



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

**A report on**

**Ysgol Pendalar**

**Ffordd Bethel  
Caernarfon  
Gwynedd  
LL55 1DU**

**Date of inspection: October 2023**

**by**

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

**This report is also available in Welsh**

## About Ysgol Pendalar

Name of provider	Ysgol Pendalar
Local authority	Cyngor Gwynedd
Language of the provider	Welsh
Type of school	Special
Religious character	
Number of pupils on roll	113
Pupils of statutory school age	83
Number in nursery classes (if applicable)	
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 maintained special sector is 46.2%)</i>	36.6%
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 maintained special sector is 99.8%)</i>	100.0%
Percentage of statutory school age pupils who speak Welsh at home	50%
Percentage of statutory school age pupils with English as an additional language	0%
Date of headteacher appointment	01/09/2016
Date of previous Estyn inspection (if applicable)	01/05/2013
Start date of inspection	02/10/2023
<p>Ysgol Pendalar is situated in the town of Caernarfon and is maintained by Gwynedd local authority. It is a naturally bilingual special day school for pupils between three and 19 years old. Most pupils come from areas in the north of Gwynedd.</p> <p>The school provides a number of specialist facilities, including a hydrotherapy pool and sensory rooms.</p> <p>Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board is responsible for providing physiotherapy, speech and language therapy and occupational therapy schemes and healthcare assistants within the school.</p>	

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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

Ysgol Pendalar is a close-knit and friendly community where staff and pupils work together happily and positively. On the whole, most pupils comply with the teachers' requests and settle quickly to activities and tasks. Many behave well in the classroom, listen carefully to staff and behave respectfully towards their fellow pupils. They engage well with their learning and work easily with teachers and support staff.

During their time at the school, most pupils make suitable progress from their starting points. Many pupils develop valuable social skills as they move through the school. However, there is a lack of opportunities for pupils to practise their communication, reading and extended writing skills.

Ysgol Pendalar has a balanced pupil-centred curriculum. Although the curriculum supports pupils' needs in general, there is a lack of opportunities for pupils to develop their independent living skills.

The quality of teaching is not consistent across the school. In a few lessons, teaching is effective. On the whole, staff meet the needs of pupils appropriately in a suitable range of activities. However, overall, teachers do not plan challenging enough learning experiences and tasks to ensure that pupils make strong progress.

Leaders have a clear vision that is shared by all staff. This vision is based on creating a school that places the pupil at the heart of all decisions. The staff are a dedicated and hard-working team. They work well together and are passionate about their work.

Although there is a strong rationale for the current improvement priorities, they do not derive directly from extensive self-evaluation processes. The priorities are based on informal evaluations by members of the senior management team and do not reflect some important areas for improvement, such as teaching. The school does not plan a timetable for quality assurance and useful activities such as monitoring the quality of teaching and provision and evaluating pupils' progress. This prevents leaders from identifying the school's true strengths and areas for development.

## Recommendations

- R1 Strengthen strategic leadership at all levels and ensure that responsibilities are defined clearly and allocated in a balanced manner
- R2 Strengthen self-evaluation and planning for improvement procedures
- R3 Strengthen teaching and planning to develop pupils' increasing skills systematically
- R4 Ensure robust opportunities for pupils to develop independent living skills and move forward to the next stage of their lives

- R5 Strengthen the role of the governing body so that their understanding of the school's strengths and areas for improvement enable them to act effectively as critical friends

## What happens next

In accordance with the Education Act 2005, HMCI is of the opinion that this school is in need of significant improvement. The school will draw up an action plan to show how it is going to address the recommendations. Estyn will monitor the school's progress about 12 months after the publication of this report.

## Main findings

### Learning

During their time at the school, most pupils make suitable progress from their starting points.

Many pupils make appropriate progress in improving their communication skills. In lessons, many pupils listen carefully to their teachers and support staff while talking to them individually. Pupils respond suitably by using a varied range of communication methods. Pupils who use signing, symbols or a device to communicate do so purposefully. For example, they enjoy using signs when following a song or use their devices to answer simple questions. In class discussions, a majority of pupils make appropriate oral contributions and answer by using single words or short sentences. A minority of pupils take turns suitably, listen to their peers with interest and report on events and share information confidently.

