



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

A report on

Ysgol Gynradd Gymraeg Blaendulais

**Blaendulais
Neath
SA10 9AA**

Date of inspection: December 2022

by

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

This report is also available in Welsh.

About Ysgol Gynradd Gymraeg Blaendulais

Name of provider	Ysgol Gynradd Gymraeg Blaendulais
Local authority	Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council
Language of the provider	Welsh
Type of school	Primary
Religious character	
Number of pupils on roll	100
Pupils of statutory school age	72
Number in nursery classes (if applicable)	12
Percentage of statutory school age pupils eligible for free school meals over a three-year average <i>(The national percentage of pupils eligible for free school meals over a three-year average in the primary sector is 23.0%)</i>	9.2%
Percentage of statutory school age pupils identified as having additional learning needs (a) <i>(The national percentage of pupils identified as having an additional learning need in the primary sector is 16.1%)</i>	16.7%
Percentage of statutory school age pupils who speak Welsh at home	28%
Percentage of statutory school age pupils with English as an additional language	0%
Date of headteacher appointment	September 2021
Date of previous Estyn inspection (if applicable)	01/03/2014
Start date of inspection	05/12/2022

Data reported is sourced from the latest available Pupil Level Annual School Census. These figures may be slightly different from 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

Ysgol Gymraeg Blaendulais is a happy, homely and caring school that encourages pupils to take pride in their community, their culture and their Welshness. Nearly all pupils behave maturely and respectfully towards others and take pride in their school. All staff have a very productive working relationship with pupils, their families and members of the community, which promotes positive attitudes in terms of learning and pupils' well-being. As a result, most pupils make sound progress from their starting points and are very aware of how to take care of their well-being.

Teachers and assistants work diligently to provide a good range of beneficial experiences that focus on developing pupils' awareness of their 'cynefin' (local area). They use the local area effectively to enrich pupils' outdoor learning experiences and nurture their skills. The strong emphasis on developing pupils' oral skills is a strong feature of provision. As a result, most pupils use polished spoken language and natural dialect successfully. Overall, teachers plan a good range of learning experiences that reinforce and apply pupils' skills across the curriculum. However, they do not always provide enough opportunities for pupils to apply their numeracy skills regularly enough. At times, over-direction by teachers and assistants also hinders the development of pupils' independent learning skills and thinking skills.

Although they are relatively new to their roles, the acting headteacher and acting deputy headteacher work effectively with stakeholders to maintain and improve provision and pupils' outcomes. With energetic support from the chair of governors, leaders and staff are committed to providing the best possible start to pupils at Ysgol Gymraeg Blaendulais. The very strong team ethos that exists across the school supports this well. Although leaders are successful in improving specific elements of provision, self-evaluation processes are not always robust enough to identify clearly what they are doing well and what needs to be improved.

Recommendations

- R1 Provide regular opportunities for pupils to apply their numeracy skills across the curriculum
- R2 Expand opportunities for pupils to develop their independent learning skills and make decisions in relation to their learning
- R3 Strengthen self-evaluation and planning for improvement processes

What happens next

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

Main findings

Learning

During their time at the school, most pupils, including those with additional learning needs (ALN), make sound progress from their starting points. They develop their knowledge, understanding and skills appropriately in different contexts, which encourages them to enjoy their learning.

Across the school, most pupils use polished spoken language and natural dialect successfully to communicate thoughtfully and sensitively with their friends and share their ideas confidently with others. As they move through the school, they build on their speaking and listening skills effectively and develop their vocabulary and language patterns purposefully. For example, Year 2 pupils describe and discuss characters from the story of Little Red Riding Hood and pupils at the top of the school use rich Welsh vocabulary freely in their discussions about muscles in the body.

Most pupils' reading skills are developing effectively. The youngest pupils develop their knowledge of letter sounds skilfully and, by Year 2, they use a good range of reading techniques effectively to interpret less familiar words. Many of the oldest pupils develop their skills soundly and enjoy reading a relevant range of books and digital texts.

In the foundation learning classes, most pupils' early writing skills are developing appropriately. Most of the youngest pupils develop sound fine motor skills before moving on to making marks purposefully both inside and outside the classroom, for example by using scissors to cut out shapes and when making dough to make cake shapes. As they move through the school, most build on their skills successfully by writing for a variety of audiences and different purposes. As their skills develop, they use a good range of punctuation and spell more complex words correctly. Many pupils develop a fluent and neat handwriting style and present their work with care and respect. Year 2 pupils, for example, select words purposefully when gathering and writing information about a forest animal. By Year 6, most write at increasing length when writing a biography of the chair of governors. Overall, many pupils apply their literacy skills purposefully across the curriculum when completing their independent challenges.

