



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

A report on

**Ysgol Bro Helyg
Rising Sun Industrial Estate
Blaina
Blaenau Gwent
NP13 3DQ**

Date of inspection: February 2020

by

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

About Ysgol Bro Helyg

Ysgol Bro Helyg is situated near the village of Blaina in Blaenau Gwent local authority. The school serves a wide area and pupils come from all corners of the county. There are 256 pupils between 3 and 11 years old on roll, including 47 nursery age pupils. Welsh is the main medium of the school's life and work.

Around 7% of pupils are eligible for free schools meals. This is significantly lower than the national average of 18%. The school has identified that around 11% of pupils have special educational needs. This is lower than the national figure of 21%. Many pupils come from English-speaking homes. Around 21% come from Welsh-speaking homes.

The current headteacher was appointed in April 2012 and the last inspection was conducted in March 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 school is a caring and hard-working community which provides a firm foundation for pupils' learning from an early age, particularly in acquiring the Welsh language. The headteacher and staff have high expectations of pupils and, as a result, most make good progress during their time at the school. Staff organise purposeful interventions for pupils, which succeed in supporting them to improve their literacy and numeracy skills, and wellbeing, well.

Across the school, most pupils show enthusiasm towards their learning. They respect others well and work diligently in pairs and groups. Classes are organised and industrious places in which most pupils persevere well with their tasks. However, not all pupils in the foundation phase are given enough opportunities to enable them to make their own decisions and become independent learners. Staff plan valuable opportunities for pupils to apply their literacy and numeracy skills consistently in their work. However, they do not plan purposefully enough to develop pupils' information and communication technology (ICT) skills.

The headteacher has a clear vision to realise the aim of 'setting a firm foundation for a bright future'. The school has established a hard-working management team that has succeeded in leading significant improvements successfully over time. However, processes for self-evaluation and planning for improvement do not always focus enough on the most important priorities in order to move the school forward.

Inspection area	Judgement
Standards	Good
Wellbeing and attitudes to learning	Good
Teaching and learning experiences	Adequate and needs improvement
Care, support and guidance	Good
Leadership and management	Good

Recommendations

- R1 Ensure that teaching and learning experiences develop the independence of all pupils in the foundation phase consistently
- R2 Improve provision to develop pupils' ICT skills across the school
- R3 Strengthen self-evaluation and planning for improvement procedures in order to prioritise and address the most important areas

What happens next

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

Main findings

Standards: Good

On entry to the school, many pupils have communication skills that are below the standard expected for their age. Very few are able to speak Welsh before entry. However, most pupils, including those with special educational needs, make sound progress during their time at the school.

Many pupils begin to acquire Welsh oracy skills very quickly after starting at the school. They come to know instructions and begin to speak Welsh by using appropriate vocabulary and simple sentences. By the end of the foundation phase, most pupils speak Welsh confidently with visitors, and respond appropriately to staff's questions. Most pupils develop their oracy skills further during their time in key stage 2 and begin to give purposeful consideration to the audience, for example when providing voiceovers for their animation work, 'Antur India'. Nearly all pupils listen attentively to adults in lessons.

Most pupils make strong progress in their reading skills. By the end of the foundation phase, they read well with a good level of fluency and use different strategies to break down unfamiliar words. Most show a thorough understanding of content and succeed in translating sentences from Welsh books to English. Many pupils in key stage 2 develop successful reading skills, and a majority read for pleasure and discuss their favourite authors confidently. They use their reading skills skilfully to analyse and find information, for example when solving a series of mathematical problems.

During their time in the foundation phase, most pupils develop sound writing skills. Many of the youngest pupils develop robust fine motor skills by making marks and begin to write letters and simple words. By the end of the foundation phase, most develop to write extended pieces successfully, such as a letter to a 'snowman'. During key stage 2, most write purposefully in a variety of different genres. For example, they write an article for an imaginary newspaper, 'Clecs y Cwm', and write a portrayal of King Richard III as part of a project about William Shakespeare.

Many pupils in the nursery classes are beginning to recognise numbers and count to ten correctly. They come to recognise and create patterns successfully, for example when printing shapes by using potatoes. By the end of the foundation phase, most pupils use number confidently in their work. For example, they find the correct change when paying for different 'fruits' with pretend money in the role-play area. Most pupils continue to apply their numeracy skills productively during key stage 2, for example as they record the results of a scientific investigation to discover the average distance of the flight of a paper aeroplane.

Most pupils develop a limited range of information and communication technology (ICT) skills appropriately. For example, Year 2 pupils use digital art packages to draw pictures of Celtic roundhouses and add a purposeful sentence to them, while Year 6 pupils find information on the internet confidently. However, many pupils' ICT skills have not developed soundly enough.

Most pupils develop creative skills skilfully. For example, individuals in the foundation phase learn about the different cultures of the world by creating Chinese lanterns and Rangoli patterns, while Year 6 pupils perform Shakespeare's plays in a local theatre.

