



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

**A report on**

**Ysgol Rhiwabon**

**Ruabon  
Wrexham  
LL14 6BT**

**Date of inspection: February 2023**

**by**

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

**This report is available in Welsh.**

## About Ysgol Rhiwabon

Name of provider	Ysgol Rhiwabon
Local authority	Wrexham County Borough Council
Language of the provider	English
Type of school	Secondary
Religious character	*
Number of pupils on roll	503
Pupils of statutory school age	501
Number in sixth form	0
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 Secondary is 20.2%)	19.7%
Percentage of pupils identified as having additional learning needs (a) (The national percentage of pupils identified as having an additional learning need in Secondary is 17.8%)	12.0%
Percentage of pupils who speak Welsh at home	1.4%
Percentage of pupils with English as an additional language	1.8%
Date of headteacher appointment	22/02/2016
Date of previous Estyn inspection (if applicable)	26/01/2015
Start date of inspection	27/02/2023

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](https://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 Rhiwabon is a caring and inclusive school, which strives to support its pupils to 'succeed with soul' and to develop both academically and personally. Staff are ambitious for all pupils to achieve their full potential and leave school prepared for the next steps in their lives. The school uses a range of valuable strategies to promote good attendance and has reintroduced a fortnightly lesson to ensure that all pupils have regular opportunities to learn about how to keep themselves safe and healthy. As a result, many pupils feel safe in school and participate well in learning. Most pupils behave well in lessons and around the school site. Younger pupils benefit from effective transition arrangements to help them settle well into school life. In addition, pupils with additional learning needs receive helpful support to enable them to develop their academic and life skills.

Since the school was removed from special measures in November 2017, leaders at the school have continued to work diligently to develop its provision for well-being and teaching. Alongside this, they responded sensitively to support the school community through the challenges of the pandemic. The headteacher has managed change carefully while increasing expectations for staff and pupils. There is a strong sense of collaboration amongst staff and pupils. Leaders at all levels understand the importance of participating in a range of worthwhile quality assurance activities. They use first-hand evidence well to self-evaluate their work and plan for improvement. They identify strengths and areas for improvement accurately. However, a few middle leaders do not always evaluate the quality of teaching based on its impact on pupils' learning. Staff value and benefit from a wide range of professional learning opportunities, which are beginning to have a positive impact on teaching.

The school offers a broad and balanced curriculum, including a wide range of worthwhile academic and vocational subjects to meet the needs of nearly all pupils. In lessons, a majority of pupils make good progress in their knowledge and understanding. These pupils make suitable contributions to class discussions and use subject specific terminology appropriately. Many pupils locate facts and information from texts accurately and can write suitably for a range of purposes and audiences. In a few subjects, pupils infer meaning effectively from texts and write sophisticated accounts to explain the purpose of a range of sources. A small minority of pupils do not make as much progress as they could. This is linked to shortcomings in teaching including lack of opportunities for pupils to progressively develop their numeracy and ICT skills across the curriculum. In addition, opportunities for pupils to use and develop their Welsh language skills in lessons and around the school are underdeveloped.

## **Recommendations**

- R1 Improve the quality of teaching to ensure that all pupils make strong progress in subject knowledge and understanding and skills
- R2 Strengthen the provision for the development of pupils' Welsh language, numeracy and ICT skills
- R3 Further develop self-evaluation processes so that they focus more precisely on the impact of provision on pupils' learning
- R4 Address the health and safety issues identified during the inspection

## **What happens next**

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

## Main evaluation

### Learning

In lessons and over time, a majority of pupils make good progress in developing their knowledge and understanding and recall their prior learning successfully. When given the opportunity, a majority of pupils apply their literacy and numeracy skills suitably in subjects across the curriculum. A few pupils make very rapid progress in their subject knowledge, for example when developing their understanding of the role of the Ku Klux Klan in 1920s America in history. A small minority of pupils do not make as much progress as they could. This is linked to shortcomings in teaching including lack of opportunities for pupils to progressively develop their skills across the curriculum.

Pupils with additional learning needs (ALN), including those that attend the 'Succeed' specialist resource base, make suitable progress against their individual targets. Generally, pupils who attend this provision engage well in specialist classes and when attending mainstream lessons, where appropriate. These pupils develop their life skills well through valuable additional activities such as visiting local shops.