Most pupils develop sound mathematics skills. On the whole, they develop an increasing range of number skills regularly in mathematics sessions and learning activities throughout the year. In the foundation learning classes at the bottom of the school, most pupils use their number skills appropriately when solving practical problems. A good example of this is Year 2 pupils using their knowledge of money and place value with increasing confidence to count a total up to twenty pounds. As pupils move through the year, most develop a beneficial range of mathematical skills well, for example by creating a scatter graph to show the relationship between the heart rate and running time. Although they develop these basic skills successfully, there are very few opportunities for them to apply and develop their skills in full regularly across the areas of learning and experience. As a result, pupils' numeracy skills have not developed effectively enough.

Most pupils' information and communication technology (ICT) skills are developing soundly. They use these skills successfully to research and support their learning regularly in the areas of learning and experience. The youngest pupils give instructions to a programmable toy confidently and persevere for appropriate periods to solve problems. At the top of the school, pupils create graphs confidently to record data and use simple coding software successfully to create a variety of interactive games that relate to the class theme.

Most pupils develop sound creative skills and they use them successfully across the curriculum. They experiment with natural materials when creating artwork, such as dough models of local forest animals. The youngest pupils are also adventurous when experimenting successfully with a variety of natural materials, such as using a variety of leaves and twigs to emulate the work of an artist who is famous for his natural sculptures. Pupils across the school enjoy performing and taking part in various musical activities, for example by participating in musical instrument lessons and singing in the choir.

Most pupils develop their physical skills soundly through a variety of beneficial experiences and activities. The youngest pupils use the bicycles energetically and demonstrate good balancing skills. These skills are developed further as pupils take part in a good range of physical activities. For example, pupils in Years 3 and 4 develop their physical and problem-solving skills creatively by working together to cross a mock-up model of the River Dulais.

Well-being and attitudes to learning

Some of the school's strongest features are its inclusive nature, caring ethos and homely environment. Nearly all pupils enjoy being members of the school community and feel that they are valued by staff. Across the school, pupils have a positive relationship with adults. Nearly all pupils behave exceptionally well and are polite and respectful towards each other and others. They treat each other with care and consideration and respect the contributions of their peers. For example, pupils speak confidently about their understanding of the rights of children and adults following their discussions during the school's 'diversity week'.

Nearly all pupils develop positive attitudes to learning from beginning of their time at the school and show an interest in their work. They concentrate diligently on their learning activities for extended periods and show perseverance and resilience when completing their work. Most persevere to try to solve problems independently or by asking their peers if they have difficulties. On the whole, most pupils develop to become ambitious and confident learners who are ready to learn. They work well with others and contribute actively when solving problems. However, the lack of regular opportunities to use and develop their skills purposefully across the curriculum limits pupils' independent learning skills to some degree.

Through their joint understanding of morals and values, most pupils feel safe and know whom to approach if something is worrying them. They appreciate that adults treat them fairly and with respect. This contributes successfully to developing a close working relationship that is based firmly on trust and respect.

Most pupils take great pride in their school and make a valuable contribution to activities and events that strengthen the relationship between the school and the community. They take their role seriously and support and make a valuable

contribution to the work of the school councils. Members of the school council and eco council are enthusiastic about their work and have a positive influence on school life. For example, a toy swap shop was organised by the eco committee and the profit was used to secure play equipment for the playground. This makes a valuable contribution to their understanding of values in relation to recycling and taking care of the local area and the wider world. Most pupils treat others with empathy and are keen to support those who are in need, for example by supporting a campaign to gather humanitarian items for refugees as a result of the war in Ukraine.

Most pupils understand the importance of making choices that affect their health. They understand the need for a balanced diet and the need to keep fit and make informed choices about what they eat and drink. Many also take part in physical activities during breaktimes and lunchtimes and in an after-school rugby club. For example, many pupils take advantage of the '*Clwb Cinió Cŵl*' lunchtime club to take part in art activities when listening to calming music to promote their mental health and well-being.

Many pupils understand that emotional well-being is important and play an active part in protecting this aspect of the school's life and work. For example, they share their feelings anonymously during daily registration in the classrooms. This promotes their mental health well and develops their understanding of how to respond appropriately to situations that affect their emotions.

Teaching and learning experiences

Without exception, teachers and assistants have a productive working relationship with pupils. They encourage respect and courtesy, which contributes well to realising the school's vision and pupils' engagement in their learning. Most model language effectively and encourage and support pupils to use correct spoken Welsh regularly and confidently, for example by encouraging Year 2 pupils to describe the features of their animal models by using correct subject vocabulary, syntax and mutations. On the whole, they plan an appropriate range of activities and learning experiences that build increasingly on pupils' knowledge, skills and experiences. In the best practice, linguistic activities during language sessions are reinforced through independent challenges for pupils.