Wellbeing and attitudes to learning: Good

The working relationship between pupils and staff at the school is sound and provides an effective foundation to maintain a caring and supportive ethos. Nearly all pupils talk about their school with pride.

Most pupils have positive attitudes to learning. They share their ideas about their education appropriately by providing ideas about what they would like to learn at the beginning of each theme. They concentrate well and persevere for extended periods. They are very willing to discuss their work, their successes and the next steps in their learning with adults. A good example of this is their pride when talking about their work on managing funds. They work together effectively, either in groups, pairs or by supporting each other, when necessary.

Pupils have a high level of trust in staff and know that they will do their best for them. As a result, nearly all pupils enjoy school, understand what to do if anything is worrying them, and feel completely safe there. They speak confidently about how to stay safe online. Pupils are able to discuss confidently the importance of not revealing information online and keeping their contact details confidential.

Most pupils understand the importance of eating and drinking healthily and make healthy choices. The mile-a-day running activity has a positive effect on pupils' attitudes to physical exercise and a healthy lifestyle. Many pupils take advantage of opportunities to participate in extra-curricular activities, such as sports and art clubs.

Pupils play a leading role in the school's strategic work. Members of the wide range of children's committees have a purposeful influence on different aspects of the school. Pupils understand their responsibilities clearly, and discharge their duties enthusiastically and maturely. A good example of this is the Criw Cymraeg and their work to promote the use of the Welsh language within businesses in the local community. The school council organises fundraising activities for a large number of charities. A significant amount of money was raised recently for a children's charity. This has a positive effect on most pupils' awareness of the needs of others within their community and the wider world.

Most pupils develop well are moral and knowledgeable citizens through their increasing awareness of values that are promoted by the school.

Teaching and learning experiences: Adequate and needs improvement

Staff have a positive and supportive working relationship with pupils. Teachers know the pupils and their needs well and, as a result, most make appropriate progress in lessons. Teachers have high expectations of pupils. Most lessons have a purposeful pace, which contributes effectively to the hard-working environment that is evident in the classrooms. Teachers plan regular opportunities for pupils to learn in groups and pairs and, as a result, most respect their peers' contribution to their learning.

All staff contribute successfully towards creating a Welsh ethos in the school. They model the language skilfully and take appropriate advantage of opportunities to enrich pupils' vocabulary. As a result, most pupils make sound progress in learning the language from a very early age. Staff ensure that pupils make full use of the Welsh language in lessons and outside the classroom. As a result, by key stage 2, they talk to each other naturally through the medium of Welsh during lessons. Teachers use off-site visits effectively to deepen pupils' understanding of their themes, for example by taking part in science and technology workshops at the university. However, teachers do not always take advantage of opportunities to weave Welsh culture and history into work across the curriculum.

Teachers plan an appropriate range of interesting activities that engage pupils' interest. They have good subject knowledge and give due attention to pupils' previous learning when planning new experiences. Teachers work purposefully with assistants, who support teaching effectively. They question pupils' skilfully during lessons, which contributes beneficially towards developing their thinking skills. This also helps them to move to the next step in their learning, and is a useful means of assessing their progress. Teachers give pupils purposeful and regular feedback during their lessons, including opportunities for them to reflect on their own progress and that of their peers. As a result, in the best practice, pupils refine, correct and improve the content of their work appropriately. Teachers set useful personal targets for pupils and arrange for them to have time to practise them regularly.

Overall, foundation phase staff plan a suitable range of learning experiences that respond appropriately to pupils' requirements. Teachers prepare suitable focus activities in order to present new concepts to pupils. In addition, there is a range of interesting challenges in the different areas in the classrooms, which provide valuable opportunities for pupils to apply their skills appropriately. However, pupils are not given enough opportunities to make choices about their learning nor to conduct research and find information for themselves. There are also very few opportunities for pupils to take part in beneficial learning experiences in the outdoor area and develop their independent learning skills in full.

Teachers plan valuable opportunities for pupils to practise their literacy and numeracy skills in lessons across the school. They apply these skills in various areas across the curriculum. For example, key stage 2 pupils have recently analysed data on the Welsh rugby team. However, teachers do not plan purposefully enough to ensure that pupils build on their ICT skills during their time at the school.

Care, support and guidance: Good

The school is a caring and inclusive community that provides high quality care and support for nearly all pupils. All staff are committed to identifying pupils' needs at an early stage and providing them with valuable support. They use robust systems successfully to track their progress from their starting points. As a result, they provide them with purposeful interventions by using a wide range of programmes in order to improve their literacy and numeracy skills, and wellbeing, where appropriate. Purposeful planning between teachers and assistants ensures that all understand their roles to enable them to meet pupils' needs robustly.

The special educational needs co-ordinator works successfully with parents in order to seek their views as they plan support for their children, and report to them on their progress. Individual plans for pupils with special educational needs are purposeful and enable them to make good progress against their targets.

Staff work effectively with a full range of partners and external agencies to support provision for pupils with special educational needs or emotional needs. This contributes well to the school's caring and familial ethos.

