



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

**A report on**

**Ysgol Gynradd Pennal  
Pennal  
Machynlleth  
Gwynedd  
SY20 9JT**

**Date of inspection: November 2019**

**by**

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

## About Ysgol Gynradd Pennal

This primary school is situated in the rural village of Pennal, near Machynlleth in Gwynedd. It has been part of a federation with Ysgol Dyffryn Dulas in Corris since 2012.

There are 22 pupils on roll, including two nursery age pupils who start school on a part-time basis following their third birthday. Over time, around 11% of pupils have been eligible for free school meals. This is slightly lower than the national percentage of 18%. The school has identified around 43% of its pupils as having additional learning needs, which is significantly higher than the national percentage of 21%. Around 5% of pupils come from Welsh-speaking homes. Most pupils come from white British backgrounds.

The school was last inspected in June 2011 and the current headteacher was appointed in September 2015.

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

## Summary

The headteacher leads the school and the federation masterfully and very successfully, and has fostered a highly dedicated and conscientious team. A clear vision has been realised to develop happy and successful pupils in a safe environment, in which pupils can develop and flourish.

Pupils take great pride in their school, and its homely and familial ethos is an excellent and prominent feature. Pupils are very caring towards each other and treat their peers, the school's staff and visitors with a great deal of respect.

Pupils make consistent progress from their starting points across the areas of learning, and develop their skills regularly in an effective range of interesting activities. They are keen to try activities without fear of failure. As a result, they develop to become skilful and independent learners.

Staff know the pupils very well and provide rich experiences for them in a supportive and inclusive learning environment. Teachers provide pupils with excellent support and meet individual pupils' needs effectively.

| <b>Inspection area</b>                     | <b>Judgement</b> |
|--|------------------|
| <b>Standards</b>                           | <b>Good</b>      |
| <b>Wellbeing and attitudes to learning</b> | <b>Good</b>      |
| <b>Teaching and learning experiences</b>   | <b>Good</b>      |
| <b>Care, support and guidance</b>          | <b>Good</b>      |
| <b>Leadership and management</b>           | <b>Excellent</b> |

## **Recommendations**

- R1 Increase the use of the Welsh language by pupils in formal and informal situations
- R2 Ensure that teachers challenge all pupils to achieve to the best of their ability
- R3 Strengthen the role of pupils in expressing a direct opinion on the school's wider procedures

## **What happens next**

Ysgol Pennal will produce an action plan to address the recommendations from the inspection.

## Main findings

### Standards: Good

During their time at the school, most pupils, including those with additional learning needs, make sound progress as they move through the school. They recall previous knowledge successfully and develop their skills regularly across a range of areas of learning.

In both key stages, nearly all pupils listen attentively to adults and each other. Most develop their oral skills effectively in a good range of activities. In the foundation phase, they discuss effectively and respect each other's contributions. Nearly all pupils are keen to provide answers and develop their ideas successfully, for example when designing puppets. As pupils move through the school, a majority develop vocabulary and patterns successfully, for example when performing a script about the battle of Bryn Glas. At the top of the school, most pupils use their Welsh and English oral skills effectively and develop to become skilful bilingual learners.

In the foundation phase, most pupils make appropriate progress in learning to read. By Year 2, they show an interest in an appropriate variety of books and enjoy reading aloud, and do so with increasing confidence. However, a minority of pupils' reading skills do not develop in line with their age and ability, and they do not make enough progress over time. In key stage 2, most pupils read fluently and with accuracy in Welsh and English. They discuss the content of books confidently, on the whole. At the top of the school, nearly all pupils gather information and organise information from different sources effectively, for example when conducting researching into the rivers of the Amazon. However, a minority of pupils' Welsh oral skills are not developing soundly enough.