Overall, most teachers use a suitable range of teaching methods and resources to engage pupils' interest and develop their skills, for example by setting a challenge for the youngest pupils to build a shelter in the outdoor area and research forest animal droppings to record what they eat. Teachers and assistants make their classes and other areas across the school stimulating and engaging environments where pupils can develop their skills fairly independently. On the whole, they plan appropriate opportunities for pupils to apply their skills across the areas of learning and experience by setting suitable challenges that promote independent learning. However, teachers and assistants over-direct pupils at times, which hinders the development of their independent learning skills and thinking skills. Use of worksheets and more formal learning methods for literacy and numeracy sessions also limits pupils' ability to write at length and use their skills more independently.

Teachers and assistants know their pupils well and respond robustly to their needs, including their emotional and well-being needs. They track pupils' progress appropriately by using a range of standardised test results and other information

about their development. This ensures that they respond appropriately to their needs and support them in a timely manner. Overall, assistants support learning robustly and support specific groups of learners skilfully.

Across the school, teachers use skilful questioning effectively to develop pupils' skills and understanding. They provide beneficial and timely oral feedback to encourage pupils to consider what they are doing well and how to improve their work. However, teachers do not always ensure suitable opportunities for pupils to improve their work wholly independently following feedback or to evaluate their own work and that of their peers.

Teachers and assistants make effective use of weekly visits to the local 'tips' area, where the landscape has been remodelled for use by the public. Here, pupils learn about nature in the area and undertake joint activities that strengthen their creative ability to work physically and as part of a team. This supports their understanding of the local area and nature and promotes their social, physical and problem-solving skills successfully. However, the outdoor areas on the school grounds have not been developed fully to allow regular access for pupils, particularly the youngest pupils. As a result, pupils are not given regular opportunities to enrich their learning and develop their skills independently in these areas.

Staff have made good progress towards establishing the principles and content of the Curriculum for Wales across the school. They have worked with pupils, parents, carers and governors to create a vision for the curriculum that reflects the four purposes successfully and is more relevant to pupils' lives. One strength of the school's curriculum is now the provision to promote the nature of local and Welsh culture and heritage. As a result, learning experiences ensure a strong sense of belonging to the valley among pupils and spark their interest to learn more about their history and culture. For example, when discussing the concept of bravery, the school's pupils study the Dulais explosion disaster and the bravery shown by local residents. However, there are few opportunities within the curriculum for pupils to learn more about the wider world outside Wales.

On the whole, teachers plan an appropriate range of activities and learning experiences that build systematically on pupils' knowledge, understanding, skills and experiences to ensure progression as they move through the school. In the best practice, linguistic activities during language sessions are reinforced through independent challenges for pupils. Over time, the school provides a number of activities to develop pupils' personal and social skills well.

Care, support and guidance

The close working relationship between staff and pupils, and between the pupils themselves, leads to a caring community with a friendly and warm ethos. Teachers and assistants know the pupils very well and respond purposefully to their emotional and social needs. Staff attitudes and the positive environment in all classes support pupils to settle easily and contribute well to school life. This reinforces their contentment and well-being and encourages pupils to foster resilient attitudes to learning.

A notable aspect of provision is the support provided for specific groups of pupils. Teachers gather useful information about pupils' progress on their journey through the school and analyse this information effectively. As a result, they identify quickly

pupils who need additional support and provide interventions that target their specific needs very successfully. There is excellent co-operation between the additional learning needs co-ordinator and support staff, parents and carers. They have a thorough knowledge of pupils' needs and provide beneficial interventions and support. Teachers and assistants work successfully with a variety of partners and agencies to support specific groups of pupils, including those with additional learning needs. Regular reviews of pupils' progress help teachers to develop a sound understanding of pupils' needs. As a result, nearly all pupils make good progress against their personal targets.

The school's inclusive nature ensures strong relationships between pupils, their families and the school. Effective communication between teachers and parents ensures that issues involving their children are given due attention quickly. All staff organise a number of events in partnership with the community, which reinforces the sense of belonging and helps pupils to respect and care for others, for example by taking part in Christmas services in the village. This is one of the school's prominent strengths, which makes a valuable contribution to the community ethos that exists. Staff support pupils' well-being very effectively and the use of external agencies, for example the police liaison officer, contributes to this very well. The school also encourages pupils to take care of their mental health by being willing to talk about their feelings. A qualified member of staff provides beneficial sessions for pupils who, for example, suffer from anxiety or need support with their mental well-being. This has a positive effect on the well-being of these pupils.

The school provides rich opportunities to celebrate and develop pupils' understanding of their identity, heritage and culture. It highlights 'Cymry Cŵl' contributions in the arts and entertainment and this was recently highlighted further by celebrating Wales' journey to the World Cup, as one of the stars of the team is a former pupil of the school. Pupils' Welshness is celebrated well by holding an annual eisteddfod and special celebrations, such as St David's Day.

