



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

A report on

Western Learning Federation Ty Gwyn Special School

**Vincent Road
Ely
CF5 5AQ**

Date of inspection: November 2022

by

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

This report is also available in Welsh.

About Western Learning Federation Ty Gwyn Special School

Name of provider	Western Learning Federation Ty Gwyn Special School
Local authority	Cardiff Council
Language of the provider	English
Type of school	Special
Religious character	*
Number of pupils on roll	203
Pupils of statutory school age	163
Number in nursery classes	2
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 maintained special schools is 44.7%)	45.8%
Percentage of pupils identified as having additional learning needs (a) (The national percentage of pupils identified as having an additional learning need in maintained special schools is 100%)	100.0%
Percentage of pupils who speak Welsh at home	0%
Percentage of pupils with English as an additional language	32%
Date of headteacher appointment	09/01/2019
Date of previous Estyn inspection (if applicable)	05/01/2012
Start date of inspection	21/11/2022
<p>Tŷ Gwyn School provides day education for pupils from 3 to 19 years old. Many pupils are of statutory school age, and a very few are in post compulsory education. The additional learning needs of pupils are varied, and all have a statement of special educational needs. Around 36% of pupils are autistic and a further 35% have physical and medical difficulties. The remaining pupils have a variety of learning difficulties including profound and multiple learning difficulties,</p>	

severe learning difficulties, moderate and general learning difficulties. In addition, a very few pupils have sensory impairments.

There are 29 classes at the schools, and 32 full time equivalent teachers and 105 teaching assistants.

The school, on behalf of the local authority, provides an outreach service to early years providers. This was not included as part of the inspection.

The school has been working with a local university to provide placements for PGCE students.

The school was last inspected in 2012 and the head of school was appointed in September 2022.

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

Further information is available from the Welsh Government My Local School website: mylocalschool.gov.wales

- a. The term 'additional learning needs' is being used to describe those pupils on the SEN/ALN register of the school.

Overview

Tŷ Gwyn School is one of three special schools that form the Western Learning Federation. The federation was established in January 2018. The aim of the federation is to achieve economies of scale, develop close collaborative working across the schools for the benefit of both pupils and staff, and develop and improve leadership capacity, whilst maintaining the individual identity of each of the three schools.

All three schools are served by one governing body and led by an executive headteacher, who was appointed in 2019.

Tŷ Gwyn School is a happy and caring community. Staff from across the teaching and therapeutic teams work together exceptionally well to provide high levels of support for pupils and families, which enables most pupils to make strong progress during their time at the school.

Pupils enjoy coming to Tŷ Gwyn as a result of the calm and nurturing environment at the school. They feel safe in school and build strong relationships with staff, which helps them to develop their social and independence skills well over time. They engage positively in lessons, learn to work alongside each other and move happily between different activities around the school. In relation to their needs and abilities, they make strong progress in developing their independence and express their views and opinions effectively.

Teachers and support staff have a strong understanding of pupils' complex additional learning needs and work together effectively. They track and monitor pupils' progress robustly and provide parents and carers with detailed information about their child's achievements. In many lessons, they plan purposeful and engaging lessons to support pupils to participate fully in their learning. In a few lessons, the planning of activities is not sufficiently engaging and staff do not use pupils' preferred communication strategies well enough to support pupils' consistent participation in learning.

The school provides valuable support for parents and carers, for example through the school's family centre. It plans effectively to support parents and carers where English is an additional language through ensuring that their language needs are met. This worthwhile support for parents and carers is highly valued by them.

Leaders are highly visible around the school and closely involved in all aspects of the school's work. They know the school's strengths and areas very well. Self-evaluation activities are robust and take suitable account of feedback from pupils, parents and carers in identifying priorities for development.

The school places a high priority on ensuring that it meets national priorities. There are strong arrangements in place to promote the professional learning of teaching staff that align well with the school's priorities.

Recommendations

- R1 Ensure greater consistency in the quality of teaching across the school
- R2 Strengthen the use of communication approaches to ensure that these meet pupils' preferred means of communication consistently
- R3 Evaluate the impact of the Western Learning Federation on Tŷ Gwyn School

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 two case studies on its work in relation to the school's support for families, including those who have English as an additional language, and its work within the curriculum to support pupils with complex needs to attend appointments for their personal care, for dissemination on Estyn's website.

