



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

A report on

Nercwys CIW Voluntary Aided Primary School

**Village Road
Nercwys
Mold
Flintshire
CH7 4EW**

Date of inspection: March 2023

by

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

About Nercwys CIW Voluntary Aided Primary School

Name of provider	Nercwys CIW Voluntary Aided Primary School
Local authority	Flintshire County Council
Language of the provider	English
Type of school	Primary
Religious character	
Number of pupils on roll	41
Pupils of statutory school age	30
Number in nursery classes	5
Percentage of pupils eligible for free school meals over a three-year average (The national percentage of pupils eligible for free school meals over a three-year average in Primary is 23.0%)	17.3%
Percentage of pupils identified as having additional learning needs (a) (The national percentage of pupils identified as having an additional learning need in Primary is 16.1%)	*
Percentage of pupils who speak Welsh at home	0.0%
Percentage of pupils with English as an additional language	0.0%
Date of headteacher appointment	
Date of previous Estyn inspection (if applicable)	
Start date of inspection	20/03/2023

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

Nercwys Primary is a happy school where all pupils treat each other, staff and visitors with politeness and respect. Pupil behaviour is good, and most are keen to undertake tasks enthusiastically. Staff have a good understanding of pupils' needs and through joint planning, they prepare interesting activities that engage pupils' interests well. However, at times, provision does not always allow pupils to develop and extend their independent writing skills and a few pupils are less enthusiastic about their learning. Most younger pupils make good progress in their language, number and digital skills. They talk confidently to adults about their work and enjoy taking part in a variety of interesting learning experiences. As they move through the school, many older pupils become very articulate and read well for enjoyment and research.

The headteacher demonstrates, effective, thoughtful leadership and works well with other school leaders and staff, towards fulfilling their vision to provide a caring, happy and secure environment for pupils. This culture enables many pupils to develop their confidence and self-assurance effectively. They are supported successfully by keen teachers and skilful support staff, who encourage pupils to develop a wide range of skills well.

Nercwys Primary is part of the Nantlwyys Federation of Schools along with Nannerch Primary school. The schools share the same governing body and the same headteacher, who splits her time wisely between both sites. The governing body exercises its duties carefully, for example by conducting site visits, and they have a good understanding of the school's strengths and areas for development. As a federation, leaders ensure that there are many opportunities for all staff to work together. For example, by collaborating effectively to implement a curriculum that is authentic and reflects the needs of both communities. Overall, leaders keep the work of the school under review appropriately. They assess the standards in lessons and in the pupils' learning in books. Looking ahead, leaders acknowledge that by fine tuning this work they can concentrate more on evaluating the difference that teaching makes to pupils' progress and what aspects to improve next.

Recommendations

- R1 Strengthen self-evaluation processes to focus more specifically on the impact of teaching on learning
- R2 Address the inconsistencies in teaching highlighted during the inspection
- R3 Provide more opportunities for pupils to develop their extended writing skills

What happens next

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

Main evaluation

Learning

During their time at school, most pupils, including those with additional learning needs (ALN) and those eligible for free school meals, make good progress from their individual starting points.

Younger pupils talk confidently about their work and listen well to other pupils and their teachers. Most respond well to their peers, ask appropriate questions, and express their opinions showing respect for others. As pupils move through the school, they continue to develop their speaking and listening skills suitably. Many pupils communicate thoughtfully with their friends and share their ideas appropriately. Many older pupils are articulate and have a wide vocabulary.

Many pupils' reading skills are developing well. The youngest pupils use a range of phonic strategies to read familiar and unfamiliar words. In Years 1 and 2, many pupils read with suitable accuracy, fluency, enjoyment and expression. Many older pupils read accurately in various contexts. They vary their tone of voice and use punctuation correctly to show their understanding. Many of the older pupils are competent readers, however, they do not always show great enthusiasm towards their reading.