Many pupils develop valuable social skills as they move through the school. They have good working relationships with staff and many pupils are caring towards each other. For example, they celebrate each other's successes naturally and miss their friends who are absent from school.

During their time at the school, a majority of pupils develop beneficial independent learning skills in line with their ability and needs. For example, pupils collect their snacks and tidy up appropriately at the end of the snack session. Many pupils develop their own learning by following a familiar routine in the classroom. They move from one task to another smoothly by using their visual timetables effectively. A minority develop a few important skills that will support their independence after they leave school in important areas such as preparing food or caring for animals.

Many pupils develop reading and writing skills suitably in line with their ability. For example, they identify letter sounds and build individual words. A few pupils read aloud confidently to their peers and make attempts confidently when they face new and unfamiliar words. Many older pupils identify and locate facts in reading pieces.

Where relevant, pupils practise and develop their writing skills by making marks on paper and forming letters. They develop their understanding of punctuation and grammar by using capital letters and conjunctions to form more complex sentences or write steps in a recipe to prepare a pizza. A majority of older pupils express themselves clearly by using a suitable range of vocabulary and form clear sentences. For example, they use adjectives to describe the atmosphere at the sixth-form prom. However, there is a lack of regular opportunities for pupils to develop their reading and extended writing skills systematically.

Many pupils develop their number skills purposefully, particularly in real-life contexts. For example, they identify coins correctly and develop the confidence to use money by shopping in the community or estimate the cost of attending sports sessions at the leisure centre.

In line with their ability, many pupils develop their physical skills effectively. For example, pupils develop their fine motor skills effectively by making marks and shapes in sand, using a fishing rod and decorating cakes with flower shapes. Many pupils develop their gross motor skills appropriately by playing on scooters and enjoying time on the swing.

On the whole, pupils develop their creative skills effectively. They create colourful paintings of trees with popcorn and enjoy singing and dancing with their peers in their classroom when given an opportunity to do so.

Outdoors, pupils develop curiosity by making boats to experiment with floating and sinking, toast marshmallows over the firepit and search for flowers that match the colour wheel.

Overall, a majority of pupils develop their digital skills appropriately. They use suitable programs to play number of literacy games. A few pupils develop useful advanced digital skills by creating QR codes and digital film clips successfully.

Nearly all older pupils study a range of vocational courses that lead to gaining units of beneficial qualifications. These include entry level courses in independent living courses and life and work skills.

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

Most pupils enjoy school and say that they feel safe there. They are friendly and courteous towards staff and visitors. On the whole, most pupils comply with teachers' requests and settle quickly to activities and tasks. Many behave well in the classroom, listen carefully to staff and behave respectfully towards their fellow pupils. They engage well with their learning and work easily with teachers and support staff.

When they are given an opportunity to do so, pupils work beneficially in pairs and small groups. However, due to limited opportunities for pupils to collaborate independently of the teacher in the classroom and at other times, they do not make as much progress as they could in their co-operation skills. A majority of pupils do not have regular enough opportunities to enjoy each other's company and develop an understanding of belonging to the whole-school family in collective situations as members of clubs, in assemblies to celebrate success and fun whole-school

activities. However, when pupils come together in specific assemblies, they enjoy singing together and listening to a presenter talk about important issues, such as the ethos of teamwork by considering the Welsh rugby team's contribution to the World Cup.

Over time, many pupils develop into confident, friendly and mature individuals. They enjoy socialising and buying snacks in a local café and develop confidence in day-to-day situations when shopping in the supermarket. On the whole, many pupils develop valuable personal skills when taking part in cycling sessions with their peers. A few pupils develop the ability to self-manage, relax and be mindful by taking part in beneficial hand reflexology sessions. Across the school, pupils increase their understanding of kindness and their consideration of others, as well as practising important life skills by taking part in fundraising activities, such as baking cakes for a Macmillan coffee morning.

A few pupils develop valuable leadership skills as members of the school council and the well-being group. These groups have had a positive influence on some aspects of the school's work. For example, as a result of a questionnaire to gather the opinions of their peers, members of the school council have worked with leaders to increase the outdoor play equipment and resources. The well-being group is also campaigning hard to raise money to purchase accessible bicycles to be used at the school and in the community.

