



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

A report on

Ysgol Caer Drewyn

**Clawdd Poncen
Corwen
LL21 9RT**

Date of inspection: November 2022

by

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

This report is also available in Welsh.

About Ysgol Caer Drewyn

Name of provider	Ysgol Caer Drewyn
Local authority	Denbighshire County Council
Language of the provider	English
Type of school	Primary
Religious character	
Number of pupils on roll	99
Pupils of statutory school age	84
Number in nursery classes	5
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 21.3%)	36.4%
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 22.2%)	7.1%
Percentage of pupils who speak Welsh at home	8.1%
Percentage of pupils with English as an additional language	2%
Date of headteacher appointment	01/09/2005
Date of previous Estyn inspection (if applicable)	01/04/2014
Start date of inspection	21/11/2022

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

Leaders and staff across the Ysgol Caer Drewyn and Ysgol Carrog Federation work well together to provide a stimulating and purposeful learning environment for all pupils. They have high expectations and aspirations for pupils to be the best that they can be. Developing strong attitudes to learning, respect for others and supporting the well-being of pupils and staff is at the heart of the federation's vision and values. As a result, pupils feel safe and valued and contribute well to the life of their school.

Teachers and other staff at Ysgol Caer Drewyn adapt the teaching and learning very well to meet the needs of learners. Effective teaching and learning, together with a rich, diverse curriculum ensure that pupils are interested in their learning and work well independently and with peers to complete their 'missions' or challenges. This helps to foster positive attitudes to learning and effective independent learning skills. Pupils receive purposeful opportunities to practise their literacy, numeracy and digital skills well through rich tasks and learning experiences, but the provision for Welsh across the school is less well developed. In addition, pupils' ability to recognise what they are doing well and how they can improve their work is limited.

The headteacher, other leaders and members of the governing body know their community well. They have a good understanding of the needs of their pupils and their families and work diligently with other stakeholders to support them effectively. This is a strength of the school and helps to foster positive relationships across the whole school community. As a result, nearly all pupils make good progress at the school.

Recommendations

- R1 Improve opportunities for pupils to develop and make good progress in their Welsh speaking skills
- R2 Strengthen teachers' feedback and opportunities for pupils to reflect on their work so that they know what to do to improve

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 developing a rich curriculum and effective teaching that meets the needs of all learners and promotes strong attitudes to learning, for dissemination on Estyn's website.

Main evaluation

Learning

On entry to the school, many pupils' basic skills are at a stage of development below that expected for their age. During their time at the school, nearly all pupils, including those with additional learning needs (ALN), make strong progress. Nearly all pupils develop and apply their skills, knowledge and understanding well.

Overall, pupils make good progress in developing literacy skills in English. They develop their speaking and listening skills well. For example, younger pupils recount the story of the little red hen verbally to prepare for a writing task and explain in detail how they played different percussion instruments to simulate rain when 'worm charming'. Pupils in Year 5 and Year 6 develop oracy skills for specific purposes well, for example to hold a debate about who should host the next football World Cup and to answer questions from journalists in the role of Gareth Bale during a 'hot-seat' activity. Nearly all pupils make strong progress in developing English reading skills throughout the school. They show an interest in picture books from an early age. As they develop early reading skills, they begin to use suitable strategies to decode unfamiliar words. Most develop their comprehension and reasoning skills well to explain the meaning of texts. For example, older pupils read unfamiliar texts confidently to discover facts about early flight and the Wright brothers. Many speak with enthusiasm about their favourite books and authors.

By the end of Year 2, many pupils apply their writing skills with increasing confidence. They write short paragraphs, for example to explain the significance of poppies in the lead-up to Remembrance Sunday. They recount information presented to them by guest speakers, for example when learning about the impact of deforestation on rainforest habitat. By the end of Year 6, pupils produce extended pieces of writing in a suitable range of forms. Most convey information appropriately, for example when creating posters to warn of the dangers of smoking and when writing a detailed report about the conditions in the Corwen workhouse during the Victorian era. However, pupils do not refine their work in light of feedback well enough and as a result, their written work is not always as good as it could be.