Many pupils listen attentively to their teachers' instructions and the contributions of their peers. During classroom discussions, a majority of pupils offer appropriate answers and use subject specific terminology suitably. A few pupils express themselves effectively, using a wide range of sophisticated vocabulary to develop their ideas coherently. For example, in health and social care lessons, they explain their thoughts about the representation of minority groups when discussing role models such as Michelle Obama. A minority of pupils offer only brief answers and explanations. These pupils struggle to fully articulate their thoughts and lack confidence when offering answers to questions. When given the opportunity to work in pairs or small groups, a majority of pupils engage appropriately with tasks and express their ideas suitably.

Many pupils demonstrate secure reading skills and are able to locate facts and information from texts. They can synthesise basic information from a range of texts competently. When given the opportunity, many pupils read aloud with suitable expression and intonation. In a few subjects, pupils infer meaning effectively from a range of texts. They make thoughtful links to their prior knowledge, for example when using their understanding of provenance and purpose, in discussions around the persecution of the Jews and the 'Kristallnacht' in history.

Many pupils write appropriately for a varied range of purposes and audiences. When given the opportunity to write at length, a majority of pupils structure their work and use paragraphs suitably. These pupils have a clear understanding of grammar and punctuation. A few more able pupils produce well-structured, effective pieces of extended writing that engage the reader. For example, they write a persuasive argument to consider multiple religious and non-religious viewpoints on abortion in religious studies or they describe the journey of a ham and cheese sandwich through the digestive system accurately in science. However, a few pupils do not structure their work well enough and make careless, repeated errors in spelling, punctuation

and grammar. In addition, a few pupils sometimes present their work untidily or leave work unfinished.

In mathematics, the majority of pupils demonstrate secure basic number skills. For example, they are able to perform substitutions in formulae and solve simple problems. The majority of pupils plot graphs accurately and calculate the areas of simple shapes. A few more able pupils are able to solve complex problems involving fractions and mixed numbers or problems requiring multi-step solutions. These pupils apply their knowledge and understanding to calculate interior angles in circles. In relevant contexts across the curriculum, pupils apply their numeracy skills and understanding suitably. For example, they rearrange simple formulae in science or use their knowledge of shape and measure accurately in their design technology lessons. In general, pupils do not apply the numeracy skills they develop in their mathematics lessons well enough. This is due in part to a lack of planning for the progressive development of numeracy in relevant subjects across the curriculum.

In general, pupils use their digital skills suitably to complete a narrow range of tasks across the curriculum. For example, they create presentations in the humanities subjects or use simple coding software to develop a sequence of commands in information and communication technology (ICT).

Overall, many pupils develop their physical skills well, for example when improving their trampolining routines in physical education (PE) lessons. Generally, pupils use their fine motor skills appropriately, for example when using tools and equipment in the design technology workshop.

Many pupils develop their creative skills suitably. For example, in music they compose and perform a short musical leitmotif to represent a film hero or villain of their choice on digital keyboards. A few pupils develop strong creative skills, for example when they create clay 3D masks to convey distortion in art lessons.

When given the opportunity, many pupils develop their thinking skills competently. A few pupils use their thinking skills effectively. For example, in sociology they discuss and consider maturely the features which contribute to inequality in society. However, a few pupils find it difficult to develop their thinking independently.

In general, pupils make only modest progress in their Welsh language skills. In their Welsh lessons, a minority of pupils develop sound speaking and listening skills. Pupils' use of Welsh outside of these lessons is limited.

### **Well-being and attitudes to learning**

Many pupils enjoy attending Ysgol Rhiwabon and feel safe in school. They say that they are treated fairly and encouraged to show respect towards others. Pupils feel that regular personal and social education lessons provide beneficial opportunities to learn about important issues such as sexism and mental health. Most pupils say that staff deal promptly and sensitively with any incidents of bullying. Pupils know who to speak to if they are worried or need support and benefit from valuable specialist support within the school's well-being hub when needed. Most pupils are polite and courteous to adults and visitors to the school and generally behave well around the school site.

Most pupils arrive promptly to lessons and many are quick to settle to work. They are respectful of their teachers and peers and behave well in class. Many participate well in lessons and show an interest in their work. A few pupils are particularly enthusiastic about their learning and enjoy opportunities to develop their knowledge and understanding. However, a few are slow to settle to work and do not pay enough attention or sustain their concentration in lessons.

Pupils in Year 7 settle well and develop their confidence quickly when they transition to the school through participation in the 'SWAN project'. They value the opportunities offered through this cross-curricular programme to develop their sense of identity and belonging. For example, they enjoy the analogy of building a solid foundation for learning through the Rhiwabon red-brick project.

