



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

**A report on**

**Ysgol Y Castell**

**Hylas Lane  
Rhuddlan  
Denbighshire  
LL18 5AG**

**Date of inspection: October 2022**

**by**

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

**This report is also available in Welsh.**

## About Ysgol Y Castell

Name of provider	Ysgol Y Castell
Local authority	Denbighshire County Council
Language of the provider	English
Type of school	Primary
Religious character	
Number of pupils on roll	229
Pupils of statutory school age	182
Number in nursery classes	23
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%)	22.9%
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%)	11.8%
Percentage of pupils who speak Welsh at home	0.0%
Percentage of pupils with English as an additional language	2.0%
Date of headteacher appointment	01/09/2022
Date of previous Estyn inspection (if applicable)	28/04/2014
Start date of inspection	10/10/2022
Following the retirement of the previous headteacher at the end of the summer term 2022, a new headteacher has been appointed but will not take up post until January 2023. The deputy headteacher, who was appointed in January 2021, is undertaking the role of acting headteacher until that time.	

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](https://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

Ysgol y Castell is a happy, caring school where pupils work and play together confidently. Staff focus well on pupils' well-being, and this allows pupils to thrive in the school's inclusive environment. Pupils say that they feel safe, secure, and happy in school. They know that adults in the school care for them and that they can turn to them when they face challenges or have difficulties. Support for pupils' emotional well-being is highly effective and is a strength of the school.

Most pupils have positive attitudes to school, behave well and enjoy their learning. They form strong relationships with adults and one another and show respect and courtesy for all members of the school community. Most pupils focus well in lessons and demonstrate interest in their learning. As a result, most pupils make good progress as they move through the school and achieve well.

The school provides a rich, broad, and balanced range of learning experiences and additional provision that meets the educational and wider needs and interests of pupils well. Staff are encouraged to try new approaches to teaching and to develop the range of learning experiences they offer pupils. They listen carefully to what pupils want to learn about and weave their ideas into well planned sequences of lessons that build systematically on pupils' knowledge and understanding. Teachers plan a wide range of opportunities for pupils to develop their literacy, numeracy, and digital skills, however, pupils do not always receive the challenge or opportunity to use these skills across the curriculum as well as they could.

School leaders have high expectations of themselves and everyone within the school community to do their best for pupils. They set a positive and ambitious tone for the school's work. They foster collaboration among staff, build professional expertise and strengthen partnerships with parents successfully. This helps the school to address national priorities such as curriculum reform and pupils' well-being successfully. They set clear goals for improvement; however, monitoring activity does not always focus sharply enough on the difference improvement work makes to pupils' learning. The governing body plays an important part in the life of the school. Governors support and challenge leaders effectively. They have a wide range of knowledge and expertise that helps them to carry out their roles well.

## **Recommendations**

- R1 Focus self-evaluation and improvement work more sharply on what pupils know, understand and can do
- R2 Challenge all pupils to improve their digital and extended writing skills across the curriculum
- R3 Improve pupils' confidence and ability to speak in Welsh, both in lessons and around the school

## **What happens next**

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

## Main evaluation

### Learning

Most pupils make good progress in their learning during their time at the school. The pandemic has slowed this progress for a minority of pupils, particularly in the development of their Welsh language skills. Pupils with additional learning needs progress well from their individual starting points and achieve well against their personal targets.

Most pupils develop their language and communication skills well. Younger pupils listen with increasing interest and sustained concentration for extended periods of time. They communicate their needs and thoughts confidently during activities and play sessions, for example when making 'autumn cawl' using natural materials in the outdoor area. As they move through the school, most pupils become increasingly articulate. Older pupils listen purposefully to gain information, for example when discussing the respective roles of the Senedd and Westminster Parliament. They volunteer opinions, giving reasons for their answers. They discuss their work thoughtfully in pairs and in groups and communicate well to achieve tasks.

Nursery and reception pupils enjoy listening to stories and retelling them to their friends and adults. They begin to recognise and name a range of sounds and use this knowledge to start to read simple but stage-appropriate texts. By Year 2, many pupils read with increasing fluency and understanding. As pupils move through the school, they build on this progress and develop a good range of strategies to become fluent readers. By Year 6 many pupils read a range of appropriate texts independently and apply their reading skills effectively to support their learning in different subjects.