Most pupils begin to develop an understanding of key Welsh words, such as colours, from an early age. As they progress through the school, they make limited progress in developing their vocabulary further, for example by using an online translation service to find Welsh words to label a landscape photograph. Most pupils learn to convey personal information about themselves, but often rely on prompt cards. However, they do not develop as confident Welsh speakers and overall, pupils make limited progress in developing Welsh language skills.

Across the school, nearly all pupils make good progress in developing an understanding of mathematical concepts and apply their numeracy skills suitably across the curriculum. Younger pupils develop appropriate data handling skills, for example when they make a graph to show their favourite animal from the story of the 'Gingerbread man'. By Year 4, most pupils apply measuring skills appropriately in science lessons, for example when using a Newton meter to measure friction. By Year 6, pupils record the results of scientific investigations with increasing

independence and accuracy, for example when recording how much their pulse rate increases after exercise in a line graph.

Nearly all pupils' digital skills develop well. By Year 2, many pupils use software confidently to make tables and graphs that record their peers' shoe sizes in centimetres. By Year 6, they produce digital newspaper articles about how the demand for palm oil is destroying orangutans' habitats and use green screen technology creatively to film news reports from a climate change summit.

Nearly all pupils make good progress in developing their creative skills. Younger pupils develop music skills well, for example by keeping a beat to the rhythm as they sing together. In Year 3 and Year 4, pupils make pictures with black card silhouettes skilfully to mark Remembrance Sunday. Many develop drama skills appropriately, for example when answering questions in the role of a passenger on the Titanic. Older pupils use watercolours purposefully to make paintings of autumn leaves. They also make pottery using local red clay to contribute to an exhibition at a local museum.

From an early age, most pupils begin to develop good physical skills. Pupils in the reception class develop strong fine motor skills by working independently to create hats, using scissors to cut out decorations. Pupils in Year 5 and Year 6 develop good physical skills by planning and taking part in a training session that they film. They take advantage of opportunities to develop their physical skills well during lessons across the curriculum, for example when taking part in an outdoor activity to decide on whether something is a fact or opinion by running to the relevant side of the yard.

Well-being and attitudes to learning

The positive, caring and nurturing relationship that exists among pupils and between staff and pupils is a strength of the school. Nearly all pupils feel that adults in the school care about them and, as a result, they feel safe and valued. They are kind, polite and respectful towards adults and each other. For example, older pupils support younger ones through a 'reading buddy' scheme, which helps to build positive relationships and supports their learning effectively. Nearly all pupils treat each other fairly and with respect and know whom to approach for advice if anything is worrying them. They are confident that staff respond immediately to their concerns and support them appropriately.

Most pupils feel that school leaders listen to them and that their contribution to school life is appreciated. They understand the importance of maintaining positive attitudes to their work and how this helps them to overcome challenges in their learning. As a result, most pupils develop as mature and independent learners who work well with their peers in pairs or groups to solve problems. They are developing appropriate thinking techniques to help them to succeed and persevere when completing tasks before seeking support. For example, pupils use strategies such as 'Tri Cyn Fi' ('Three Before Me') effectively to progress with their tasks. As a result, pupils across the school develop resilience and confidence when persevering with their work in their classes and when engaging in practical outdoor tasks.

Members of the various school councils and pupil voice groups are proud of their roles and take their duties seriously. Representatives undertake their work enthusiastically through a variety of activities and make a valuable contribution to the

school's life and work. For example, the eco committee members designed a healthy lunch box information leaflet for parents and carers.

Nearly all pupils have a sound understanding of how to keep themselves safe online. They know the importance of protecting their personal information and reporting concerns to an adult. Visits from the community police officer and a video created by the school's digital leaders reinforce this well. Nearly all pupils speak confidently to visitors and other adults, for example when discussing their work, hobbies and interests. Most pupils behave well in lessons and around the school at breaktimes. They understand the school rules – be ready, be respectful, be safe – and refer to them regularly in class. They listen carefully to their peers and to adults, and most sustain their concentration well, especially when tasks interest them. Pupils' positive attitudes to learning is a strength of the school and contributes well to the strong progress that nearly all make.

Most pupils have a sound understanding of the importance of eating and drinking healthily and understand the effect of physical exercise on their health. Younger pupils explain why it is beneficial to eat a balanced diet, for example when planning a healthy meal for a football player. They participate enthusiastically in a range of physical activities inside and outside the school, which has a positive effect on their well-being and fitness.