Main evaluation

Learning

Most pupils across the school make strong progress against their individual targets and starting points in relation to their individual needs and abilities. They develop a worthwhile range of valuable skills that help them to make progress during their time in school and in their future lives. This strong progress that pupils make over time is a highly effective feature of the school.

Most pupils develop their communication skills successfully, enabling them to access the curriculum, engage with each other, make choices and express themselves effectively. In class, they listen well to teaching staff and respond positively, using their preferred method of communication. Younger pupils express their happiness on arriving in school through speech, sounds or signs according to their ability. They respond well to the use of signs and symbols by teaching staff when using the soft-play room, for example, or they use signs and symbols themselves to request their preferred colour pencils during colouring activities. A few pupils use communication devices such as tablets, switches and eye-directed communication technology to support their learning across the curriculum, to make choices when choosing songs, and to express their needs. Older pupils in the autism support department respond well to the careful and sustained use of signs and symbols to re-direct and focus them during circle time sessions. This helps them to become more settled and to engage in their lesson more effectively.

Most pupils make particularly strong progress in developing their physical skills. They enjoy taking part in a wide range of physical activities at the school including hydrotherapy, rebound therapy and circuits in the gym. They improve their balancing and co-ordination skills, jumping from gym benches and throwing hoops. Many pupils develop their stamina and mobility, using their walking frames to make their way independently around the school or to take part in a whole-school walking challenge. Many improve their fine motor skills in a wide range of different contexts. For example, they manipulate kitchen utensils in the food technology kitchen, carefully adding ingredients to a mixing bowl, peeling onions and grating cheese.

Many pupils apply their creative skills successfully across the curriculum, for example, by decorating the food they make in cooking lessons, or when designing and making their own crowns, coins and silhouettes of the Queen to celebrate the Jubilee. They enjoy listening to and joining in with class songs at the beginning of the day and celebrate their achievements with colourful displays of their work across the school.

Many pupils improve their reading and writing skills appropriately in relation to their needs and abilities. For example, they correctly identify the day of the week from the board or choose books to read aloud to others in the class. They practise mark making, and letter formation with hand over hand support from staff. Many make effective progress in developing their numeracy skills, for example by sorting and matching objects and colours, counting simple sequences in English and Welsh or using their addition and subtraction skills to count the number of footballs during a lesson on the World Cup. Older pupils identify coins correctly and practise using these when shopping or in the pupil-run on-site coffee shop.

Many pupils improve their digital skills in ways relevant to their needs and abilities. For example, they use a range of communication devices to support their own preferred means of communication, as well as to access their favourite music and cartoons during personal choice time. In lessons, they use interactive whiteboards appropriately to support and reinforce their learning or to make choices.

Older pupils improve their independent living skills in areas that support their transition to their future destinations effectively. For example, they practise work-related skills or improve their ability to take responsibility for their own personal care when at home or in the community. They achieve purposeful accreditation that recognises their growing independence in these important areas, including through the Duke of Edinburgh Award.

Over the last three years, all leavers progress successfully to carefully planned destinations that reflect their needs and abilities well, including further education and specialist colleges and day service provision.

Well-being and attitudes to learning

Pupils enjoy attending Tŷ Gwyn School. They enter the school happily in the company of peers and staff. They feel safe in school and benefit from the strong safeguarding culture that exists, for example by showing an awareness of how to stay safe online. Most pupils respond positively to visitors to their classes and greet them warmly.

Many pupils develop their social skills well during their time at the school. In class, they learn to work alongside each other and transition happily between different activities around the school. They learn to wait patiently, take turns appropriately and with support from verbal prompting or from their visual schedules, wait for their turn to participate in sensory stories. They engage confidently with their staff and with visitors to the school. For example, many pupils across the school are confident to initiate conversations with visitors, showing them their work and asking questions. A few listen carefully to their responses and respond successfully to them.

Many pupils have a positive attitude towards activities that encourage them to become physically healthy and take part readily. They communicate that they enjoy going for walks, using the play areas or their sessions in the pool. A few show an awareness of how to make healthy choices relating to diet. A few develop their physical skills well in the boxing club.

Many pupils respond positively to instructions, for example when learning how to wash their hands and faces in the splash pad. They respond well to rules and rewards in the classroom environment. They understand when they've completed a task to a standard that deserves a reward, such as a star. They know how many stars are needed to earn a reward such as time on the computer, or an opportunity to play with bubbles. Many develop their resilience and persevere with tasks well. For example, pupils use different communication tools to ask adults for support to complete tasks. A few respond well to feedback from the teacher, persevering with a task in order to complete it correctly, for example identifying simple 2-dimensional shapes or filling in a missing word from a familiar story.