Most pupils' early writing skills are developing skilfully in the foundation phase. They form letters and simple words through various activities, for example when writing about Cled the Clown. By Year 2, most write independently for different purposes. They use a suitable range of punctuation marks and spell simple words correctly, on the whole. A majority choose suitable vocabulary, for example 'mam weithiau'n hapus, weithiau'n flin, mae'n werth y byd' (mum is sometimes happy, sometimes angry, she means the world to me) when writing a poem. Most pupils develop their writing skills successfully in both languages in key stage 2. They write increasingly complex sentences and divide their work effectively into paragraphs. They choose vocabulary carefully in a rich variety of writing forms, for example when writing 'llond llwyed o gariad, pinsied o garedigrwydd, cwpan o gysur' ('a spoonful of love, a pinch of kindness, a cup of comfort') in a recipe for peace. By Year 6, they develop their creative writing skills soundly, for example when describing feelings in a monologue by an evacuee during the war. Nearly all pupils present their work neatly and tidily.

Most pupils' numeracy skills are developing successfully. In the foundation phase, they make purposeful progress in their mathematical development. By Year 2, they handle money correctly and develop a good understanding of measurement, time and data. Most develop their numeracy skills successfully across the areas of learning, for example when collecting and measuring autumn leaves. In key stage 2, most pupils have a sound understanding of number strategies and apply their skills

successfully in a valuable range of activities. For example, they measure the height that they can toss a pancake carefully in centimetres and millimetres, and present the results in a bar graph. They collect, analyse and present information effectively in different forms, for example when measuring fluid in objects that are thawing when learning about St Dwynwen.

Most foundation phase pupils develop a good range of information and communication technology (ICT) skills and apply them skilfully across the areas of learning. For example, they take pictures of their work when completing different challenges and save them independently in their personal digital files. A majority develop their creative and linguistic skills beneficially when create a video about Deri the dragon. At the top of the foundation phase, many pupils develop their problem-solving and thinking skills purposefully as they guide a programmable toy to move to a square that contains a particular 3D shape. In key stage 2, many pupils build appropriately on their previous ICT skills. They search for relevant information on the internet safely and use this information to create an information pamphlet on Anderson shelters. Many develop their thinking and problem-solving skills skilfully to control a rocket to move from one planet to another on a screen. They develop their creative skills purposefully by using an app to create a song to promote eating healthily, based on a character from the Second World War. However, pupils' ability to create and interrogate databases is inconsistent and their skills in using spreadsheets have not been developed.

### **Wellbeing and attitudes to learning: Good**

Nearly all pupils are proud of their school and feel safe there. They appreciate its extremely homely and familial ethos, and this in an excellent and prominent feature of the school. Nearly all pupils' behaviour and discipline are excellent. They are very caring towards each other in the classroom and outside on the playground. They treat their peers, the school's staff and visitors with a great deal of respect. Nearly all pupils arrive at school punctually and are eager to learn.

Most pupils contribute beneficially to their own learning by providing ideas for their theme work. For example, they provide ideas about what they would like to learn about the Second World War and develop their skills effectively when organising a party to celebrate the theme with the friends of the school.

Nearly all pupils understand the importance of eating and drinking healthily, and understand that eating fruit at break time is important. All pupils take part in daily physical activity around the school grounds in order to keep fit. Pupils at the top of the school discuss the effect of exercise on the heart effectively in their learning activities.

Most pupils have a sound understanding of the importance of caring for the world. For example, they explain the features and importance of rainforests for the environment successfully. They take advantage of opportunities to care for their habitat through the diligent work of the gardening club, which supports pupils' pride in the school. They take pride in the wider community and, for example, have created decorations from the willow that grows on the school grounds and produced 'Pennal pupils' pickle' to sell in Machynlleth winter fair. As a result, the profit from these

activities has contributed generously towards purchasing resources for the school, such as a green screen.