Many pupils develop as ethical and knowledgeable citizens through their awareness of fairness and equality. They respect the needs and rights of others as part of a diverse society. A good example of this is the way in which the older pupils research human rights in Qatar during the World Cup and consider what contributes to a society that respects human rights effectively.

Most pupils make purposeful suggestions about what they learn and have a positive influence on class topics. For example, they take advantage of the opportunity to share their interests and ideas regularly when contributing to mind maps and topic planning. As a result, most pupils participate with enthusiasm and a high level of engagement when completing their 'missions' or challenges.

Pupils value and respond effectively to verbal feedback from adults to enrich and move their learning forward. However, their ability to reflect on and improve their work is less well developed.

Although the COVID-19 pandemic had a negative effect nationally on attendance last year, the school's attendance rate over the same period is significantly higher than the average. The attendance rates to date continue to be higher than the national average and this is a strong feature of the school.

Teaching and learning experiences

Leaders have a clear vision for implementing the Curriculum for Wales at Ysgol Caer Drewyn. This is based on strong values across the federation, including kindness, curiosity and creativity. These are clearly visible at Ysgol Caer Drewyn and form the basis of the strong and supportive relationships that exist in all classrooms. Staff work together successfully across the federation to discuss progress and improve practice, for example by leading on areas of learning and experiences. This is

particularly effective in developing aspects such as health and well-being, which support the pupils' emotional development well. However, opportunities for pupils to develop their Welsh language skills are underdeveloped.

Leaders and staff have developed purposeful plans to support the teaching of literacy, numeracy and digital skills across the curriculum. Teachers plan a wide range of learning experiences to develop these skills across the curriculum. Pupils contribute well to the planning of each term's topics by suggesting what they want to learn. As a result, the independent learning experiences or 'missions' enable pupils to apply their skills in engaging and challenging contexts. In addition, pupils select the activity at the level of challenge that they consider to be appropriate for them, which develops their independence successfully.

Staff focus well on developing aspects of the four purposes of the Curriculum for Wales to develop the pupils as independent lifelong learners. An effective example of this is the '50 things to experience before I leave Ysgol Caer Drewyn,' which includes a wide and valuable range of experiences, designed to enrich the pupils' lives. For example, staff encourage pupils to develop as healthy, confident individuals through engaging in discussions with the older members of the community as well as walking to the top of Caer Drewyn, a local Iron Age hillfort.

The provision for foundation learning is based on a broad range of enriching learning and play experiences, which develops pupils' skills and independence effectively. Staff provide a very good range of stimulating activities which encourage pupils' enthusiasm and collaborative skills well. As a result, most pupils respond well to different challenges that allow them to collaborate with their friends and develop self-confidence. For example, many speak confidently about how they record pictures and video clips of their activities and explain how they achieved their goals.

Ysgol Caer Drewyn pupils benefit from being part of a close knit and supportive community, which provides a wealth of opportunities to learn about the history and traditions of the Corwen area. For example, pupils learnt about the National Eisteddfod which was held in Corwen and helped to create artwork based on the picturesque local area within the Dee valley. In addition, pupils from both schools learnt about life in the area during the First World War by working with members of Corwen Museum.

Teachers adapt their teaching extremely well to meet the needs of all learners. They make skilful use of short, sharp and mostly practical activities that ensure that pupils remain active and engaged throughout the sessions. The use of the outdoor learning environment to support pupils' learning is a strong feature of the curriculum provision. Teachers use teaching assistants effectively to support pupils' learning. Together they set high expectations and provide pupils with the necessary support to succeed and to challenge themselves effectively. There is a strong emphasis on pupils' well-being in all classrooms to ensure that they are ready for learning and that they are supported in the best way possible. This is a strong feature of the school and links closely to the consistent focus on pupils' well-being. For example, pupils are encouraged during lessons to face new challenges and make responsible choices. Staff use a calm and supportive approach to maintain high expectations of pupils' behaviour. As a result, most pupils enjoy their learning and remain engaged and focussed on learning tasks for extended periods.

