



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

A report on

Ysgol Cae'r Gwenyn

**Prince Charles Road
Wrexham
LL13 8TH**

Date of inspection: June 2023

by

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

This report is also available in Welsh

About Ysgol Cae'r Gwenyn

Name of provider	Ysgol Cae'r Gwenyn
Local authority	Wrexham County Borough Council
Language of the provider	English
Type of school	Primary
Religious character	
Number of pupils on roll	59
Pupils of statutory school age	12
Number in nursery classes	27
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%)	97%
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%)	100%
Percentage of pupils who speak Welsh at home	0%
Percentage of pupils with English as an additional language	5%
Date of headteacher appointment	01/09/2007
Date of previous Estyn inspection (if applicable)	01/03/2015
Start date of inspection	19/06/2023
<p>Ysgol Cae'r Gwenyn is a mainstream school but operates as a specialist ALN resource provision. Nearly all pupils are referred into the provision by Wrexham local authority. There are currently early education, nursery and reception age pupils at the school. From the 2023-2024 academic year there will be a class of Year 1 pupils at the school for the first time. Nearly all pupils are eligible for free school meals, and nearly all pupils have additional learning needs. Nearly all are non-verbal when they start at the school. Nearly all make good progress from their starting points.</p>	

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

The headteacher's vision for Ysgol Cae'r Gwenyn is of a school where all children flourish, despite any additional learning needs they may have. Leaders and staff provide a warm family atmosphere at the school. Each pupil is valued as an individual and their needs and interests are fully embraced. The staff know the pupils and their families very well and regularly discuss all aspects of each child's development. They focus on the positive and allow each child to flourish. The school community works together successfully to conquer challenges.

Nearly all pupils start at the school with skills which are less developed than most children of their age but make good progress over time. Most develop independence and grow in confidence through the consistent support and encouragement of the school's skilled staff. Many pupils develop their skills through playing with a rich range of resources. Most are non-verbal when they start at the school but gradually develop confidence in their communication skills, sometimes signing to make themselves understood. They remain engaged for short periods and show a developing level of understanding.

The well-being of pupils is at the centre of everything at the school. The school provides an engaging curriculum based on developing the pupils' communication skills. Learning experiences are designed to support pupils to understand and to be understood. School staff are highly skilled and provide excellent support to develop pupils' verbal and non-verbal skills. Pupils show enjoyment during activities and are developing confidence in making choices about what they would like to play with. However, their opportunities to choose where and how they play are less well developed. They engage well in their learning and demonstrate real enthusiasm. Working alongside adults, they show developing levels of concentration and perseverance. They behave well and are comforted by their box of special things, which are familiar to them and have a relaxing and calming effect. However, opportunities for pupils to engage in visits to enrich their learning are less well developed.

Recommendations

- R1 Further develop opportunities for pupils to make choices during their play
- R2 Develop opportunities for pupils to engage in visits within the locality to enhance their learning experiences

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 early communication skills with predominantly non-verbal pupils, for dissemination on Estyn's website.

Main evaluation

Learning

Nearly all pupils start at the school with skills that are less developed than most children of their age. Nearly all are placed at the setting through a managed approach with the local authority, and this reflects the range of early assessments and interventions that have taken place during their early years. Most pupils make good progress during their time at the school. They gradually develop independence and personal skills through constant engagement with the school's skilful staff.

Many pupils demonstrate good physical skills. For example, they climb the steps and move down the slide confidently. Many show good balance, strength and co-ordination when playing on the large wooden equipment, walking along the series of logs or riding trikes.

Many pupils' fine motor skills are developing well according to their stage of development. For example, they show appropriate dexterity when putting the wooden track together and taking the different trains on a journey to wherever they want to go. A few older pupils show very good ball skills, bouncing large balls skilfully, and showing delight with their success. A few demonstrate very good control when starting to roll a hoop along the ground.

Across the school, a minority of pupils show awareness of the importance of considering other children's feelings and play together or alongside one another for short periods. Many pupils develop independence through playing with the rich range of resources. For example, they decide to move the long tube to a different area on the grass before crawling through it. They demonstrate a good range of creative skills, for example using strips and spots of coloured paper and paint to create their own colourful impressions of different animals. In the nursery class, the pupils create effective artwork, which includes a detailed and colourful combination of painting and printing. They use a range of resources to weave colourful Welsh dragons. Pupils respond well to opportunities to create music on percussion instruments, varying the tempo. They engage with familiar songs as they prepare for snack. A minority put their hands in the air and clap to the music enthusiastically.