Many pupils develop their independence well. They move around the classroom freely, making choices about which activity to complete next or where they would like to spend some time. A very few pupils have been allocated fobs that allow them to move around the school building when helping staff with tasks. Many pupils increasingly develop skills and attitudes that help them cope with life outside of the school. For example, in the classroom, they wait for permission, use toilet facilities appropriately and in a timely manner, and listen carefully to adult instruction. A few older pupils help to run a weekly coffee and cake shop at the school.

Pupils further develop their independence and resilience through the Duke of Edinburgh's Award scheme. They volunteer in the local area, develop their physical skills in the school gym and enhance their living skills in the breakfast club and by attending a two-day expedition to Margam Park.

Many pupils express their views and opinions effectively to influence their own learning and the wider community. They contribute to important aspects of their individualised support plans. Pupils feel included and that their voice is valued by being involved in the school council. Members vote on matters affecting the whole school and communicate their ideas and decisions to their peers effectively. For example, members wrote to the local council to complain about the state of the pavements for wheelchair users in the local area. This resulted in the local council adapting the pavements appropriately.

Teaching and learning experiences

Staff across the school develop strong working relationships with pupils, which promote a positive, supportive and calm environment for learning. Overall, staff manage pupils' behaviour skilfully, enabling those who require a high level of support to manage their behaviour and re-engage with their learning in a meaningful manner. Class routines are well established and this provides valuable stability, which supports pupils well as they start and finish the day as well as during transitions between lessons.

Teaching staff have a strong understanding of pupils' complex additional learning needs, including their healthcare and therapeutic needs. As a result, they have realistic expectations of pupils' progress in their learning. A dedicated team of teaching assistants diligently support the teachers to provide seamless provision during the day. This helps pupils to participate fully in their learning and achieve their individual targets over time. In most lessons, staff teams make effective use of pupils' individual targets to plan purposeful learning opportunities. In these lessons, they personalise learning effectively and adapt learning tasks and resources well to meet individual pupils' needs throughout the day. Staff utilise the designated outdoor learning spaces and internal sensory areas skilfully to promote pupils' engagement and wellbeing.

Overall, activities move at a suitable pace and are generally stimulating and engaging. In many lessons, staff encourage pupils' active participation throughout the lesson. Verbal feedback is immediate, positive and supportive of pupils' efforts. This motivates pupils to persevere with their learning tasks and make effective progress over time. In a few lessons, the sequence and planning of activities are not sufficiently engaging, which means that there are missed opportunities for learning.

The use of a total communication approach is effective in many lessons and staff use class schedules, now and next boards and signs and symbols confidently to communicate with pupils and to encourage them to participate fully in their own learning. However, in a few cases, staff do not use pupils' preferred communication strategies consistently to support pupils' engagement and participation in their learning.

Teachers assess and track individual pupil progress from their entry baselines in areas of learning and skills robustly using the school's internal online system. They use this data and information well to inform group settings, class planning and when setting person centred outcomes.

There are robust arrangements in place to implement the curriculum based on the school's definition of the 'four purposes' that meet the principles of the Curriculum for Wales in the context of Tŷ Gwyn School. Teachers plan purposefully to develop pupils' literacy, numeracy and digital skills across the curriculum. For example, when studying the FIFA World Cup, teachers plan adeptly to encompass the skills that are important for their pupils such as matching, counting, using switches to change programmes and making choices between preferred tasks. This promotes pupils' independence and supports their skills' development in a relevant and timely context. Curriculum 'focus days' are used well to enhance the breadth of the curriculum offer and enrich pupils' real-life experiences. For example, the recent health and well-being focus day promoted pupils' personal safety in the community through the use social stories, art and songs.

The school actively promotes the Welsh language and Cynefin and teachers plan engaging localised community visits. For example, pupils visit their local shopping areas to learn about their local culture and practise their literacy and numeracy skills in real life contexts.

The school's provision for the health and well-being area of learning and experience is strong. Teachers take a personalised approach to addressing sensitive subjects such as growing up, visiting the community and relationships. For example, a staff team has worked closely with health professionals and psychologists to plan a drama-based project that supports pupils with complex needs to attend appointments such as hairdressers, doctors and nurses.