A few pupils take on leadership opportunities through the school council and as associate members of the governing body. A few pupils develop their leadership skills as sports leaders such as when they organise and run sports tournaments for partner primary schools. The school council has contributed to beneficial improvements such as increasing the number of picnic benches in outdoor areas. However, pupils are not always clear about the work and impact of the school council. Around half of pupils do not feel that staff listen well enough to their views.

A minority of pupils participate in worthwhile extra-curricular activities including sports and music clubs. Activities such as netball and basketball help pupils develop their physical skills and understand the benefits of exercise. In addition, pupils participate in the school choir and take part in community concerts and events such as the school's annual Christmas carol concert.

### **Teaching and learning experiences**

The school provides a broad and balanced curriculum that builds suitably on pupils' prior learning and meets the needs of nearly all pupils. A few pupils with ALN who attend the specialist resource base follow an adapted curriculum that meets their needs well. The school has developed valuable links with the local further education college to enhance the curriculum offer at Key Stage 4. As a result, pupils have a comprehensive range of academic and vocational subject options available to them, including economics, engineering, hair and beauty, hospitality and public services. This is a notable strength.

Older pupils benefit considerably from the career advice and support staff provide to help them make decisions about their future. This includes individual interviews, writing curriculum vitae and interview preparation with local business people. These activities have a positive impact on pupils' understanding of career options and help to raise their aspirations.

Leaders are in the early stages of establishing their vision and planning their curriculum in accordance with the requirements to implement the Curriculum for Wales in September 2023. This includes a consultation with staff and pupils to develop the school's vision. The school has prioritised opportunities for departments to collaborate in order to develop new schemes of learning and has provided useful training for teachers to develop their understanding of the principles of the Curriculum for Wales.

There are a few enrichment opportunities for pupils to learn outside the classroom, for example visits to Rhiwabon and Wrexham libraries and to the local area as part of the 'Rhiwabon Red Brick' project. There are close links with partner primary schools and leaders have recently started to work collaboratively to ensure that learning for Year 7 pupils builds suitably on what they have experienced in primary school.

Literacy and numeracy co-ordinators are beginning to work with subject leaders to plan suitable opportunities for pupils to develop and apply these skills across the curriculum. However, strategic planning for the progressive development of pupils' skills across the curriculum is underdeveloped. The school makes appropriate use of the results from standardised assessments to identify pupils with weak basic skills. They provide suitable support for the majority of these pupils.

A few subjects provide valuable learning experiences and opportunities for pupils to learn about the culture and heritage of Wales. For example, they learn about Welsh artists Cefyn Burgess and Kyffin Williams in art lessons and, in history, they study the story of Percy Edwards, a local boy who fought and died in the First World War. In a very few other subjects, leaders are beginning to consider their contribution to developing pupils' understanding of their Welsh culture and identity within a diverse society. However, this aspect of the school's work is underdeveloped as are the opportunities for pupils to develop their Welsh language skills in lessons other than Welsh or in extra-curricular activities.

The school has recently re-structured its provision for personal and social education (PSE) to support pupils' emotional development and mental health. All year groups have dedicated, timetabled lessons. The programme covers important themes that impact positively on health and well-being, such as physical exercise, healthy eating and drinking and sexual health, as well as the impact of harmful lifestyle choices and behaviours such as substance misuse. This provision is enhanced by visits from external providers and specialist speakers.

The school provides a few beneficial opportunities for pupils to take part in after-school activities that support their learning. These include sports clubs, a science gardening club and the school choir.

Most teachers foster positive working relationships with pupils and have a secure knowledge of their abilities and needs. They manage pupil behaviour appropriately and promote positive attitudes to learning. Most teachers have strong subject knowledge and are good language models. However, teachers' use of everyday Welsh is too variable across the school. Teaching assistants work well with individual pupils who require additional support and also provide valuable whole-class support in relevant cases.

Many teachers provide clear explanations and instructions. They share relevant learning objectives at the start of lessons and plan appropriate activities to support pupils' learning. In general, tasks provide beneficial opportunities for pupils to develop subject knowledge and understanding. There are suitable opportunities for the development of pupils' basic literacy and numeracy skills across most relevant subjects. Many teachers use helpful and sometimes well-crafted resources to support teaching and learning. They circulate the classroom, supporting pupils as they work and responding to any difficulties they may have. These teachers question pupils



regularly to check their understanding. However, they often address their questioning to the whole class and ask questions that require very brief answers.