Many pupils listen well and respond appropriately to adults' prompts and questions. A minority respond verbally using sounds or single words. Many remain engaged for short periods during activities and show a developing level of understanding. A very few older pupils sometimes use a more extensive range of words, which demonstrates their understanding as they make sense of the world around them. For example, they ask for a tissue to wipe their nose. It sometimes takes a long time for them to develop the skills and confidence to express themselves verbally, although occasionally they make significant strides in a short period.

Many of the pupils are beginning to use a few 'Makaton' signs to show understanding, using signs such as 'thank you,' 'more,' and 'again.' They respond with increasing confidence to the verbal language and signs used by staff. Despite many of the pupils being non-verbal, they show a good level of understanding and sometimes respond with a smile, or answer with a firm 'no,' when something displeases them. Many pupils show a keen interest in listening to stories. For example, during circle time in the reception class, they enjoy listening to the story about the shark as part of their project about the sea. They join in enthusiastically with the story.

A few reception pupils are familiar with the sounds of different letters, which helps them develop confidence when beginning to learn to read. Staff make effective use of a good range of resources to support early literacy skills. Many pupils engage well with books, turning pages and looking at the pictures. They understand that books contain exciting stories and pictures to enjoy. As they grow in confidence, a few reception class pupils become fully engaged with playing with letters and beginning to associate them with the corresponding sounds they represent. A few pupils actively return to literacy-based activities and make significant progress based on the experiences they receive over time. They enjoy tracing letters using crayons and pens and use chalks confidently to draw shapes.

Many pupils' mathematical skills are developing well in line with their stage of development. The majority match shapes and colours and interact with numbers with increasing confidence when playing in different areas of the provision. For example, they love running along the number line as a member of staff counts quickly or more slowly. A few count together up to ten, with older pupils counting back down to zero with the support of a practitioner. A few pupils love investigating how many small toys will fit into both sides of a balance scales. They remove some from one side and see that scales drop down. With skilled and patient support, many are developing an increasing understanding of different mathematical concepts. The majority of pupils show an increasing understanding of a few Welsh phrases and respond appropriately to instructions given in Welsh.

Most pupils engage well with an appropriate range of digital equipment. For example, they decide if they would like the programmable car to travel to the number 1 or the number 2. Many reception pupils interact well with digital devices for example, when colouring the interactive whiteboard screen, using their fingers to fill in the colour. This develops their fine motor skills effectively. A few pupils use digital touch screen devices to create simple shapes using a range of colours and tools, using the bubble tool to make a pattern. They navigate the programs well and delete content to create a new image.

Well-being and attitudes to learning

The well-being of pupils has a high priority at Ysgol Cae'r Gwenyn. Nearly all pupils feel happy and safe and know that staff will care for them. Most pupils enter the school happily and are greeted warmly by staff. Pupils respond well to beneficial opportunities to develop their physical skills. For example, most nursery pupils pedal a tricycle independently and many feel confident to explore the outdoor learning areas by climbing, jumping, sliding, and balancing. Pupils are regularly encouraged

to try new foods and increase the range of their diet. This means that, over time, many pupils' choices in relation to healthy eating and drinking progress well.

Many pupils show increasing confidence in new situations and persist in the tasks that are set for them. For example, nursery pupils learn resilience and to tolerate new textures gradually through play, when they explore the cornflour 'swamp' with their toy dinosaurs.

Most pupils respond well to the routines of the school day and develop an understanding of rules and boundaries. Over time, a majority acquire a sense of fairness through their play experiences. For example, when drawing, they take turns and share their pencils with 'Dewi' the puppet. Most pupils begin to recognise their own emotions and identify the emotions of others with support.

The majority of pupils persevere to solve problems when exploring resources in their environment. For example, reception pupils persevere to create houses using the large construction toys. When supported by an adult, they begin to work together to solve practical problems, such as how to hold construction pieces in place so that another pupil can add pieces without causing the house to collapse.

During unstructured play sessions, most pupils demonstrate appropriate levels of independence and make choices about what they will play with, selecting resources from a limited range. Pupils are very well supported to engage with new and unfamiliar experiences. For example, pupils grow in confidence to engage with practitioners in simple massage sessions designed to relax them.