Parents and carers are kept well informed about their child's progress and achievements through the school's social media app, phone calls and individual development plan meetings. The end of year reports and accompanying DVD illustrating their child's progress over the year provide parents and carers with detailed information about their child's achievements as well as identifying the next steps in their learning journey.

Care, support and guidance

Tŷ Gwyn School is a happy, caring and safe community that supports its pupils and their families exceptionally well. The school provides a calm and welcoming learning environment for its pupils, which contributes significantly to pupils' personal development.

The school's support for parents and carers is extremely valuable, including for parents where English is an additional language. The school communicates with parents and carers effectively. In addition, the school's family centre offers valuable and sympathetic support to families. It offers a range of helpful activities such as coffee mornings and daytime workshops for families in areas including language lessons, sewing and basic information technology classes as well as sleep clinics and paediatric first aid. Further, the school arranges for translators to attend annual review meetings and to support home to school communication. As a result, parents and carers support their children's physical and additional learning needs well. This worthwhile support is highly valued by parents.

The close collaboration between teaching staff and health and therapy staff based at the school provides an effective approach to meeting the needs of all pupils. On-site therapists and the assistive technology team support teaching staff to provide valuable strategies and communication resources, which have a positive impact on pupils' communication and physical skills.

Pupils' person-centred profiles and individual development plans are purposeful and include worthwhile targets and approaches to promote pupils' learning and well-being. The plans are shared well with staff and most teachers use this information effectively in their teaching and planning. The school has robust arrangements to monitor pupils' progress against their individual targets. The school uses this information very well to evaluate pupils' progress, plan next steps in learning and intervene with appropriate strategies and additional support where necessary.

The school works effectively to support pupils' transition, and staff plan valuable opportunities for pupils to make informed decisions about their future. This includes opportunities within the curriculum as well as visits to the school from different further education colleges.

The school is successful in encouraging pupils to become active citizens and to participate in the life of the school. For example, pupils vote for their school council members and make key decisions for life at the school such as choosing resources for classes and the outdoor learning areas.

The school has developed worthwhile practice in promoting pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development in relation to their needs and abilities. Weekly assemblies at the school provide valuable opportunities for pupils to develop as well-rounded citizens. Assemblies focus on important aspects such as Remembrance Day and Pride week.

Pupils benefit from a range of interesting educational visits, which often relate closely to pupils' individual interests and develop their independence skills well. This includes visits to local parks and shopping centres as well as places of interest such as Margam Country Park.

There is a strong culture of safeguarding at the school. Leaders have established an ethos where pupils feel safe and secure. Staff at all levels are alert to the signs of abuse and neglect. They follow appropriate procedures to ensure that the children at the school receive effective support and protection. All staff undertake regular

beneficial training to keep pupils and themselves safe. They understand the school's arrangements for safeguarding and respond to safeguarding concerns promptly.

Leadership and management

The leadership team at Tŷ Gwyn School provide strong role models for the staff and pupils and are highly visible and closely involved in all aspects of the day-to-day work of the school. They have collaborated closely with the school's stakeholders to create a powerful shared vision and to ensure that their work is guided by a set of values and principles that underpin all aspects of school improvement.

As a result of a well-established cycle of purposeful self-evaluation, leaders have a robust understanding of the school's strengths and areas for development. This cycle is underpinned by regular monitoring and reviewing of activities throughout the year. This work provides rich and varied sources of evidence, such as an evaluation of the impact of sensory story training on the quality of teaching and learning. In addition, they value and evaluate effectively feedback from learners and stakeholders such as parents in considering the quality of provision and identifying future priorities.

The school makes constructive use of evaluative reports from external organisations as part of its commitment to a number of accreditation schemes. This information is used strategically to validate the school's own judgements and self-evaluation and to support the setting of school priorities and targets.

School leaders produce thoughtful and reflective development plans, which identify a clear rationale for their priorities, along with a detailed breakdown of the intended monitoring arrangements, activities, key milestones, resourcing and evaluation of impact. School development plans generally link closely with the federation's priorities. Staff contribute positively and are well informed in relation to school priorities and recognise their role and contribution to school improvement planning.

The school has robust performance management systems supported by clear policies and guidance documents, which are ratified and reviewed regularly by the governing body. As a consequence, all school staff are clear about their responsibilities, including how they contribute to ensuring a positive safeguarding culture.