Overall, pupils' writing skills develop well. They understand from an early age that they can communicate through mark-making, and this motivates them to write as they move through the early stages of their development. Over time, many pupils develop a clear understanding of a wide range of different forms of writing. They apply this knowledge well in their own work. By Year 2, many write an increasing range of sentences and develop their ideas effectively. Many pupils in Years 3 to Year 6 write in a wide range of styles and genres with growing confidence as they gain in experience. By Year 6 many pupils make interesting and varied vocabulary choices in their writing. Generally, however, pupils do not write independently and at length across the curriculum to the standard of which they are capable. Regular use of writing templates restricts their writing too much.

Many pupils make good progress in developing their mathematical skills. From an early age, many pupils develop a good understanding of numbers, size and shape. By Year 2, many build on these skills as they learn to add and subtract numbers. They develop a secure understanding of place value in two-digit numbers. Many pupils use their numeracy skills well, for example when planning the layout of a bird's eye view as part of their project on Rhuddlan Castle. Most pupils from Year 3 to Year 6 work well with the four rules of number, shape and measure and develop good data handling skills. Many pupils use a wide range of methods competently to calculate in their heads and on paper when solving problems. They describe their thinking and

reasoning well. By Year 6, many pupils make effective use of their numeracy skills to support their learning across the curriculum, for example to plan a 'Dig for Victory' garden as part of their project on the Second World War.

The development of pupils' Welsh language skills has been hampered by missed learning opportunities arising from the pandemic. Many pupils have a positive attitude to learning Welsh and respond to teachers' instructions well. By Year 2, many pupils use simple greetings and phrases, for example when discussing the weather. Many sing songs in Welsh enthusiastically during a 'Jambori' session. Older pupils communicate simple information appropriately, such as when sharing personal information. However, their Welsh language skills are not as advanced as might be expected for their age. Consequently, pupils do not use their oral Welsh language skills confidently enough in other areas of the curriculum and around the school.

Many pupils develop an appropriate range of digital skills to support their learning and to help them communicate purposefully. Younger pupils, for example, learn how digital programs can be used to control a floor robot to avoid obstacles and how an animation program can be used creatively to record descriptions of their homes and families. Many older pupils use a broad range of apps and programmes with increasing confidence. They develop a suitable understanding of how basic coding can be used, for example to control an on-screen image in order to create a quiz about space exploration. However, although most pupils, throughout the school, use an appropriate range of programmes to develop their basic literacy and numeracy skills, few pupils use their digital skills confidently and independently to support their learning across the curriculum.

### **Well-being and attitudes to learning**

Nearly all pupils enjoy coming to school and are confident in the school environment. They are caring, tolerant and respectful towards each other and to adults. Nearly all pupils say that they feel safe in school and free from issues of bullying. They respond positively to the regular opportunities they are given to discuss their feelings and emotions. They feel well supported by staff, know where to turn to if they need support and are confident that staff will listen and deal appropriately with any concerns.

Most pupils behave well in lessons and move around the school sensibly. They settle in lessons quickly, concentrate well on their learning and focus effectively on tasks and activities. Most show positive attitudes to learning. They collaborate well with one another and persevere with tasks when undertaking more challenging work. They talk enthusiastically about their lessons and take pride in showing what they can do. They describe confidently how they have a say in what they learn, for example during discussions at the planning stage of their learning topics. This results in most pupils displaying high levels of interest and engagement in their learning.

As they move through the school, most pupils develop their independent learning skills well. Many younger pupils demonstrate these skills suitably when choosing activities in the outdoor areas for example. Older pupils often seek their own solutions to questions or problems using a 'self, neighbour, others' approach effectively before asking their teacher for help if needed. Most pupils value and show respect for the contributions of others, for example by allowing others to speak or by

remaining calm when others disagree with them. They listen patiently, take turns in paired activities, and share equipment well, for example, when designing, refining and testing parachutes they have created as part of their project on 'The Greatest Show'. Most pupils value and respond well to feedback from adults and their peers. They take time to self-assess their learning during lessons and respond positively to teachers' comments.