Older pupils increase their understanding of the world of work and what life will be like after they leave school fairly appropriately through their vocational courses. However, they do not develop independent living skills or self-care skills regularly enough. The school does not provide sufficiently relevant and consistent opportunities to ensure that pupils learn and practise domestic tasks to undertake everyday activities, such as using public transport and other services independently. As a result, pupils do not develop essential independent skills to ensure that they move to the next stage in their lives.

Overall, whole-school attendance is good and is similar to what is seen in similar special schools.

### **Teaching and learning experiences**

The quality of teaching is not consistent across the school. In a few lessons, teaching is effective. In these lessons, teachers plan activities that ensure that pupils make appropriate progress in their understanding and skills. Teachers have high expectations and challenge pupils to achieve to the best of their ability in activities that motivate them to learn. In these lessons, there is an appropriate pace and teachers use questioning and oral feedback effectively throughout the lesson to assess pupils' understanding. They use resources skilfully to support learning.

Teachers and teaching assistants have a positive relationship with pupils and manage pupils' behaviour effectively, in general. However, at times, the behaviour of a very few pupils disrupts the learning of others.

On the whole, staff meet pupils' needs appropriately in a suitable range of activities. However, in general, teachers do not plan sufficiently challenging learning experiences and tasks to ensure that pupils make strong progress.

Staff use various communication support strategies purposefully. These include clear verbal instructions, the use of symbols and the use of signing. A majority of teachers use digital resources effectively to support pupils.

Teachers plan a suitable range of tasks to develop pupils' reading and writing skills. However, there are not enough opportunities for pupils to develop higher-order reading skills and extended writing skills.

Overall, teachers' oral feedback is positive. However, teachers' written feedback does not always include comments on the quality of the work or identify clearly the next steps for pupils.

Staff's use of the Welsh language varies across the classes. Staff usually communicate in Welsh and ensure that pupils understand and respond in Welsh. In a few cases, there is a tendency to allow discussions to continue in English.

The school has an appropriate progress-tracking system to monitor pupils' progress, which is updated regularly. This ensures that staff have a clear overview of pupils' progress over time but they do not use this information effectively enough to challenge pupils by differentiating tasks purposefully.

The school uses an electronic platform to communicate with parents on a daily basis. This enables parents to see work that their child completes at school. Many parents value the information they receive about their child's progress and well-being. Annual reports for parents are appropriate and include the necessary information.

All of the school's staff have worked together appropriately to provide a balanced curriculum that focuses on the pupil and their individual targets. However, although the curriculum supports pupils' needs, in general, staff do not provide sufficiently effective opportunities for pupils to develop their independent living skills.

The curriculum focuses beneficially on personal, health and social education and well-being. This provision allows pupils to make appropriate choices to make healthy choices and keep themselves safe. For example, pupils research, discuss and share information about healthy foods.

The school has effective links with a number of external organisations to ensure that pupils benefit from an appropriate range of experiences and valuable learning resources. For example, a few pupils have access to cycling sessions with a social enterprise, horse-riding at the local stables and work with a professional musician in music workshops. The school organises individual musical instrument lessons for a few pupils through the county's music service.

The school provides an appropriate range of visits and extra-curricular activities which make a valuable contribution towards developing pupils' self-confidence, physical development and creativity. For example, pupils enjoy visiting local places of interest such as Caernarfon Castle, Bangor Cathedral and Llanberis Slate Museum.



There are also some opportunities for pupils to take part in annual external activities, such as a pentathlon, fishing and climbing.

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

Ysgol Pendalar is a close-knit and friendly community where staff and pupils work together happily and positively. Staff take pride in the close and warm relationship they foster with pupils, and in their knowledge of them. The whole-school community embraces values of respect and friendship. As a result, most pupils respect the staff who take care of them and teach them, and many of the pupils are well behaved.

Recently, particular staff have worked well together to consider well-being provision across the school to promote pupils' well-being. They have condensed the curricular offer that contributes to their well-being and have planned purposefully to strengthen the offer by adding opportunities for outdoor learning. This has led to winning a recognised well-being award.