The school places a strong emphasis on providing a range of trips and visits to support the curriculum. For example, a visit was held to Cardiff Castle as part of this term's theme and the oldest pupils have been on a residential trip to Pembrokeshire. These visits engage and hold their interest in learning successfully. Activities relating to diversity also promote pupils' understanding of the importance of values such as tolerance and the right to be free from harassment. Through this, the school succeeds in nurturing shared values effectively, such as honesty, fairness, justice and sustainability. This helps pupils to understand more about the wider community, celebrate diversity and promote inclusion, for example by discussing children's rights and lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans-sexual and queer/questioning (LGBTQ+) rights.

Staff provide appropriate opportunities for pupils to express their views to contribute to their learning and school life. This enriches their experiences and prepares them well to take responsibility for their decisions and consider the views of others. The school promotes pupils' spiritual and moral development successfully. For example, pupils are given an opportunity to reflect and think about other religions through daily assemblies. The school also reinforces pupils' community values by arranging for them to take part in fundraising activities for local and national causes. However, plans to develop pupils' knowledge of multicultural communities are not as developed.

The school has a strong culture of safeguarding and all staff take part in purposeful training and relevant discussions regularly. The school's arrangements for safeguarding pupils meet requirements and are not a cause for concern.

Leadership and management

The acting headteacher undertakes her role skilfully and succeeds in reinforcing and strengthening the school's principles effectively. In the period since being appointed, she has worked successfully with stakeholders to create a shared vision. This is based on supporting pupils to become independent, respectful and ambitious learners who are ready to succeed. As a result, there is a strong sense of trust, pride and respect between pupils and staff, which permeates naturally across the school's close-knit community.

The acting headteacher sets high expectations and uses the expertise of all staff effectively to support pupils' well-being and achievement. She works effectively with the acting deputy headteacher, which contributes effectively to reinforcing a productive team ethos among teachers and assistants. Through regular staff meetings and discussions, nearly all have a sound understanding of the school's main priorities.

Overall, members of the governing body know the school well and support the acting headteacher and staff successfully. The chair is incredibly hard-working and visits the school on a weekly basis to undertake a good range of activities, for example by supporting outdoor learning sessions and giving a presentation to girls on her experience of playing walking football for Wales. The governing body also takes advantage of the expertise of members to make a valuable contribution to the school's work, for example by holding training for staff on LGBTQ+ issues and providing short videos on how to keep fit during the Covid-19 lockdown periods. Although members of the governing body have not taken part in many monitoring activities over the last three years, leaders' reports and presentations help them to understand more about the school's work, for example by presenting information about changes to the school's arrangements as a result of the new ALN act. This supports their understanding of the school's current provision and arrangements, in addition to strengths and priorities for improvement. The governing body ensures that the school has comprehensive arrangements to promote healthy eating and drinking.

Leaders have an appropriate timetable for evaluating provision and pupils' outcomes. They have undertaken a few activities this term, including analysing and discussing the findings from national and other tests, in addition to scrutinising books. Although leaders know a few strengths and areas for improvement as a result of these activities, they do not focus sufficiently on evaluating the quality of provision and teaching in terms of its effect on pupils' achievement. As a result, they do not always have an understanding of what works well and what needs to be refined to improve provision and pupils' outcomes. The school development plan identifies three priorities that are beginning to have a positive effect on provision and pupils' standards and well-being, for example by improving pupils' oracy skills and supporting pupils with ALN.

Leaders have created a positive culture and ethos to promote and support the professional learning of all staff. They provide them with beneficial opportunities to take part in a good range of professional learning, which responds robustly to their

individual needs and the school's priorities. For example, teachers and learning assistants have taken part in appropriate training to develop pupils' oracy skills, which is a priority in the school development plan. Leaders have also worked successfully with other providers and partners to improve staff's understanding of national and local priorities, such as working with specialists from the nearby English-medium school to support pupils with ALN. These activities are a good response to improving staff's skills and understanding in order to support pupils.

Leaders ensure an appropriate level of staffing and learning resources to deliver the curriculum and they use these resources effectively. The headteacher and governing body manage the school's funding carefully and review expenditure in detail to ensure its best possible use. They link spending appropriate to the priorities in the development plan and make suitable use of funding and grants to enrich provision for the school's 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/members of the management committee 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, middle leaders, and individual teachers to evaluate the impact of the school's work
- meet pupils to discuss their work 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 lessons, 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
- 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 (<http://www.estyn.gov.wales>)

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

Every possible care has been taken to ensure that the information in this document is accurate at the time of going to press. Any enquiries or comments regarding this document/publication should be addressed to:

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This document has been translated by Trosol (Welsh to English).