Most younger pupils make good progress in developing their writing skills. They begin to record their ideas through mark making, forming legible letters, and writing simple words. They write effectively in a range of different forms, choosing vocabulary carefully and using capital letters and full stops accurately. Many older pupils develop their writing skills suitably across a few different genres. As their skills develop, many pupils use adjectives, different sentence structures and appropriate punctuation to enhance their work. However, there are fewer opportunities for them to develop their extended writing skills frequently and, as a result, pupils do not develop their skills in writing at length sufficiently.

Younger pupils begin to develop their Welsh language knowledge well. They interchange English and Welsh words, for example when exploring descriptions. As they get older, the majority of pupils respond to simple questions appropriately with clear pronunciation and good intonation. However, pupils' progress across the school is variable and most children do not use the Welsh language outside of planned Welsh activities.

Younger pupils develop their mathematical knowledge well. When learning about concepts such as heavy and light, they move from concrete to abstract and match objects to numbers. They make predictions, carry out mini-investigations and record their results. Many use comparative vocabulary to describe their findings. The youngest pupils create tally charts using sticks when learning to count in 5s. Year 2 pupils create bar graphs of items such as pews and candlesticks after a visit to the local church and confidently sequence numbers to a 100. Most older pupils use a range of approaches to calculate totals and understand the different ways to measure mass, length and volume. They plot coordinates in the four quadrants, reflecting and translating shapes. Overall, by the end of their time in school, older pupils make good progress in Mathematics.

Most pupils use and apply their numeracy skills effectively and at the same level in their work across the curriculum. For example, when comparing and ordering the distance of planets from the sun or planning recipes for a Christmas fayre. Older pupils use their mathematical knowledge regularly in other learning, such as when measuring ingredients for a recipe and when carrying out science investigations.

Most younger pupils use tablet computers confidently, for example, they record their work and each other talking and singing. By Year 1, most pupils use a range of apps confidently.. Many create pictures using laptops and tablet computers and add words or sentences to annotate their work. Most take photos of activities they have done and upload them appropriately. Many Year 2 pupils log on to computers and use software diligently to create a bar chart of favourite fruits and vegetable snacks. By Year 6, most pupils use a good range of apps to support and present their wider work. For example, to create presentations relating to their project, 'Y Cynefin'. However, overall, pupils do not have a sufficient understanding of important areas, such as spreadsheets and databases.

Many pupils are developing their thinking and creative skills suitably. Younger pupils talk readily about their learning experiences and begin to develop an understanding of purpose. For example, when making superhero peg dolls they understand why it is important to be sustainable and explain how they recycle and reuse at home and in school. Most older pupils use their prior experiences to plan and create virtual presentations on a sustainable life on Earth.

Well-being and attitudes to learning

Most pupils enjoy school. There are positive relationships between pupils and staff, and this means they are confident to speak with adults regarding any worries they may have. Pupils have a good understanding of how to keep themselves safe online. They know the importance of protecting their passwords and personal information, and the importance of keeping this information secure.

Behaviour throughout the school is good. Most pupils enjoy lessons and take part enthusiastically in interesting activities. There are times however when a few older pupils are less motivated towards their learning. Pupil committees such as the school council and 'Cryw Cymraeg' are beginning to make a few contributions to school improvement. For example, pupils have considered healthy eating and the importance of minimising food waste and are currently promoting healthy and manageable portion sizes at snack time. The 'Cafe Cymraeg' successfully encourages healthy eating choices whilst also developing everyday Welsh for younger children. Pupils' understanding of healthy eating and sustainability is enhanced further through the pupils' work outside. For instance, pupils have developed the raised beds and allotment area and older pupils have grown ingredients to make and taste their own Dewi Sant Soup.

Pupils have an increasing understanding of the rights of children, for example when discussing the human rights symbol of 'Little Amal' a Syrian refugee they demonstrate empathy and understanding of his plight. On occasion, pupils develop these discussions effectively through expressive arts activities. Nearly all pupils demonstrate respect for one another and support each other well when taking part in learning experiences. Most are enthusiastic and polite to staff and their peers. Most

pupils across the school listen carefully to their teachers and concentrate well on their learning.

