



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

**A report on**  
**Ysgol Gynradd Pontyberem**

**Heol Y Felin  
Pontyberem  
Llanelli  
Carmarthenshire  
SA15 5LY**

**Date of inspection: March 2023**

**by**

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

**This report is also available in Welsh**

## About Ysgol Gynradd Pontyberem

Name of provider	Ysgol Gynradd Pontyberem
Local authority	Carmarthenshire County Council
Language of the provider	Welsh
Type of school	Primary
Religious character	Not a denominational school
Number of pupils on roll	230
Pupils of statutory school age	198
Number in nursery classes (if applicable)	None
Percentage of statutory school age pupils eligible for free school meals over a three-year average <i>(The national percentage of pupils eligible for free school meals over a three-year average in the primary sector is 23.0%)</i>	15.8%
Percentage of statutory school age pupils identified as having additional learning needs (a) <i>(The national percentage of pupils identified as having an additional learning need in the primary sector is 16.1%)</i>	13.2%
Percentage of statutory school age pupils who speak Welsh at home	50.2%
Percentage of statutory school age pupils with English as an additional language	0.0%
Date of headteacher appointment	01/01/2022
Date of previous Estyn inspection (if applicable)	01/11/2014
Start date of inspection	13/03/2023

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

Further information is available from the Welsh Government My Local School website:

[mylocalschool.gov.wales](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

The school's leadership is strong and effective and respects the contributions of everyone associated with it. As a result, the school is an inclusive one where leaders and staff promote healthy relationships well, with a specific emphasis on ensuring equality, equal opportunities and fairness for all individuals within its community. They respect the contributions of all pupils to the school's life and work and implement procedures to ensure that they are all in a good place emotionally to enable them to learn. As a result, nearly all pupils are happy and feel safe in the school's caring and inclusive community.

A broad and balanced curriculum is provided for pupils that builds effectively on their knowledge, understanding and skills. Provision is exciting and provides an opportunity to pupils to learn about their local area, Wales and places further afield. This raises their awareness of their place in society and the importance of being responsible and conscientious citizens. As a result, most pupils develop very positive attitudes towards their learning, are keen to take advantage of the rich range of learning experiences and make sound progress from their starting points.

Pupils are given a strong voice to contribute to what they would like to learn. They are very happy about this and particularly about the opportunities they are given to organise interesting activities that add to the richness of the curriculum and that often place a clear focus on supporting humanitarian activities.

Pupils are given regular and valuable opportunities to take part in sports, activities, performances and events such as eisteddfodau and concerts, which nurture their self-confidence and their physical, expressive and creative ability.

Staff know their pupils very well and meet the needs of different groups masterfully, including those with additional learning needs, others who have challenges in terms of behaviour and others who are vulnerable. Most teachers have very high expectations and classroom arrangements are effective, on the whole. However, this practice is not consistent or effective enough across the school. Although the school develops most pupils' literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology skills well, strategies to enable a minority of pupils to read fluently and enjoy reading have not been developed consistently enough.

## **Recommendations**

- R1 Ensure that all teachers and support staff have consistently high expectations and effective classroom organisation
- R2 Ensure that procedures to promote pupils' skills and enjoyment while reading are widespread and consistently effective across the 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 a case study on how the school meets pupils' emotional needs to ensure that they are in a good place to learn.

## Main findings

### Learning

On entry to the school, a minority of pupils have Welsh language skills and social skills that are equivalent to, or higher than, that expected for their age. The skills of the remainder of the pupils are lower. However, most pupils, including those with additional learning needs, make sound progress from their starting points in all aspects of their work by the end of the time at the school.

Nearly all pupils' listening skills are developing very well and most make sound progress in their oral skills in both languages. Many pupils' reading skills are developing suitably; however, at times, a few have difficulty reading fluently and struggle to explain clearly what they are reading. Many pupils' writing skills are developing strongly in both languages, where appropriate, considering their age and ability. Most pupils' numeracy and information and communication technology (ICT) skills are also developing strongly. Pupils use their literacy, numeracy, ICT and wider skills meaningfully, appropriately and purposefully in a variety of contexts based on their termly themes.