Pupils develop their leadership skills effectively by being members of the school council. They organise activities enthusiastically in order to raise money for a variety of local and national charities. This has a positive effect on most pupils' awareness of the needs of others in the wider world. The school council's influence on the school's policies and procedures is developing appropriately. For example, as a result of a discussion, the headteacher has invested in new doors for the school toilets. They also promote the school's rules by creating beneficial posters to be displayed. The influence of the young ambassadors ensures that children's rights are beginning to be highlighted in the school. However, pupils do not develop their voice in order to have a wider influence on the school.

Most pupils show perseverance in their work and implement effective ideas to help themselves and their friends to learn more effectively. They are now confident to face difficulties without fear of failure. As a result, nearly all are beginning to develop as independent learners and are beginning to take wider responsibility for completing their work.

Most pupils understand the importance of staying safe online. Pupils in the foundation phase promote this effectively by writing, performing and recording a rap to emphasise the need to be careful while browsing the internet. A visit by the local police officer reinforces this beneficially. All pupils appreciate that there is an adult available should anything worry them. As a result, pupils develop as confident learners in an inclusive learning environment.

### **Teaching and learning experiences: Good**

Staff know the pupils exceptionally well and ensure provision that corresponds with their personal needs effectively. They have a positive working relationship with pupils, which promotes learning successfully. They engage nearly all pupils' interest skilfully and encourage them to work diligently. Teachers encourage pupils effectively to give of their best in a supportive learning environment.

Teachers set clear learning objectives for pupils and question them skilfully in order to recall previous knowledge. They develop their ideas successfully as they encourage them to contribute regularly to learning activities, for example when learning about different tropical forests. Teachers ensure that activities have an effective and smooth pace. They encourage pupils to work skilfully with their peers in order to develop their skills across the areas of learning, for example when organising a feast at Sycharth to celebrate the victory in the Battle of Bryn Glas. Staff are beginning to support pupils subtly without intervening too much in learning, and encourage them to become skilful learners.

Teachers provide activities that correspond to nearly all pupils' ability successfully. They encourage pupils to try a wide variety of activities without fear of failure. They provide them with constructive oral feedback and encourage them to take responsibility for developing their work further. Teachers provide appropriate opportunities for pupils to reflect on their learning and offer purposeful improvements for them to achieve well.

Teachers plan stimulating learning experiences for pupils, which engage their interest effectively. They ensure valuable opportunities for them to contribute to their activities and develop the ability to take ownership of their efforts skilfully. Provision is enriched purposefully by organising a variety of visitors to the school to talk about different issues, and visits to places of interest, such as the Alternative Technology Centre, to learn about protecting the environment. Teachers also take advantage of rich opportunities to develop pupils' awareness of Welsh history and culture, for example through activities that are based on the rugby world cup and by studying the history of Owain Glyndŵr as part of the 'Heroes' theme.

Staff are skilful language models and promote the use of the Welsh language naturally to pupils. However, this does not have a positive effect on pupils' desire to use the Welsh language spontaneously in the classroom or in informal situations outside the classroom at all times.

Teachers provide high quality opportunities to develop pupils' creativity. They ensure continuity and progression in their skills across the school, for example in developing their ability to observe detail in the artwork of others before using the same techniques in their own work. This work is reinforced successfully by projects with external artists, which provide opportunities for pupils to apply a wide range of skills, such as music and ICT, soundly.

Teachers have a sound awareness of the principles of the foundation phase. They plan an effective balance between activities that are led by staff and opportunities for pupils to work independently in the learning areas, for example when creating decorations. Teachers plan effectively to develop pupils' skills outdoors, for example as they write instructions to create a celebration drink in the mud kitchen.

Teachers provide a wide and interesting range of learning experiences to develop pupils' literacy, numeracy and ICT skills successfully. Pupils develop their skills soundly over time, and teachers track skills appropriately. However, teachers do not plan skills in enough detail over time to ensure that all pupils achieve to the best of their ability.