Leaders have recently adapted their approach to monitoring the pupils' progress, including their well-being and attitudes to learning. This means that teachers have a wealth of useful information available when planning the next steps of pupils' learning. All teachers share learning intentions and success criteria appropriately with pupils, and these provide suitable opportunities for pupils to reflect on their learning. They ask useful questions and give verbal feedback to pupils during learning activities, which helps to reinforce their understanding and challenge their thinking. However, teachers do not always provide suitable opportunities for pupils to reflect on their work and make improvements following feedback. As a result, pupils do not always improve and extend their work to the best of their ability. Teachers share information regularly with parents and carers about their children's progress and well-being, which helps them to understand how they can support them at home.

Care, support and guidance

The school is a caring, inclusive and friendly community that promotes the importance of good behaviour successfully. Positive relationships are a strong feature across the whole school, and this contributes effectively to pupils' happiness and well-being. Staff support the emotional and social needs of pupils exceptionally well by offering purposeful and suitable interventions.

Nearly all members of staff provide effective guidance to help parents and carers to develop their understanding of how to support their children. Regular information evenings and the close relationship between staff and parents and carers are key to this. They are also welcomed into the school to participate in activities with the pupils, such as 'Messy Mondays' with the younger pupils, working with the Eco Group and dining in the school hall with the pupils.

The school has effective arrangements in place to identify, support and monitor pupils with additional learning needs across the school. These include a clear provision map, useful one-page profiles and individual development plans that outline the pupils' needs and the required support well. Every pupil also has their own individual targets identified by the teacher in collaboration with the pupil. Staff identify the pupils who could benefit from additional support at an early stage. They provide a purposeful variety of interventions that help pupils to make valuable progress in developing their literacy and numeracy skills as well as improving their well-being. Individual support for pupils with emotional needs helps them to feel calm at school and enjoy their learning, for example the 'Ystafell Enfys' provides a safe and calming environment for the pupils to relax and reflect. The headteacher and Additional Learning Needs Co-ordinator (ALNCO) place strong emphasis on working in partnership with external agencies to help support pupils with additional learning needs. For example, they work well with the local authority's family link worker and behaviour specialist teacher to support pupils and families.

The school has strong arrangements in place to promote exercise and healthy eating, so that the pupils understand the importance of choosing a healthy lifestyle. A strong feature of the school provision is to provide the pupils with opportunities to cook healthy snacks regularly as part of the curriculum and after school provision. The outdoor play areas and extra-curricular activities also provide beneficial opportunities for physical exercise, for example staff lead useful team building and forest school activities to support pupils' learning and development.

Teachers provide a variety of valuable experiences to promote pupils' moral, spiritual and cultural development. They provide beneficial opportunities for pupils to reflect on current affairs and different religions and cultures in assemblies and class activities. For example, pupils investigate the key beliefs of the Islamic religion linked to the Football World Cup in Qatar, and create a poster illustrating the story of Jonah and the whale. Teachers also provide purposeful opportunities for pupils to celebrate their Welsh heritage and culture, from celebrating the life of Owain Glyndwr, who had strong links with the local area, to reciting in the Urdd Eisteddfod and going on residential visits to the nearby outdoor centre and Cardiff.

The school ensures that pupils develop an understanding of equality, diversity and inclusion by providing a variety of creative and interesting activities. For example, they research the work of Wangari Maathai, the Nobel Peace Prize winner, and discussing the importance of 'Show racism the red card'. The school has beneficial partnerships with charities and other communities, which supports the school's core values and pupils' learning well. Pupils participate in a range of initiatives to promote anti-bullying and display posters and other material on the qualities of good friendships around the school. This has a positive impact on their understanding of the importance of caring for each other and knowing the difference between right and wrong. The school's provision ensures that pupils have a good understanding of their rights.

Staff encourage learners to become active citizens by leading various activities in pupil groups. For example, the Road Safety Ambassadors designed a competition to create road safety posters for pupils, and the digital leaders produced an informative presentation on how to keep safe online. The school provides effective guidance and advice to learners, which raises their aspirations and possible future career choices, for example arranging visits to a local university for pupils and their families to learn more about their work.