Most pupils engage well in their learning and approach tasks readily and with enthusiasm. When supported by adults, they sustain focus and remain on task for an appropriate period of time. They behave well and with careful support from adults, manage the transition between activities successfully. A few pupils with particular challenges learn how to regulate their emotions and get comfort from their individual box of 'special things' that helps them to relax and keep calm.

Teaching and learning experiences

The school's curriculum has suitable breadth and enables pupils to develop their skills and knowledge at an appropriate level. All members of staff have consistently high expectations of their pupils. They strive to overcome any barriers to learning and celebrate pupils' small steps to success. Staff encourage pupils to make progress through constant interaction and use their interests to guide the learning in each class. For example, pupils in the reception class enjoy finding out about sea creatures and develop their physical skills by chasing one another as they play a game of 'sharks and fish.'

The school's curriculum is based largely on developing the communication skills of all pupils. As a result, almost all learning experiences are designed to support pupils to understand and to be understood. Adults teach communication skills in a structured and consistent way in all classes. Well-established daily routines include individual, small group and whole-class learning experiences. For example, there are daily whole-class opportunities for pupils to hear familiar songs and games in English and Welsh. Staff successfully encourage pupils to take an increasingly active part in

activities that support their communication skills. Teachers and support staff are well trained and highly skilled, and they provide excellent support to develop pupils' verbal and non-verbal communication. For example, they act as good language role models for pupils by commenting on what they see and what the child is doing so that pupils are immersed in rich spoken language. In addition, adults expertly use non-verbal, visual approaches and sign language, and encourage and support pupils to use these strategies whilst playing alongside them.

Adults provide appropriate opportunities for pupils to make choices about where they would like to explore and play, and to decide which resources appeal to them. For example, in both classes, pupils enjoy playing outdoors for extended periods, showing good levels of perseverance in different areas of the provision. However, at times it is challenging to strike the appropriate balance of adult initiated activities and open access, uninterrupted play.

Every pupil has a detailed communication profile, which outlines what they have achieved and their next small steps in learning. Staff regularly review progress against these profiles and adjust learning experiences to ensure that pupils have the most appropriate provision. For example, pupils' next steps may be to use visual communication tools to ask for 'more' of a favoured activity. Teachers and support staff make a note of any toys that the child particularly enjoys to encourage and motivate the pupils' communication.

Learning experiences, both in the classroom and in the outdoors, maintain pupils' interest very well. For example, small group activities that develop pupils' sensory and communication skills in the nursery class engage the interest of most pupils for sustained periods. However, overall, opportunities for pupils to learn from real-life authentic experiences and to access visits in the local area are underdeveloped.

Staff make regular and effective use of the Welsh language during activities, using simple vocabulary that most pupils understand confidently. For example, they use simple instructions, such as asking the pupils to come over and see them, in Welsh.

Leaders and staff use an effective and detailed approach to developing the health, social, and emotional development of all pupils. Pupils eat and drink together every day and this provides staff with regular opportunities to improve the healthy eating and drinking choices that pupils make. Staff encourage children to eat when they lose focus and remind them of appropriate table manners. A few pupils bring a packed lunch as they will only eat a restricted diet. However, adults work with pupils to ensure that they try new foods. As a result, a few pupils have increased the range of foods they enjoy, and most pupils eat a healthy school lunch.

Care, support and guidance

The school provides a warm and welcoming environment, where adults value each pupil's individuality and embrace their needs. For instance, they meet pupils' individual learning, health, emotional and social needs through a range of bespoke approaches that accelerates pupils' development. The school knows its pupils and their families very well and uses this information to create valuable links and strong partnerships that benefit pupils and families. Parents and carers are very positive

about the impact that the school has on their children's development and appreciate the support that they receive as families.

The school provides consistent and comprehensive learning support programmes, which have a positive effect on pupils' learning and well-being. The structured and consistent approaches to develop non-verbal pupils' communication are an outstanding feature and, as a result, most pupils make good progress. All learners have an effective individual development plan and a highly personalised one-page profile. They include relevant information and person-centred targets, which help staff to tailor experiences to the pupils' individual needs and interests. As a result, most learners make good progress from their starting points.