One notable example where Year 1 and 2 pupils apply their various skills in an interesting and stimulating context is in their work creating doors for the fairies. This work was stimulated by visiting the fairy village in the National Botanic Gardens which are a stone's throw from the school. While there, they found a letter from a fairy explaining that they wanted to move to Pontyberem and asking for the pupils' help to find them a suitable home. On their return, the pupils went and explored the school's woodland where they found a small door at the bottom of one of the trees, along with another message welcoming the fairies there. Most pupils read the message fairly confidently, discussed its content and used their measuring skills correctly to design small doors for their homes. While role-playing as fairies that had moved to the area, they wrote interesting postcards and letters to their friends explaining how much they are enjoying their new homes and the like. Most have researched appropriately on the internet to price new doors and have designed simple models of them to sell, applying their measuring and calculation skills confidently.

The school's youngest pupils also use their various skills confidently and correctly in response to exciting prompts. For example, pupils in the reception class created a butterfly garden on the school grounds following a visit to the local park. Nearly all pupils sorted the plants correctly by colour, before choosing the ones that were suitable to be planted. They planned decorations and expressed a sensible opinion on their favourites, showing the results clearly in an electronic pictogram by using their ICT skills appropriately. Nearly all pupils wrote simple sentences correctly by following a specific pattern and performed their work in a whole-school assembly, where their parents were present to listen to them.

One of the main qualities of the school's older pupils is the ability of almost all of them to take responsibility for their own learning maturely, using their various skills confidently for a specific purpose. Recently, Year 6 pupils organised the Ysgol Pontyberem Eisteddfod. They planned and created appropriate banners for their classes, before helping pupils in all other classes to make them in the same way.

They were responsible for creating a suitable timetable, posters to advertise the Eisteddfod, certificates for the winners and a useful advertisement for parents to encourage them to dress their children in traditional Welsh clothing. Pupils were responsible for choosing and contacting the judges and writing a small speech to greet the audience and proclaim the Eisteddfod locally. This was in addition to working together effectively to lead, prepare and train each team that competed.

Most pupils' creative skills are developing very well and they use them successfully across the curriculum. Pupils in the reception class experiment with natural materials, such as a variety of leaves and twigs, when forming letters and numbers following a trip to the local forest. Year 4 pupils use their digital skills skilfully. They design Islamic prayer mats as part of their work looking at different religions and print tea towels with patterns that reflect the local area. Pupils at the top of the school compose and perform pieces of rhythmic music skilfully and imaginatively by using untuned percussion instruments, based on the theme *Hei Mistar Urdd*.

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

Nearly all pupils are happy and feel safe within the school's caring and inclusive community. They also understand well the importance of staying safe online. Most pupils behave very well in lessons and during break times and lunchtimes. The very few who find it difficult to control their own behaviour use suitable strategies to help them behave better. Nearly all show exceptional courtesy and are very welcoming towards visitors to the school. The pride they have towards their school and their local community is notable.

Nearly all pupils appreciate the care and support they receive in an inclusive and stimulating environment and treat adults and each other with respect. A good example of this is the excellent way in which the school's oldest pupils support the youngest during break times. The 'Bydis Bont' bench on the playground is a place where pupils can sit if they are looking for support from their peers. Nearly all pupils are confident that staff listen and respond to any concerns they may have promptly.

Nearly all pupils develop a sound understanding of the importance of being moral and principled citizens. They develop the ability and confidence to discuss their feelings and to show empathy towards others in distress. A notable example of this is the way the pupils themselves organised and led a vigil to remember the pupils of Ukraine and the effect of the war on them. Nearly all pupils understand that they have certain rights, which develops their sense of self-worth.

Pupils appreciate the opportunities they have given to voice their opinions and influence the school's life and work, which develops their confidence and a wide range of skills. For example, the various pupil's voice groups lead a number of activities, such as a local history day, school uniform recycling and tree planting.