In a few lessons, where teaching is at its best, teachers provide engaging, lively and supportive instruction. They offer a rich and varied range of learning experiences and have high expectations of what pupils can achieve. Teachers in these lessons set challenging and interesting tasks for pupils. They plan individual and group tasks that encourage independence and resilience, enabling pupils to take more responsibility for their own learning. In these lessons, teachers incorporate effective 'progress stops' to probe and develop pupils' understanding. They question pupils skilfully and respond quickly to pupils' misinterpretations to adapt teaching deftly to ensure strong progress.

In a minority of lessons, teachers do not plan well enough for the progressive development of pupils' skills. In these lessons, teachers sometimes set tasks that are repetitive or lack challenge. They over-direct the learning, and there are few opportunities for pupils to discuss and work in pairs or small groups. Too often, pupils do not have enough opportunities to work independently of the teacher. Teachers do not provide enough opportunities for pupils to develop their skills, in particular their numeracy, oracy, extended writing and advanced reading skills.

The quality of teacher feedback on pupils' work is variable within and across subjects. In most cases, teachers helpfully draw pupils' attention to spelling, punctuation and grammatical errors and any gaps in pupils' work. In the majority of cases, teachers' comments on pupils' work are relevant and helpful, including useful targets for pupils to work on in future tasks. As a result, pupils are able to make improvements. In a very few subjects, teachers place strong importance on pupils' consideration of the feedback. Pupils are encouraged to respond to comments and are given time to make improvements. This has a positive impact on the quality of work produced by pupils of all abilities. However, pupils' response to feedback is inconsistent and teachers do not address this well enough.

### **Care, support and guidance**

Ysgol Rhiwabon is a caring and inclusive community, which values the well-being and character of its pupils as highly as their learning. Staff work together productively to support pupils' individual needs. The school ensures that it provides beneficial opportunities for pupils to develop their spiritual, moral, social and cultural understanding. These include aspects of the curriculum, assemblies, a few enrichment activities and the extended afternoon registration period.

Transition arrangements to support pupils' well-being are a strength of the school. Staff help pupils settle in well by being welcoming and getting to know them quickly. For example, pupils undertake a two-week cross-curricular project at the start of Year 7, during which they are taught in their form groups. For much of Year 7, they have a separate play area at break and lunch times. These approaches help most pupils to feel safe and to integrate successfully into their new school.

The school uses a range of valuable strategies to promote good attendance and to support pupils whose attendance is a cause for concern. The school has prioritised actions to improve attendance in response to the impact of the pandemic and staff

work closely the local authority to monitor and support individual pupils. The school is in the process of refining its approaches to managing pupils' behaviour to better reflect its values and ethos. This has led to some uncertainty and inconsistency among pupils and staff.

Pupils with additional learning needs receive purposeful support from the additional learning needs co-ordinator and other members of staff. In general, teachers use pupils' one-page profiles and individual development plans appropriately to adapt their lessons to meet pupils' needs. The school has a small specialist resource base called 'Succeed' for pupils with moderate learning difficulties. These pupils benefit from regular opportunities to participate in mainstream lessons and the support of staff in the resource base. For example, they learn important life skills such as how to cook and use public transport, alongside gaining worthwhile qualifications. As a result, pupils with ALN make appropriate progress in their learning and a few make notable progress.

The school's PSE programme is beginning to provide beneficial advice and guidance for pupils to develop their understanding of moral, social and cultural issues. The school has reviewed and amended the programme in the light of information from pupil surveys. As a result, the programme responds appropriately to emerging local and national concerns. It focuses well on important issues like the dangers of vaping and the harmful impact of misogyny. By reintroducing a fortnightly PSE lesson, leaders ensure that all pupils have regular opportunities to learn about and reflect upon how to keep themselves safe and healthy. This provision, as well as opportunities to help others within the community, such as raising money for a children's hospice, supports pupils' emotional and social needs well.

Overall, the school's provision for meeting pupils' social and emotional needs is a strength. For example, the 'Nurture' sessions allow pupils to listen to and support one another. Senior leaders are developing a 'well-being hub' to support pupils. This brings together services from inside and outside the school to work collaboratively on behalf of pupils, for example the youth service and school counselling service.

The school provides a few opportunities for pupils to develop their leadership skills, such as in the school council or as sports leaders. However, there are few groups in which pupils can voice their opinions. Around half of pupils feel that leaders don't always ask their views about matters that affect them or listen well enough to their opinions.