### **Care, support and guidance: Good**

The school is an extremely welcoming community. Staff know the pupils very well and provide them with excellent care, support and guidance. Procedures to ensure that pupils work safely on the internet are effective and the school's arrangements for safeguarding pupils meet requirements and are not a cause for concern. All pupils feel safe, treat others with respect and courtesy, and behave consistently well in school.

The school has robust progress-tracking processes. Staff identify pupils' needs at a very early stage of their school journey and provide them with valuable guidance and support. Learning support staff are very skilful and support pupils, including those with additional learning needs, to make good progress. These procedures ensure that all pupils receive timely support to enable them to progress successfully to the next step in their learning.



Provision for pupils on the additional learning needs register is effective. Individual education plans identify clearly what needs to be improved to develop pupils' literacy and numeracy skills. The school has begun to develop a procedure to improve pupils' emotional wellbeing by providing sessions for those who need them to improve their levels of anxiety, anger and stress. Pupils and parents are given purposeful input into the individual plans and review them every term.

The school has strong links with a variety of external agencies. For example, the educational psychologist and language therapist visit the school regularly. Provision has been mapped in detail and learning support programmes have a positive effect on pupils' standards. As a result, nearly all pupils make sound progress from their starting points.

Staff have a very close relationship with parents and welcome them to the school regularly. As a result, parents work closely with teachers to support provision. For example, a parent leads the gardening club very successfully and provides valuable opportunities for pupils. The school is a 'Peace School', which means that pupils develop their understanding of humanitarian values effectively. A parent who specialises in counselling provides sessions to develop resilience, which have a robust effect on pupils' positive attitudes to learning. Teachers present purposeful reports for parents at the end of the year, which report clearly on their children's progress.

Provision to develop pupils' creative skills is valuable and has a positive effect on their progress. They have written a school anthem under the guidance of a famous poet and create attractive pieces of art. Staff also plan a wide range of interesting activities that develop pupils' appreciation of Welsh culture successfully.

The school has appropriate arrangements for eating and drinking healthily and promotes activities to encourage pupils to live healthy lives, for example by providing swimming lessons for them in a local swimming pool. Staff encourage pupils to keep fit by holding a daily race on the school grounds and encouraging them to persevere through the 'dal i fynd' (keep going) activity.

Assemblies and plans for collective worship promote pupils' spiritual and moral development successfully. Teachers provide interesting opportunities for pupils to develop moral and social skills purposefully by reflecting in collective worship sessions. Various opportunities are provided for pupils to learn about other religions and the lives of other people around the world. The school promotes a close and productive relationship with the local church as pupils take part in Christmas, Harvest and Remembrance Day services.

The school promotes sustainability successfully, for example by growing and selling vegetables. It celebrates fair trade week every year, which raises pupils' awareness of fairness effectively. As a result, this develops pupils' understanding, not only of local issues but also of global issues effectively.

The school provides suitable opportunities for pupils to develop their leadership skills appropriately, for example through the activities of the young ambassadors, the school council and the digital wizards. However, these groups are not given an opportunity to express their views directly on the school's wider procedures.

## **Leadership and management: Excellent**

The quality and effectiveness of the federation's leadership are excellent and have a very positive effect on pupils' standards and wellbeing. Leaders have established and conveyed a clear vision that is based on developing happy and successful pupils highly effectively. There is a very beneficial focus on creating a happy and inclusive haven as a basis for creating a very effective environment in which pupils can develop very successfully. As a result, there is an exceptional ethos across the federation, and pupils and staff feel that they are valued continuously. All staff share the vision successfully across both campuses, and this has a very positive effect on pupils' experiences and outcomes.