The school develops the pupil's voice well through a number of school councils and committees. This has a positive effect on the school's ethos, as pupils feel that they are respected and that staff listen to their ideas. These opportunities promote principles such as co-operation, courtesy and friendship effectively and naturally.

The school's arrangements for safeguarding pupils meet requirements and are not a cause for concern. External partners, such as the police, are used effectively to ensure that pupils understand how to stay safe online and the importance of not abusing substances.

The school promotes pupils' health and wellbeing effectively and has appropriate arrangements to promote eating and drinking healthily. A full range of beneficial activities, such as extra-curricular cooking, netball and football clubs, and skipping during break times, support this well. As a result, most pupils understand the importance of keeping healthy.

There is a robust relationship between the school and parents. Staff promote an open and co-operative culture, which succeeds in ensuring their commitment and comprehensive support. Successful arrangements include implementing a transition programme when pupils start at the school, which helps them to settle quickly. This programme also provides valuable support for parents to develop their knowledge of making healthy food at home, in addition to developing their initial knowledge of the Welsh language.

There are good opportunities for pupils to develop their awareness and knowledge of different cultures and other parts of the world by learning about special celebrations. A good example of this is the work on the Chinese New Year, and the differences and similarities between some of the world's religions. This ensures that pupils show empathy towards the lives of others and are given suitable opportunities to develop spiritually by reflecting on their own beliefs. The school promotes pupils' moral development successfully. It places a clear emphasis on aspects such as the importance of treating others with respect and promotes children's rights. The school has a supportive and effective programme to support young carers. It has successful links with people who are living with dementia, and beneficial opportunities are provided for pupils to support charities such as the local Cancer Centre.

Provision to develop pupils' understanding of sustainability is good. As a result of the work of the eco council, teachers and pupils promote the importance of looking after our planet effectively. For example, they recycle paper and develop ways of saving energy to foster the whole community's understanding of the importance of living a greener lifestyle.

Leadership and management: Good

The headteacher and leaders have a clear and robust vision to develop the school as a successful learning community by providing high quality education and care for all pupils. This vision is based soundly on raising standards, developing pride towards the Welsh language, and pupils' wellbeing. The headteacher has established an effective leadership team to support the work of setting a decisive strategic direction for all of the school's work. They share this successfully with staff, governors, parents and pupils. Members of the senior management team have high expectations of themselves and others. They use their expertise skilfully to ensure support and encouragement for staff to commit themselves fully to improving pupils' outcomes. Nearly all members of staff are very aware of their roles and responsibilities, and operate highly effectively as a team. All of this has had a positive effect on raising standards, and has ensured clear improvements across the school over the last five years.

The school has robust procedure to manage the performance of its teachers and assistants. This ensures that they are given support to fulfil the school's priorities and their individual professional needs. A strong feature of the school's work is the way in which leaders support and encourage staff to undertake professional learning activities successfully within the school and through a range of beneficial networks with schools across the region. A good example of this is the guidance that the school provides to schools in the cluster on professional learning. This enables all staff to reflect on their practice and develop leaders' confidence. The headteacher also supports staff to take part in further training activities to prepare them for the next step in their careers. Most learning assistants are trained effectively to support individual pupils and specific groups of pupils with a variety of useful interventions. This contributes successfully towards strengthening staff's skills, in order to ensure that pupils' standards are good in terms of their learning and wellbeing.

The governors are supportive of the school and have a good understanding of pupils' standards and achievement. They receive purposeful information from the headteacher, and valuable and regular presentations from staff on particular elements of the school's life and work. Members of the governing body conduct valuable learning walks with pupils, staff and the challenge adviser in order to seek more information about provision. This develops their understanding of the school's work successfully and enables them to challenge leaders appropriately.

Leaders have established a strong culture of continuous self-evaluation, which focuses appropriately on pupils' outcomes and wellbeing, in addition to provision. Leaders make suitable use of the views and input of parents, pupils and staff as part of the school's self-evaluation procedures. Leaders and teachers follow a comprehensive monitoring programme in order to evaluate the quality of provision and learning. However, these evaluations are not always incisive enough to identify some areas for improvement effectively enough. Overall, there is an appropriate link between the findings of self-evaluation procedures and the priorities in the school development plan. The development plan is a comprehensive document, which outlines suitable actions to ensure improvement. However, priorities are very wide-ranging and include a number of areas for improvement. As a result, leaders do not always prioritise the most important areas that are in need of attention.

Leaders manage the budget carefully and ensure that expenditure links well with plans for improvement. The school makes skilful use of different grants, including the pupil development grant, to support vulnerable pupils. This has a positive effect on the literacy and numeracy skills, and wellbeing, of these 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)

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

Excellent	Very strong, sustained performance and practice
Good	Strong features, although minor aspects may require improvement
Adequate and needs improvement	Strengths outweigh weaknesses, but important aspects require improvement
Unsatisfactory and needs urgent improvement	Important weaknesses outweigh strengths

The report was produced in accordance with Section 28 of the Education Act 2005.

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