The school has a strong safeguarding culture. All staff are clear about the arrangements for reporting child protection and well-being concerns to appropriate staff. The school makes the necessary referrals to external statutory agencies and provides support for pupils where necessary. A few health and safety matters regarding the school site have been brought to the attention of the school. Estyn will issue a well-being letter to the school and the local authority requesting that the school responds appropriately to these issues within a required time frame.

## **Leadership and management**

The headteacher provides assured leadership, managing change sensitively while increasing expectations for staff and pupils. She is ambitious for all pupils to achieve

their full potential and that the school prepares them well for the next stage in their lives. This is supported by her vision of pupils 'succeeding with soul'.

The headteacher is supported well by the senior leadership team who are clear about their individual and collective responsibilities. Senior leaders work closely to develop important aspects of the school's work such as teaching and providing relevant professional learning for staff. They have a sound understanding of the strengths and weaknesses within their areas of responsibilities. In general, leaders pay due attention to national priorities such as reducing the effect of poverty by providing a thoughtful and engaging curriculum and opportunities for pupils to engage with local businesses through a mock interview process. Leaders are preparing appropriately to implement the Curriculum for Wales through planning and trialling work with Year 7 pupils. However, work towards other national priorities such as developing pupils' skills and their Welsh language is currently underdeveloped.

Many middle leaders understand their roles and the expectations placed on them by senior leaders. They have an appropriate understanding of pupil standards and quality of teaching within their departments. Line management arrangements are generally robust and provide a suitable level of support and challenge. Senior leaders hold regular meetings with middle leaders where they follow a set agenda, focused mainly on strategic aspects as well as operational matters. As a result, middle leaders are held to account suitably for progress against their departmental improvement priorities and standards within their departments.

Performance management arrangements are appropriate and objectives align closely to whole-school and departmental priorities. Professional learning opportunities are linked suitably to priorities. The headteacher deals appropriately with instances of underperformance when required.

Leaders at all levels understand the importance of quality assuring their work. They participate in a well-structured programme of activities, which forms the basis for the whole-school approach to continuous improvement. They gather first-hand evidence from a range of worthwhile activities including learning walks, lesson observations, book scrutiny and listening to learner activities. Senior leaders ensure that staff, pupils and external partners are involved and work together to agree findings from these activities. In the majority of cases, leaders identify accurately strengths and areas for improvement and focus suitably on the impact of provision on pupils' progress. However, a few middle leaders do not always evaluate the impact of teaching on pupils' progress well enough. Therefore, they do not identify areas of improvement precisely enough.

Leaders plan on a whole-school, departmental and pastoral level to address relevant improvement priorities. They set sensible timescales and allocate responsibilities for monitoring and evaluating progress appropriately. However, leaders do not always focus sharply on the key actions required to drive rapid improvement and leaders do not always evaluate the impact on pupils' learning.

Senior leaders plan professional learning opportunities that focus on the needs of staff and whole-school priorities strategically. These opportunities are wide-ranging and generally valued by staff. They include tailored continuous professional development (CPD) sessions, opportunities to collaborate with other staff, teaching

and learning newsletters and sharing good practice. The school works well with various external partners to enrich their professional learning offer. It collaborates beneficially with other schools and partners on aspects of teaching and learning. Professional learning is beginning to have a positive impact on a few important areas of the school's work, including improvements in the quality of teaching. Although quality assurance processes focus on the effect professional learning is having on classroom practice, a few leaders do not evaluate its impact on learning closely enough.

The school communicates effectively with parents through providing comprehensive information on the school website. It also makes good use of a school app and messaging service for parents. However, the school does not regularly seek the opinions of parents on aspects of its work.

The governing body is very supportive of the school and its senior leaders. There is a clear structure to committees and members know the importance of their roles. When appropriate, they provide suitable support and challenge. They understand their statutory role in safeguarding pupils and are developing their understanding of the need to promote healthy eating and drinking.

The governors, business manager and headteacher manage the school's finances carefully. They make purposeful use of grants including the pupil development grant to support pupils' well-being and progress.

## Evidence base of the report

Before an inspection, inspectors:

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

During an inspection, inspectors normally:

- hold a meeting with parents to hear their views on the school and its effectiveness
- meet the headteacher, governors, senior and middle leaders (where appropriate) 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, where appropriate
- visit a broad sample of lessons, 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 (<http://www.estyn.gov.wales/>)

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

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