The headteacher sets high expectations for herself and staff, and ensures that provision and pupils' progress are maintained through very beneficial discussions in joint staff meetings. These meetings are recorded concisely, by noting decisions and purposeful comments, any relevant documentation or websites that were referred to, in addition to any further action that is needed. This process ensures that there is clear continuity from one meeting to the next and that all teachers are given an opportunity to review progress jointly in detail against any actions. As a result, accountability is very clear and all teachers have a very robust commitment towards developing an agreed strategy. By doing so, leaders ensure that both schools learn from each other by sharing good practice and working together purposefully on specific areas. A notable example of this is the way in which a teacher who worked in the foundation phase is being mentored successfully as she becomes established in a class that includes the full range of pupils in key stage 2.

Leaders respond very successfully to national priorities. An excellent example of this is the way in which the foundation phase ethos has been embedded very successfully in both schools, and particularly at Ysgol Dyffryn Dulas. Expertise there is used highly effectively to develop provision further at Ysgol Pennal. The headteacher has ensured that staff have begun to prepare purposefully to introduce the new curriculum for Wales in due course. As a result, pupils' willingness to take responsibility for their learning and develop their creative skills is an exceptional strength. This contributes very effectively to teachers' success in engaging pupils' enthusiasm and imagination at both schools.

Governors know, support and challenge the schools effectively. They understand and fulfil their roles and responsibilities conscientiously in terms of monitoring, tracking and promoting the ethos and values of the schools in the federation. Governors visit the schools regularly to scrutinise books, observe lessons and discuss work with pupils. This gives them a valuable, first-hand understanding which enables them to ask relevant questions to evaluate the effect of any changes. Their role as critical friends is developing beneficially. This is very evident as they challenge the standard of pupils' handwriting and presentation, and monitor that pupils understand and respond to teachers' comments on how to improve their work. Governors support staff very effectively and show pastoral care towards them, when necessary. The governing body promotes the principle of the importance of eating and drinking healthily well by ensuring that water is available to pupils during the day, and that there are beneficial opportunities for them to work in the garden and grow vegetables.

Leaders use a range of self-evaluation procedures extremely purposefully in order to identify the schools' strengths and areas that need to be developed further. The federation's priorities for development reflect the outcomes that have been identified very clearly. Both schools have a very strong record of making improvements, and leaders have responded very purposefully to recommendations from previous inspections. As a result, both schools are now in a robust situation and Ysgol Dyffryn Dulas, in particular, has shown exceptional improvement since the last inspection.

Leaders create a rich culture of addressing staff's professional learning needs, by providing beneficial opportunities for them to increase their knowledge, understanding and professional skills in specific areas. They do so by providing an opportunity for teachers to research best practice, in addition to implementing change in provision. Training sessions are effective and link directly to the priorities in the federation's improvement plan. Staff share their new skills with each other highly effectively after attending courses. A specific example of this is the way in which they have developed staff's confidence in creative digital skills which, in a short time, has had a very positive effect on pupils' skills. Performance management procedures have been established very firmly, and they are operational and highly effective. As a result, leaders ensure as much consistency as possible in provision across the federation.

Leaders have ensured an appropriate level of staffing and learning resources to deliver an interesting curriculum, and they use these resources efficiently. Decisions on expenditure link appropriately with the school's priorities for improvement and the school uses grants effectively. A specific example of this is the way in which it uses the pupil development grant effectively to mitigate the effect of poverty on pupils.

## Evidence base of the report

Before an inspection, inspectors:

- analyse the outcomes from the parent 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 to hear their views on the school and its effectiveness
- meet the headteacher, governors, senior and middle leaders 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 the specialist resource base (where appropriate), 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 (where appropriate) and in outdoor areas
- visit the specialist resource base within the school to see pupils' learning (where appropriate)
- 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' 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](http://www.estyn.gov.wales))

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

|  |  |
|--|--|
| <b>Excellent</b>                                   | Very strong, sustained performance and practice                          |
| <b>Good</b>  | Strong features, although minor aspects may require improvement          |
| <b>Adequate and needs improvement</b>              | Strengths outweigh weaknesses, but important aspects require improvement |
| <b>Unsatisfactory and needs urgent improvement</b> | 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:

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