The school works in close partnership with external agencies, such as speech and language therapists, health visitors, the educational psychology service and social care professionals. This multi-agency approach is highly effective and has a positive impact on pupil development.

Leaders, teachers and support staff collaborate well to review and revise the support for learners with additional learning needs. The additional learning needs co-ordinator has a thorough understanding of each pupil's progress and supports staff and parents very well. The home school co-ordinator provides a valuable link with parents and carers. She provides individual and group support for families, based on their needs. For example, she organises sessions for families who may need support with aspects of a child's development, such as toilet training. This ensures that parents and carers not only receive support from professionals at the school, but from one another. The school shares its successful approaches with local schools and settings, sharing their effective practice for the benefit of the wider community.

All adults provide effective support in the classroom, at playtimes and during group sessions. Staff maintain a calm and consistent approach to managing behaviour and set a positive culture, using praise, reward and restorative approaches. They demonstrate empathy, care and a deep understanding of the needs of each learner. When learners become disruptive or angry, staff use interventions, such as distraction, effectively.

The school develops pupils' spirituality through reflection. For example, staff teach pupils to be thankful for the food at snack time. Pupils develop social and moral skills appropriately through stories and the use of games and puppets, which promote taking turns and empathy. For example, the highly skilled use of 'Emrys, the Dragon', breaks down barriers and builds pupils' confidence to try new things in their own time. Staff promote the Welsh culture through songs and stories. Pupils develop an appreciation of the different languages used in their school when they greet each other each morning in languages, such as Welsh, Polish and French.

The school encourages pupils to use their imagination and creative skills through the experiences that they provide. For example, during periods of independent outdoor play, pupils in the reception class join in with familiar nursery rhymes and use instruments, such as the xylophone and percussion instruments, to accompany their music-making.

There is a strong and well-established culture of safeguarding at the school. Leaders ensure regular training for all staff. Policies and procedures are effective and updated regularly according to current guidance.

Leadership and management

The headteacher's vision for Ysgol Cae'r Gwenyn is of a school where all children flourish, despite any additional learning needs that they may have. She has worked to create a culture where all staff work together diligently to help pupils to enjoy learning. They do their utmost to empower pupils to develop and achieve whilst allowing children to learn at their own pace. All staff have a strong and consistent relationship with parents and carers. The school provides an effective range of practical guidance that supports parents' well-being successfully. This is extremely important to parents as they come to terms with the fact that their child has a particular need. The school community works together successfully to deal with challenges and celebrate successes.

Distributed leadership is well developed at the school. Leaders ensure that all staff have meaningful opportunities to flourish within an identified role that supports a particular need in the school. For example, a member of the support staff has specific responsibility for co-ordinating home-school transport and providing workshops for contracted staff, such as taxi drivers and pupil escorts. These sessions provide contractors with strategies they can use to support pupils during their work. The school works closely with local authority officers to provide a range of support and training for colleagues within the local area.

Members of the school's governing body meet regularly and focus effectively on the quality of provision and pupil progress. As the school continues to grow and develop its provision, the governing body has maintained consistent support for the headteacher and staff, for example as they develop their approach to the Curriculum for Wales. They also provide an appropriate level of challenge, so that there is effective accountability and consistent focus on ensuring high standards of provision for pupils. For example, governors have a sound understanding of the school's baseline, and its approach to monitoring pupil progress over time.

There is a well-established and effective process for self-evaluation at the school. Leaders provide stakeholders with regular opportunities to contribute towards developing different aspects of provision. They adapt their approach to ensure that they value everyone's opinion equally. For example, as a result of limited feedback from parents, the home-school link co-ordinator now contacts parents directly to talk about how they feel about provision at the school and how they feel it could be improved. This has resulted in nearly all parents and carers making a valuable contribution to school evaluation and development. Leaders and staff undertake beneficial monitoring activity that highlights effective practice and areas for improvement. For example, the school is concentrating on developing its approach to supporting pupils' skills within the context of the Curriculum for Wales.

There is a strong culture of professional learning at Ysgol Cae'r Gwenyn. Leaders provide valuable opportunities for all staff to discuss their roles and identify strengths and areas for further development. The school plays a key role in the local authority's primary STEPS service (Supporting Teachers and Educational Practitioners). This

service provides opportunities for the staff to share elements of their practice to support staff in other schools within the local authority.

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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