Most pupils understand the importance of making choices that have a positive effect on their physical, mental and emotional health, such as maintaining a healthy and balanced diet, exercising and the need to share and discuss their feelings. They are also committed to activity that promotes their emotional well-being and develops their personal resilience. The leadership of the Bronze Ambassadors for physical exercise during break times has a very positive effect on pupils' well-being and relationships.

Most pupils develop very positive attitudes towards their learning. They are keen to take advantage of the rich range of learning experiences that are provided for them. They demonstrate motivation, curiosity and perseverance in their lessons. By the time they reach the top of the school, most face new experiences and situations with increasing confidence and resilience. Overall, many concentrate for extended periods and participate very well in activities in the indoor and outdoor environment.

Most pupils show respect and maturity towards the contributions of others. For example, they respect each other's views and accept different opinions in a reasonable and balanced manner. They work together happily and productively in pairs and groups.

Most pupils recall and build on their previous learning appropriately. As they move through the school, they develop independent learning skills with increasing confidence and use and apply a good range of skills for various purposes, for example when comparing Lent and Ramadan and conveying their findings in the form of a Venn diagram. Most respond positively to feedback from teachers and assistants as they work on their learning tasks. They show a willingness to act on the comments made to them to improve their work, for example when improving and refining pieces of extended writing or language exercises on mutations.

### **Teaching and learning experiences**

The school provides a broad and balanced curriculum that builds effectively on pupils' knowledge, understanding and skills. Leaders have a clear vision for this and are making significant progress in introducing the Curriculum for Wales across the school. The curriculum is based on promoting a caring community where pupils are challenged and encouraged to do their best. They have worked with pupils, parents, carers and governors to formulate a vision for the curriculum that reflects the four purposes successfully and makes it relevant to pupils.

The curriculum reflects the nature of the local community imaginatively and includes exciting learning activities that reflect the linguistic and cultural nature of the area well. Activities consider the context of the school and a strong sense of belonging to the village successfully. For example, activities relating to the school community form a basis for whole-school themes and deepen pupils' understanding of local history very effectively. The school's oldest pupils organised a successful open morning and invited members of the community to share historical knowledge about the life and work of the village in the past. By doing so, pupils have learned about past events, which include a peasant rebellion and the story of the Rebecca Riots.

Staff know their pupils very well and meet the needs of different groups skilfully, including those with additional learning needs, behavioural challenges and vulnerable individuals. They use standardised test results and the outcomes of procedures for assessing and tracking pupils' progress skilfully to plan purposefully for them. This ensures that teachers respond promptly to pupils' needs and support them in a timely manner. Assistants support learning extremely robustly and support specific groups of pupils very skilfully.

Provision builds methodically on pupils' previous skills, particularly in literacy, numeracy and ICT, which enables them to have full access to the curriculum. However, provision to develop strategies for learning to read is not always effective

across the school, which hinders the fluency and enjoyment of a minority of pupils in their reading.

The school plans stimulating educational trips to enrich and reinforce learning. For example, as part of the theme 'Cynefin', pupils from Years 3 and 4 and the reception class visited Llansteffan beach and Pembrey Country Park to compare their habitats. Through these visits, they are given rich opportunities to deepen their knowledge and understanding of various surroundings. Teachers provide exciting opportunities for pupils to work with local artists and national poets, for example in creating an impressive mural jointly that reflects the history of the local community.

In many of the classes where teaching is at its best, teachers have high expectations and classroom organisation is robust. In these classes, teachers' presentations are lively and stimulating and engage most pupils' interest skilfully. However, this practice is not consistent or effective enough across the school and this prevents a minority of pupils from achieving to the best of their ability.

On the whole, teachers use a range of probing questioning methods that are effective in recalling previous learning and guiding the direction of learning appropriately. They share lesson aims appropriately and include pupils in the process of discussing what they need to do to succeed in their tasks. In turn, this leads to improvements in the standard of pupils' work. Teachers provide pupils with beneficial and timely oral feedback to encourage them to consider what they are doing well and how they could improve their work. They earmark suitable opportunities for pupils to improve their work following feedback or, at times, evaluate their own work and that of their peers. They model good pieces of work, which prompt purposeful discussions among pupils to set incisive and specific success criteria for learning tasks.