Many pupils make good use of opportunities to develop their leadership skills through a range of roles and pupil voice committees for example the school council and eco committees. While undertaking these roles, many pupils present themselves with confidence and can explain where their work has made a difference to school life. For example, they talk enthusiastically about the influence of the eco committee who conduct regular checks on the amount of plastic in school lunches boxes as well as organising 'uniform amnesties' each year where the school passes these on to other parents. They understand how these initiatives help the environment.

Most pupils know about and understand that they have rights as children. Older pupils talk about their rights in detail, what they mean and how they apply within the school. They treat others with respect and enthusiastically celebrate the diversity within their school. They describe countries where pupils' rights are not being upheld and compare their own lives with those in other countries. As they move through the school nearly all pupils demonstrate an awareness of the needs of others in their community and the wider world.

Most pupils have a good understanding of how to keep themselves safe online. For example, they know the importance of protecting their passwords and personal information. They lead assemblies on aspects of e-safety and actively participate in internet safety days, producing posters encouraging safe use of the internet. All pupils understand the importance of regular exercise to be healthy. This is promoted well by the school's sports ambassadors. Most pupils develop a suitable knowledge of the importance of how to make healthy choices relating to diet and apply this with their choice of snacks and lunches.

## **Teaching and learning experiences**

The school has a clear, shared vision for learning that reflects the principles and culture of the Curriculum for Wales and is working well to develop a curriculum design that meets the needs of all pupils. The school's vision reflects the context of the school well and staff plan effectively for pupils to learn about their local area, for example through their strong links with Rhuddlan Castle.

Staff are enthusiastically trialling different ways of planning and delivering the curriculum in line with the requirements of the curriculum, for example through the introduction of three phases of learning 'Explorers, (Nursery and Reception), Adventurers (Years 1,2 and 3) and Discoverers' (Years 4,5 and 6). Teachers collaborate effectively in these phases to ensure continuity and progression in pupils' learning. Staff regularly consult pupils on what they would like to learn and incorporate these ideas into topic planning. This ensures that pupils are more engaged in their learning.



Staff provide exciting learning experiences that simulate and engage pupils in their learning. For example, younger pupils take part in a circus workshop as part of 'The Greatest Show' topic. Older pupils show high levels of enthusiasm for their work, for example when watching the National Theatre's production of Treasure Island. This provided a worthwhile stimulus for story writing on the theme of pirates.

Teachers plan well for activities that enable pupils to learn about the diverse nature of Wales and the wider world. Staff have forged purposeful links with schools and educational professionals across Europe to enhance opportunities for pupils to study European and Worldwide countries. Teachers enhance the curriculum provision through strong community links with visits, such as planting sunflowers at Rhuddlan bowling club and members teaching the pupils how to play bowls.

Teachers plan suitable opportunities for pupils to develop their literacy, numeracy and digital skills, however, these opportunities do not ensure that all pupils apply these skills as well as they could in other areas of the curriculum. Many teachers use basic Welsh vocabulary appropriately in the classroom, for example to give instructions to their pupils. Generally, however, they do not make the most of opportunities to model the language or encourage the pupils to speak, ask and answer questions in Welsh.

Teachers develop positive working relationships with pupils and create a warm, nurturing and supportive learning environment. Staff know the pupils very well and encourage them to do their best. This contributes to a purposeful working environment where pupils feel listened to and can ask questions if they need help with their learning. Staff manage pupils' behaviour well ensuring most pupils are engaged and remain on task during lessons. All teachers have good up-to-date subject knowledge and use a variety of effective teaching methods to stimulate and encourage pupils to learn. Support staff work alongside teachers skilfully and contribute effectively to pupils' learning. Across the school, teachers appropriately build on pupils' prior learning. They ensure there is a suitable pace to learning in nearly all classes. In most classes, teachers use questioning well to move pupils' learning on and support understanding according to the needs of pupils. This ensures that most pupils are appropriately challenged. In a few classes, where teaching is less effective, teachers tend to guide activities too much which limits opportunities for pupils to decide for themselves how they organise and present their own work effectively.