The school places a high priority on ensuring it meets national priorities. For example, it has developed and published a thoughtful vision and rationale for its implementation of the Curriculum for Wales, and staff have applied much of their learning from their involvement in local and national professional learning networks such as the pioneer school and innovation school programmes. In addition, they have created a strong culture of person-centred review to support the implementation of the ALN reforms.

The school provides a welcoming and supportive environment for parents and carers. Leaders are pro-active in listening to parents' and carers' needs and as a result the school builds very strong relationships and supports families to play an active role in their child's learning. The school provides valuable training, support and advice to parents to support them following the pandemic.

The school has developed an innovative partnership with a local work-based learning provider that supports newly appointed support staff to undertake nationally recognised qualifications at levels 2 and 3 in supporting children in a school setting. This partnership has helped the school to address the growing challenge faced by schools nationally of recruiting suitably qualified and experienced support staff.

Over the past three years the Western Learning Federation has developed a generally clear vision supported by highly ambitious strategic aims. However, the federation does not always articulate stated actions with precision. At times they are jargonistic and unclear.

The federation and the executive headteacher are supported very well by a chair of governors and governing body who are highly invested in the vision for the federation and its schools. They are passionate and generally use their skills well in supporting and challenging the executive leadership team. However, not all governors are fully aware of the aims and priorities of the federation. In addition, a few are not sufficiently aware of spending decisions.

The governing body's duties extend across the three schools. Members of the governing body are advised suitably on the work of the three schools by the executive headteacher and the heads of school. Heads of school, where appropriate, present to governors on the work of their school and sit on the governing body in an observer capacity. In part due to the increase in responsibility of the governing body and restrictions following the pandemic, the extent to which governors visit each school informally, meet pupils and staff is infrequent and this limits their understanding of each of the three schools.

The executive headteacher has established a series of valuable systems and structures to ensure that the governing body make informed decisions. Systems and oversight of finances, for example, across the federation, are strong. However, core budget deficits are predicted for each of the schools. The federation has recently increased its leadership capacity and, as a result, the contribution that each school makes to funding the federation has increased, which further limits the resources available to the three schools. The long-term viability of the federation is unclear.

The professional learning offer for staff is enhanced by strong partnerships with external providers. In addition, the development of in-house trainers and collaboration across the federation in areas such as positive approaches to behaviour support training. This is having a positive impact on the work of schools. The professional learning offer for leaders has also been strengthened.

The federation has undertaken a thorough analysis of the funding it receives and has been successful in gaining an uplift in the core budgets for each of the schools. As a result of this activity, other special schools in the authority have benefited also.

The federation and the schools have strengthened links with a range of partners that provide highly valuable and essential services to both pupils and staff. For example, the federation has well-developed plans to commission services from the local health authority to extend provision, where appropriate, across the three schools.

Evidence base of the report

Before an inspection, inspectors:

- analyse the outcomes from the parent/carer and pupil questionnaires and consider the views of teachers and the governing body through their questionnaire responses

During an inspection, inspectors normally:

- hold a meeting with parents/carers to hear their views on the school and its effectiveness
- meet the headteacher, governors, senior and middle leaders (where appropriate) and individual teachers to evaluate the impact of the school's work
- meet pupils to discuss their work, to listen to them read and to gain their views about various aspects of their school
- meet groups of pupils in leadership roles, such as representatives from the school council and eco-committee
- visit a broad sample of classes, including learning support groups and undertake a variety of learning walks to observe pupils learning and to see staff teaching in a range of settings, including classrooms, support groups and in outdoor areas
- where appropriate, visit the specialist resource base within the school to see pupils' learning
- observe and speak to pupils at lunch and break times and at a sample of after-school clubs, where appropriate
- attend assemblies and daily acts of collective worship
- look closely at the school's self-evaluation processes
- consider the school's improvement plan and look at evidence to show how well the school has taken forward planned improvements
- scrutinise a range of school documents, including information on pupil assessment and progress, records of meetings of staff and the governing body, information on pupils' well-being, including the safeguarding of pupils, and records of staff training and professional development

After the on-site inspection and before the publication of the report, Estyn:

- review the findings of the inspection alongside the supporting evidence from the inspection team in order to validate, moderate and ensure the quality of the inspection

Copies of the report

Copies of this report are available from the school and from the Estyn website (www.estyn.gov.wales)

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

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

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