All pupils are given rich opportunities to benefit significantly from purposeful experiences in the school's extensive outdoor areas. For example, Year 3 pupils are given purposeful opportunities to develop their problem-solving and teamwork skills while building a shelter in the forest for St Dwynwen. They are given creative opportunities to develop their art skills by producing impressive 'Hapa-Zome' patterns from Japan by using daffodils. Year 5 pupils are given specific opportunities to develop their physical skills successfully by taking part in physical education activities that develop aspects such as balance and ball handling skills.

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

Promoting healthy relationships is a priority for the school, which a specific emphasis on ensuring equal opportunities and fairness for all individuals within its community. The emphasis on valuing diversity is based on the principle that everyone is as important as each other and is a central element of the school's work. A number of established strategies ensure that the school is a friendly, caring and inclusive place based on respect and empathy. As a result, pupils feel happy and safe. The school's arrangements for safeguarding pupils meet requirements and are not a cause for concern.

The headteacher and teaching staff provide very purposefully and successfully to meet pupils' well-being needs. They have established a variety of innovative strategies that include all pupils and ensure that they are in a 'good place' to learn and take advantage of the wide range of experiences that are provided. The emphasis on rewarding effort and positive behaviour is based on the basic principle:



'I can do this' or 'I can't do this yet'. This is a core element of the school's vision and leads to ensuring an inclusive and supportive environment for all pupils, where they are happy to try without the fear of making mistakes.

The teaching team has a thorough knowledge of the pupils and their needs. They work together purposefully to tailor provision skilfully to meet their needs highly successfully in a holistic manner. The school has established cohesive procedures to track pupils' progress and well-being and pays close attention to groups of learners and individuals. The teaching team uses information from these systems purposefully to plan the next learning steps for pupils. They provide a wide range of appropriate interventions at an early stage for pupils who need additional support, which enables them to make sound progress against their individual targets.

Provision to meet pupils' additional learning needs is a highly effective feature of the school's work. These strategies include a comprehensive programme of interventions, a sensory room, well-being corners and mindfulness sessions. Recently, 'Y Nyth' has been established, which is a nurture room that is proving to be a highly successful development in supporting vulnerable pupils. The high levels of expertise of the teaching team and their passion towards well-being and developing the 'whole' pupil ensure that the learning environment is fully inclusive and provides an opportunity for nearly all pupils to make sound progress from their starting points. The close links and communication with parents, including support for families, contribute highly effectively towards reaching this aim. Parents and carers appreciate the support greatly. The school has productive links with a wide range of external agencies to support the staff to provide effectively for pupils with additional learning needs and promote regular attendance.

Through the range of children's councils, the school takes advantage of beneficial opportunities to promote the learners' voice and develop them as hard-working and responsible citizens. These provide valuable opportunities for them to influence the school's life and work while developing a variety of skills, in addition to their confidence. One example of an activity prompted by pupils is the stall for selling second-hand school uniforms, which promotes recycling and is a means of raising money to buy and plant trees on the school grounds.

The school develops pupils' spiritual, moral, cultural and social skills highly successfully. Staff take advantage of appropriate opportunities to promote pupils' understanding of their Welsh identity, heritage and culture very effectively. They provide opportunities to share and celebrate these elements through a range of valuable activities. These include learning about the local links of Merched Beca (Rebecca's Daughters); holding an eisteddfod; selecting the Welshman and Welshwoman of the Week and by organising educational trips to places of national interest, such as the National Botanic Gardens. In addition to Christianity, the school introduces pupils to a variety of different religions, such as Judaism and Islam, in addition to influential international people such as Rosa Parks, Martin Luther King and Gandhi. Stimulating activities, such as making unleavened bread in Year 2, engage the curiosity and enthusiasm of nearly all pupils. Collective worship assemblies are impressive in their tone and are very valuable in developing pupils' understanding of the importance of respecting diversity and equality. They also provide opportunities for individuals and groups to perform musical items for the rest of the pupils on a regular basis.