All teachers provide clear instructions, and this ensures that pupils know what they need to do to be successful. They provide immediate feedback to identify what pupils have done well and what they can do to improve their learning. As a result, pupils are increasingly assessing their own work and that of others. This helps them to know what they need to do to improve their work.

Staff utilise school assessments effectively to identify next steps for learning and plan appropriate provision and support, for example by ensuring good quality literacy and numeracy intervention. Annual school reports to parents provide appropriate information on their child's progress and provide suitable next steps for them to improve their learning, including how parents can help their child.

## Care, support and guidance

The school is a caring community, where staff and pupils show a high level of respect for each other. Staff know the pupils, their backgrounds, and the local community very well. They place a high priority on the well-being of pupils and ensure that the school provides a nurturing environment in which pupils feel safe, happy, and cared for and take pride in being valued members of the school 'family'. This strong focus on improving pupil well-being is a key aspect of the school's provision and contributes significantly to pupils' happiness and well-being. This has been particularly beneficial during the pandemic.

Staff display a relentless focus on enhancing provision to support pupils' emotional wellbeing, for example, by raising pupils' awareness of their emotions and how to keep calm when they feel anxious. Strategies include breathing exercises and access to emotional literacy support by trained classroom assistants. Adults ensure that pupils have time to talk if they are unhappy and consequently, pupils feel comfortable in talking about any personal concerns they may have. During the day, there are clear systems in place to help pupils who are struggling with their emotions to self-regulate. For example, younger pupils who encounter emotional issues during the day can have withdrawal time in the school 'Zen Den'. Pupils who are struggling to settle have access to trained adults throughout the day to support their engagement in lessons.

Staff promote Welsh culture and Welsh heritage effectively across the school through regular events such as Eisteddfodau, Jambori and topics including 'Cwl Cymru' where pupils celebrate the history and traditions of Wales. This also involves using their community as an educational resource through environmental studies in the nearby nature resource area and Rhuddlan Castle. As a result, pupils take pride in the area's traditions and their Welshness.

The school has an inclusive ethos and has well-developed and effective systems to support pupils with additional learning needs. Staff monitor pupils' progress effectively. There are clear processes to identify pupils in need of support, plan intervention and evaluate the impact of this work. As a result, these pupils gain confidence and show renewed enthusiasm towards learning as well as showing a marked improvement in their social skills. Support staff provide quality support for programmes including emotional well-being, literacy and numeracy. They involve pupils, parents and the views of outside agencies effectively to plan pupils' next steps in learning. Daily professional dialogues between support staff and teachers enable them to monitor the progress of these pupils effectively and adapt provision in a timely manner to meet any new targets they may have. Robust links with a range of external agencies, such as the speech and language service and counselling services, provide specialist and beneficial support for pupils who need it.

There is a strong focus on developing pupils' awareness of children's rights. As a result, nearly all pupils have a clear understanding of fairness, equality and inclusion in their own lives. Daily collective worship, where pupils have time for reflection, support pupils' understanding of the multicultural nature of society well and include celebrations from other faiths such as Diwali, Eid and Chinese New Year.

Teachers provide pupils with worthwhile opportunities to learn about making healthy lifestyle choices, for example during 'well-being Wednesdays'. The school has appropriate arrangements to promote healthy eating and drinking. Staff provide valuable opportunities for pupils to benefit from physical exercise such as 'daily mile', yoga, dance and football. These effective arrangements motivate pupils to keep fit and deepen their understanding of healthy living. The school promotes pupils' emotional wellbeing and physical health very successfully. Staff support pupils to foster a positive attitude towards solving problems and persevering with learning activities. This has a positive effect on pupils' attitudes to their work and their ability to overcome challenges successfully.

The inclusive ethos ensures that all pupils are given good opportunities to become members of various councils. Staff ensure that these councils meet regularly and their contribution to the work of the school and the community is becoming highly valuable. The school's environment and collective worship promote pupils' spiritual and moral development successfully. Staff encourage pupils to consider other people's views sensitively, acknowledge and respect diversity and the importance of values such as respect, tolerance and caring.