Older pupils understand the importance of looking after their own well-being, they practise mindfulness and talk confidently about meditation techniques that they use in school to support their learning. Most pupils are regularly involved when planning learning experiences alongside the teacher. They confidently share their interests on a given topic. For example, younger pupils join in enthusiastically in discussions to share what they know about Wales, and what they would like to know. When learning about sustainability a group of older pupils chose to look at sustainable transport, whilst other groups investigate food waste on both a global and local scale and undertake litter picking at a local beach.

Across both schools, both communities have spent valuable time revisiting the federation's values and have placed emphasis on including resilience and compassion to support the delivery of the Four Purposes of the Curriculum for Wales. Whilst discussing the plight of the victims of war, a few older pupils demonstrated self-directed learning away from school, for instance by learning basic Ukrainian to communicate with new pupils who recently arrived at the school. Younger pupils acknowledge their peers positively through 'Person Pwysig', celebrating their strengths and positive attributes. Many pupils use the school's 'steps to success' to support their concentration when learning, and a greater emphasis on problem solving activities is beginning to raise levels of pupils' resilience.

Nearly all pupils are physically active throughout the school day, including when learning outdoors. This is particularly true for foundation learning where pupils play team games and construct and measure using a variety of natural resources and equipment. Older pupils are beginning to have more choice over how and what they learn, for example, when choosing to present their work through green screen or stop motion for a project on space.

Many pupils reflect on and improve their work suitably. Younger pupils benefit from and respond to the support they receive during lessons and when learning outdoors and make important next steps. As pupils progress, feedback provides older pupils with useful steps to improve. When given the time, many pupils confidently assess their work own work and that of their peers suitably.

Teaching and learning experiences

Across the school, staff develop positive working relationships with pupils. Staff working with the youngest pupils, for example, often apply an effective range of innovative approaches to support pupils' learning. They review and refine the impact of their teaching to ensure pupils make good progress.

Nearly all teachers have a secure knowledge of Curriculum for Wales. They plan with clear learning intentions and provide explanations which help pupils understand what they are supposed to do. They often build well on prior learning and use questioning effectively to develop pupils' thinking. Teachers are beginning to plan a thoughtful range of learning experiences. Younger pupils enjoy their opportunities to have fun while learning, relishing their independence and thriving outdoors. Older pupils engage well with learning experiences which support them to think about the world they live in and how it compares to the lives of others.

On occasion, teachers make the most of opportunities for pupils to learn in more depth about aspects of the curriculum. As a result, younger pupils in particular, talk readily about their learning experiences and begin to develop an understanding of purpose. For example, when making superhero peg dolls they relate the dolls to the story of 'Michael Recycle'. They understand why it is important to be sustainable and explain how they recycle and reuse at home and in school. Older pupils enjoy opportunities to delve deeply into their work on planets and the wider issues of the impact of climate change. When teachers plan learning experiences which capture pupils' interest and imagination, pupils make good progress and recall their learning well. However, in a few instances, when teachers do not adapt their teaching and assessment effectively, pupils are less motivated to learn and do not retain their learning well enough or understand the purpose of their learning.

Teachers are beginning to develop their understanding of progression across the curriculum. They build learning well in aspects such as oracy, for example, to support pupils to develop as confident speakers. As a result, most pupils are articulate and confident when talking about and taking part in learning experiences. Across the school, most teachers and teaching assistants provide feedback during lessons to enable pupils to improve their work. Younger pupils benefit from the continuous support they receive during their learning to make small but important next steps. Older pupils have suitable opportunities to reflect on their work and to identify what they need to do to progress with their learning.

Teachers provide opportunities for pupils to develop their knowledge of mathematical concepts and digital skills systematically. However, teachers do not provide sufficient opportunities for pupils to apply their skills, particularly their writing skills, often enough across the curriculum. Although younger pupils have plentiful opportunities to be creative through art and music, in general, the school's plan to develop creativity are at an early stage of development.

The school is well-resourced, and many areas of the school are bright and inviting. The outdoor garden area is a firm favourite with younger children who spend much of their time outside. They explore the space independently, finding places to relax and places to play. Staff utilise this area well, making the most of the nature around them to promote learning outdoors. A few areas of the school, however, are less well developed and less engaging and exciting places for the pupils to learn.