The school's procedures for promoting good attendance are a strong feature of the provision. Leaders monitor attendance rigorously and promote good attendance purposefully. This is having a positive impact on pupils' attendance which compares well with national benchmarks. Leaders set high expectations for the safety of pupils and have established a strong culture of safeguarding across the school. They ensure that all staff understand and promote the school's safeguarding culture effectively. The school's arrangements to safeguard pupils meet requirements and give no cause for concern.

Leadership and management

Ysgol Caer Drewyn is part of a school federation with a neighbouring school, Ysgol Carrog and the headteacher shares her leadership time between both schools. Leaders and teachers from both schools are responsible for various aspects of the provision across the federation. This allows leaders to make good use of staff specialisms and expertise to support learning on both sites. The headteacher has worked diligently with stakeholders to create and communicate a clear vision for the federation, which focusses on ensuring a caring and nurturing environment where pupils have the best opportunities to learn. The well-being of staff, pupils and their families is at the heart of the work of both schools. The headteacher sets high expectations for the whole school community across the federation, with a strong

emphasis on the staff of both schools supporting one another to achieve the best possible outcomes for all pupils.

The headteacher and deputy headteachers have established a strong team ethos across the federation where staff feel valued, respected and cared for. All staff model and promote professional values and behaviour that contribute positively pupils' outcomes. They understand and fulfil their roles and responsibilities well and support important aspects of the work of both schools, for example by leading on areas of learning and experience and by undertaking the role of ALNCO. Leaders and staff readily adapt and evolve their provision effectively to meet the needs of their learners. They ensure that they provide a rich and diverse curriculum that stimulates pupils' interest and develops strong attitudes to learning. This means that nearly all pupils across both schools make strong progress in their learning and show healthy attitudes to learning.

Members of the governing body know the school communities very well and provide effective support and challenge. They understand their roles and responsibilities well and know the strengths and areas for development across the federation of schools. Although the COVID-19 pandemic has lessened their monitoring and pastoral visits to the schools, they continue to provide appropriate challenge to leaders and contribute effectively to important decisions, for example when deciding on appropriate attendance targets for both schools, having considered data from previous years to inform their decision. The governing body ensures that the school has comprehensive arrangements to promote healthy eating and drinking.

Leaders prioritise challenging the impact of poverty on educational attainment very well. This includes subsidising residential and other visits to places of interest for pupils eligible for free school meals and those from low-income households. The school plays a prominent role in the wider community and works well with other agencies that provide support to pupils and their families. For example, leaders and staff work alongside the local authority's family link worker to provide much needed support to families who are struggling to make ends meet. In addition, leaders ensure that staff receive a suitable range of resources and professional learning to help support pupils and their families, for example by providing additional support to meet their well-being and emotional needs.

Leaders and staff have established strong links with parents and carers and the wider community, which is having a positive impact on pupils' learning and well-being. Whenever possible, parents and carers are invited into the school to support pupils and to learn more about how they can support their children. For example, they recently attended a 'Messy Monday' session to make 'Hattie the Hedgehogs' using natural materials with the younger pupils and worked with their children to develop their early writing skills through printing and scribbling on a collage.

Leaders have established purposeful arrangements to monitor and evaluate the work of both schools. Although the COVID-19 pandemic restricted monitoring activities, leaders and staff have continued to evaluate the quality of the provision and standards. Teachers scrutinise books across both schools and the headteacher conducts informal observations of teaching and learning, as well as listening to pupils' views and opinions. As a result, leaders have a strong understanding of the school's strengths and areas for development. For example, they recognise the need

to improve provision for developing pupils' Welsh skills. There is a clear link between the findings of the self-evaluation process and the school's identified priorities, which include important national priorities such as the Curriculum for Wales. Although the school's targets and actions link appropriately to the needs of the school, leaders do not identify well enough which areas need prioritising in order of importance.

Leaders have created a positive culture and ethos to promote and support the professional learning of all staff. There is a strong emphasis on ensuring that staff's professional learning focusses on teaching and learning as well as supporting the emotional and well-being needs of pupils. The headteacher also supports staff to develop their professional knowledge and leadership skills, which allows them to lead on important aspects of provision. This is having a positive impact on teaching and learning across the federation, for example by allowing teachers and leaders to develop the areas of learning and experience across both schools.

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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