The school's safeguarding culture is robust, and all staff understand their roles and responsibilities in contributing to pupils' safety and well-being. There is effective provision to support pupils to keep themselves safe when working online. The school has sound strategies in place to promote good pupil attendance including daily monitoring, regular communication with parents and follow-up work supported by the local authority. The school's arrangements for safeguarding pupils meet requirements and give no cause for concern.

### **Leadership and management**

The acting headteacher provides effective leadership, which ensures that the school has a clear strategic direction and promotes a close-knit and inclusive community. She has a clear vision, with an emphasis on inspiring all pupils to be the best they can be in all that they do by enabling the development of skills which will provide them with the strongest start in life. The headteacher is well supported by the acting deputy headteacher and all staff promote the school's agreed vision and values successfully. As a result, there is a strong team ethos and mutual respect between pupils and adults working at the school with a commitment to 'learning from each other and succeeding together'.

Staff are dedicated, hardworking and collaborate well to ensure that pupil well-being is at the heart of their work. They have created a positive safeguarding culture, where pupils and staff feel safe and valued. They show a strong commitment to promoting continuous and sustainable improvements. The headteacher has identified the need to share leadership responsibilities more effectively and has begun to drive forward changes which enable staff to feel more involved in decision making. This is a developing feature of the school although it is too early to assess its impact on pupil outcomes.

Among leaders and staff, there is a strong awareness and commitment to address local and national priorities in education including implementing the Curriculum for Wales, additional learning needs reform and supporting pupils' well-being. Over the

past year, the acting headteacher has taken the lead on curriculum design. She took an active part in local and regional groups to support her work and worked collaboratively with staff, governors, pupils and parents to create a clear rationale. The headteacher encourages and supports staff to innovate and trial new approaches to teaching and learning effectively.

The school has appropriate processes to evaluate its performance and to plan for improvement. Leaders use a suitable range of information to identify areas for improvement, including learning walks, book scrutiny, lesson observations and pupil performance data together with pupil and parent questionnaires. They use this information suitably to identify appropriate areas for improvement. For example, they have recognised the need to ensure that pupils make good progress in literacy and numeracy skills as the new curriculum is implemented. Leaders also recognise the need to provide further opportunities for pupils to confidently use their Welsh oracy skills outside the classroom.

There are useful opportunities for all staff to contribute to evaluation and improvement work. This provides beneficial opportunities for staff who have recently attended leadership development training to apply newly learnt skills. However, current evaluation work does not focus sharply enough on identifying the difference that teaching or improvement initiatives make to the progress pupils make in their learning.

Leaders ensure that all staff have regular opportunities to undertake worthwhile professional development and training that link well to the school's priorities. As a result, the school has embedded a wide range of effective intervention strategies that respond very well to pupils' well-being needs. They make use of strategic partnerships with other local schools to support the professional learning of all staff.

The school has established productive links with parents. During the pandemic, the school created virtual classrooms on their school website. Feedback from parents and pupil was positive and the school has maintained these as part of everyday practice. This ensures parents are well informed of the work their children are doing.

The headteacher and governors have developed productive links between the school and the local community. This ensures that pupils take part in a wide range of community events ranging from improving the environment through to community safety. Teachers use these links effectively to support the curriculum and ensure the pupils develop a strong sense of cynefin.

The Governing Body is well informed, effective, and committed to supporting the school. Governors have a valuable range of professional expertise and contribute well to school life and to its place within the community. They play a key part in ensuring an effective strategic direction for the school. Governors understand the school's context, its strengths, and priorities for improvement well. They receive regular reports from school leaders and individual governors visit school, for example, to carry out learning walks, listen to learners and scrutinise pupils' work. They challenge sensibly as critical friends and hold the school to account for its performance effectively. They ensure that there are appropriate arrangements to promote healthy eating and drinking.

Leaders monitor the school's finances robustly and make astute spending decisions linked to school priorities. They make purposeful use of additional grant funding, including the pupil development grant to provide focused support programmes to help and encourage pupils' learning and well-being, together with additional support for promoting good pupil attendance.

## 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](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 going to press. Any enquiries or comments regarding this document/publication should be addressed to:

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