The school's planning to develop pupils' awareness of the history and culture of Wales is a strength. For example, pupils research the history of their local area, cook traditional Welsh recipes and celebrate their own work during the St David's day celebrations. Teachers plan and deliver regular Welsh lessons for pupils. However, they do not ensure enough opportunities for pupils to practise their Welsh language skills regularly throughout the school day. As a result, many pupils have a limited ability to use even basic Welsh to ask and answer even simple questions.

The school fosters a strong sense of belonging and its focus on values supports pupils to form and maintain friendships and think about ways they can make someone else's life better. Younger pupils begin to understand the ways in which families are different and older pupils share the story of previously unrecognised African American women who contributed to America's space race. However, the school's plans for developing pupils' understanding of relationships and diversity are at an early stage.

There are suitable opportunities for pupils to develop their understanding of the impact of physical exercise and healthy eating on their bodies. Pupils are developing their understanding of the importance of well-being, setting themselves healthy goals for getting enough sleep and avoiding screens for prolonged periods. Throughout the school, pupils have a good knowledge of anti-bullying and how to stay safe online.

Care, support and guidance

All staff have well developed working relationships with pupils and parents. Many parents feel the school enables their children to be happy and safe and believe the school helps their children settle well when they first start school. For example, before joining the school nursery, pupils have a thoughtful induction programme which allows staff to gain valuable information about all new pupils. The level of care, support and guidance the school provides for all pupils is good. Trained staff provide additional support to individual pupils and groups who are struggling with their emotional development and well-being and the school provides parents with good, quality support and information.

Provision for pupils with ALN is co-ordinated well and is a strength of the school. The ALN co-ordinator has a good understanding of national reforms and has ensured a smooth and well-informed change to new systems. The school tracks the progress of pupils requiring extra literacy support well and provides purposeful support to meet their needs. ALN pupils have a useful one-page profile that outlines their interests, how they like to be supported to learn, and their targets for improvement. This ensures staff have clear direction to enable pupils with ALN to make the best possible progress. Teachers and support staff modify their approaches to engage learners effectively. For example, they provide different levels of challenge for pupils, use visual timetables and cue cards. These methods promote inclusion for pupils with additional needs.

The school provides a good range of opportunities for pupils to play different sports. These include involvement in the 'NFL' flag programme where, besides learning how to play non-contact American football, pupils also participate in lessons on healthy diets and positive mental well-being. Access to extensive outdoor areas, including the playing field, eco areas and forest school, along with activities in lessons and in after-school clubs, enables all pupils to be physically active. In addition, pupils enjoy opportunities to play sports such as hockey and football alongside players from Wrexham FC. Staff also provide pupils with opportunities to try out new sports such as Boccia.

The school actively provides opportunities for children to make healthy choices and develop healthy lifestyles. The school promotes healthy snacks and lunches, and snack time in younger classes is used to reinforce this message. The school promotes this by requiring that pupils bring healthy snacks for breaktimes and providing information about healthy lunchboxes.

The school provides all pupils with opportunities to take responsibility and contribute to the life and work of the school. Members of the pupil groups monitor and encourage recycling, reducing waste and reducing energy and water consumption. Older pupils have worked with a local biodiversity company to examine the use of recycled materials to be turned into growing materials for planting. Pupils have

produced high quality animations, videos and presentations promoting the importance of recycling.

Following the covid pandemic, the school is re-introducing educational visits. These develop pupils' knowledge and skills and enhance their learning opportunities. For example, visits from the local community police officer enables all pupils to develop an important awareness of road safety, 'stranger danger' and substance misuse. Residential visits to a nearby outdoor pursuits centre support the development of pupils' confidence and independence.

The school assists pupils to understand issues such as equality, diversity and inclusion appropriately. As part of a recent project on 'Space Race', pupils researched inequality during the space race, particularly referencing how countries could afford to send people to the moon, whilst many people were living in poverty. Pupils have recently debated the removal of rights for minority groups including LGBTQ+ during the recent World Cup. Through a range of visits, topics and events, the school helps pupils develop a clear understanding of the wider world, alongside their own heritage and Welsh culture.