The school provides regular and valuable opportunities for pupils to take part in performances and events, such as eisteddfodau and concerts. This is a means of nurturing their self-confidence and their expressive and creative ability. The link with Sinfonia Cymru provides a very valuable opportunity each year for the school choir and orchestra to work and perform with professional musicians in the village hall.

## **Leadership and management**

Since being appointed a little over a year ago, the headteacher has strengthened the school's leadership strategies significantly to ensure that pupils are safe and achieve to the best of their ability, in line with their developmental stage. By working closely with the deputy headteacher and the additional learning needs co-ordinator, she has identified the school's strengths quickly, in addition to important issues that need are in need of urgent improvement. She has implemented effective procedures that are already bearing fruit. Together, they ensure that staff at all levels understand and fulfil their roles and responsibilities effectively. This has raised staff morale, increased their enthusiasm towards teaching and addressed a number of inconsistencies across the school.

Leaders have a clear vision based on ensuring that the school is close-knit and friendly, with a caring and supportive ethos where all pupils achieve well and mature as valuable members of society. They convey this vision clearly to staff, parents and pupils. They prioritise ensuring that they understand and promote a strong culture of safeguarding across the school.

The headteacher and most other leaders model and promote high expectations of themselves, staff and pupils. They demonstrate professional values and behaviour that make a positive contribution towards improving the school. The headteacher and other members of the senior leadership team manage the performance of all staff regularly to improve their practice. They now address issues relating to underperformance, when necessary. There is a clear focus on addressing national and local priorities, such as establishing a strong culture of safeguarding, reducing the effects of poverty on pupils' educational attainment, implementing the Curriculum for Wales and improving the development of pupils' literacy, numeracy and digital skills.

Governors understand and fulfil their roles and responsibilities thoroughly. They know the school very well and know what happens from day to day. They conduct appropriate learning walks and evaluate provision and standards regularly. They give full consideration to legislation and provide relevant guidance to staff and families, including the way in which they manage complaints and appeals from parents. They contribute directly to setting the school's strategic priorities and have a clear understanding of its strengths and areas for development. They ensure that the school uses its resources, including the pupil development grant, appropriately to promote learning. They provide an appropriate balance of support and challenge in their role as 'critical friends'. They ensure that the school has appropriate arrangements to promote healthy eating and drinking.

The headteacher has forged a very productive relationship with parents in a short period of time and ensures that she has effective lines of communication to enable them to raise any issues that may affect their children's learning and well-being. For example, she sends them a weekly newsletter to provide information about matters

that will occur the following week and updates the closed social media accounts to share pictures of activities and send them text messages. Parents value this greatly.

The headteacher has refined and tightened the school's self-evaluation procedures, ensuring that they are based on first-hand evidence and provide an accurate picture of the current situation. The findings of these procedures contribute to the progress records of each class and feed into the priorities in the development plan suitably. Improvement procedures are already having a positive effect on pupils' standards, particularly in language and well-being and on improving leadership at all levels. This process includes all staff, in addition to a range of partners, including pupils, parents and governors.

There is a positive culture and ethos at the school to promote and support the professional learning of all staff. In particular, this includes developing ways to deal with trauma in children and a number of specific strategies to deal with conditions relating to aggressive behaviour. This have already begun to have a positive effect on ensuring consistency in provision to meet the needs of all learners. Leaders identify best practice at the school and ensure that other members of staff can benefit from it. They also work with other schools to share and develop professional practice, particularly in literacy, and monitor the effect of professional learning on the effectiveness of teaching and leadership and on pupils' progress and well-being.

## Evidence base of the report

Before an inspection, inspectors:

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

During an inspection, inspectors normally:

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

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

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

## Copies of the report

Copies of this report are available from the school and from the Estyn website (<http://www.estyn.gov.wales>)

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

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

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