A range of activities and opportunities, promotes pupils' moral development. For example, while studying world religions, pupils effectively compare census data to examine the decline of people worshipping in the different faiths. The school has very good links with the Church, including visits to study the history of the building.

The school creates and maintains a safe environment for all pupils, including effective site security. Leaders have successfully embedded a strong culture of safeguarding. There is an established system to report safeguarding concerns regarding pupils and the school makes timely referrals to outside agencies when appropriate. The school has thorough safer recruitment procedures and all staff complete regular safeguarding update training. Effective procedures are in place to monitor pupils' attendance. The school works well with education welfare agencies to promote good attendance. As a result, pupil attendance is improving.

Leadership and management

The federation's headteacher, along with school leaders and the whole community, have effectively shaped and implemented a clear vision for the education and well-being of all pupils. Across both schools, and through thoughtful and compassionate leadership the headteacher has gained the trust of all staff and established a caring culture, where pupils feel safe and secure and enjoy being at school. All staff have a good understanding of the needs of individual pupils and their local communities. Across the federation there is a strong team culture and a shared commitment to doing the best for all pupils. As a result, most pupils make good progress from their individual starting points.

The headteacher divides her time wisely between Nercwys and Nannerch. School leaders and staff provide strong support to the headteacher and assume responsibility for the day-to-day management of the schools in her absence. The headteacher successfully nurtures and builds leadership capacity in both schools. Those with responsibilities carry out their roles competently and contribute to strengthening the vision and aims of the federation well. They are good role models, demonstrate professional values effectively and contribute to developing school priorities successfully across the federation.

The headteacher works diligently to develop the strong and positive culture of collaboration across the federation. For example, when developing the school's curriculum to align with the Curriculum for Wales, all teachers worked closely to research and share their knowledge and expertise, enabling teachers to plan and develop engaging learning experiences for their pupils and strive for consistency and equity across the two schools. The performance management of teachers is well co-ordinated and individual targets are linked directly to school priorities. Shared professional learning opportunities support the positive well-being of both teachers and support staff. This overall approach to strategic leadership promotes teamwork effectively and supports the drive for consistency in practice across both schools.

Leaders undertake a range of useful self-evaluation activities including learning walks and looking at pupils' work and celebrating learning events. They involve all staff and, at times, governors. Information gathered from this work feeds into the school's priorities for development. However, leaders and staff do not always evaluate the effectiveness of the school's teaching and provision sharply enough to consider the difference it makes to pupils' progress. As a result, they do not always identify aspects of the school's work that need attention, for example, the inconsistencies in teaching and the limited opportunities for older pupils to write at length for a range of different purposes.

Leaders and staff develop effective close working partnerships with parents across the federation and give careful thought to how to adapt its provision to ensure better engagement. For example, by asking and responding to parents' views and organising a variety of family events, such as 'family forest school'. In addition, the headteacher's blog effectively shares the work of the schools and this is well received by parents. The school collaborates successfully with several partners, for example when sharing best practice within the region, and through supporting the local cluster of schools with the introduction and management of ALN reform. The school also works closely with local universities and regularly receives and support students who are training to become teachers.

The governing body demonstrates a strong commitment to the work of the federation. They work closely with the headteacher and staff and provide valued support. Governors understand and carry out their duties well and have an appropriate understanding of the schools' strengths and areas for development. They have a suitable understanding of national priorities, including the Curriculum for Wales and the impact of poverty on pupil progress. Governors often visit the school and contribute appropriately to keeping the school under review. For example, they talk to pupils and look closely at their work. This helps them to keep up to date with the school's progress in implementing new initiatives such as introducing ALN reform. Governors make appropriate arrangements to promote healthy eating and drinking in school and effectively help to maintain a robust safeguarding culture.

School leaders and governors oversee finances sensibly and make prudent decisions that support all pupils' learning. Grant funding is utilised effectively, for example, to provide intervention for pupils in literacy, numeracy and to support vulnerable pupils. Leaders and teachers track the progress of groups of pupils diligently and ensure that any interventions funded by grants support pupils to make effective progress.

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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