The school provides suitable opportunities for pupils to understand the difference between right and wrong and to develop as moral and spiritual individuals. Arrangements for collective worship are sound. Staff provide valuable opportunities for pupils to increase their understanding of important features, such as respect and empathy in lessons and by organising humanitarian activities. Pupils are given valuable opportunities to contribute to the school community and the wider community by co-ordinating fundraising events for good causes and organising celebrations, such as the sensory Christmas festival in the school garden and activities during well-being week.

There are valuable opportunities for a few pupils to develop their leadership skills by representing their fellow pupils on the school council and the well-being committee. They are given rewarding opportunities to express their views and suggest ideas that contribute to improving provision in the outdoor area and a few whole-school activities. On the whole, there are suitable opportunities for pupils to take part in artistic and expressive activities, for example by competing in the Urdd Eisteddfod and taking part in a summer concert in the garden. The school provides appropriate opportunities for pupils to celebrate their Welsh and Welsh-speaking identity through activities such as 'Shwmae Su'mae' and St David's Day celebrations. The school does not provide enough appropriate opportunities for pupils to come together collectively to celebrate successes, to sing together or to enjoy whole-school activities. Only a few opportunities are provided for pupils to develop creativity and physical confidence.

The school works purposefully with specific external agencies to ensure that there is careful planning for transferring pupils to the next stage in their learning. As a result, all pupils move to post-16 education either at school or college. This is a strong element.

The school does not plan sufficient opportunities to develop pupils' independent living skills. For example, there are very few opportunities for pupils to learn domestic skills, use public transport independently and go on work placements regularly on their own.

Arrangements for planning, administering and monitoring provision for additional learning needs (ALN) are sound. This includes setting suitable individual targets for pupils and fixed review arrangements. Teachers produce comprehensive profiles of the pupils in their care, which enable the support staff who work with the pupils and their families to understand which strategies are best when working with them. The school has a beneficial working relationship with parents and with external agencies to support its work.

The school has a clear culture of safeguarding. Training arrangements for staff are purposeful and meet statutory requirements. As a result, teaching and support staff understand their responsibility to keep pupils safe and follow the school's arrangements to report any concerns correctly. On the whole, the relevant leaders respond appropriately to this information. Teachers work appropriately with external agencies to share information about their pupils' well-being when necessary. External agencies are used productively to enrich the curriculum on important issues occasionally, such as online safety and maintaining healthy relationships.

### **Leadership and management**

Leaders have a clear vision that is shared by all staff. This vision is based on creating a school that places the pupil at the heart of all decisions. The pupil's aspiration and voice influence elements of provision and the curriculum and this contributes to the ability of staff and pupils to 'succeed together'. The staff are a dedicated and hard-working team and work well together. Leaders have created a suitable culture of safeguarding, where all members of staff are aware of their duties and are caring and watchful of the pupils.

The responsibilities of senior managers have not been shared in a sufficiently balanced way. As a result, the school's strategic planning for improvement is fragmented. Senior leaders do not have a sound enough understanding of their responsibilities and lines of accountability are unclear. Leaders have also allocated further responsibilities to some members of staff, but again, expectations of them are not clear enough. Very recently, the school has created two middle manager positions with responsibility for leading departments within the school, but it is too early to see the effect of this new structure on the school's work.

Leaders create a comprehensive improvement plan annually, but the process of planning for improvement does not include meaningful and regular input from a wide range of stakeholders, including pupils and parents, when preparing it. Although senior leaders share the plan with governors and ask for their comments, it is only very recently that they have begun to ask staff for their input when setting priorities.

Although there is a strong rationale for the current improvement priorities, they do not derive directly from structured self-evaluation processes. Priorities are based on informal evaluations by members of the senior management team and do not reflect some important areas for improvement, such as teaching. The school does not plan a timetable for quality assurance and useful activities such as monitoring the quality of teaching and provision and evaluating pupils' progress. This prevents leaders from identifying strengths and important areas for improvement.

Teachers meet with leaders annually to discuss personal targets to improve their practice and contribute towards whole-school priorities. However, staff performance management activities are not incisive enough to support the school to ensure improvement in the quality of teaching. Targets that are set for teachers do not align closely enough with the school's improvement priorities.

Members of the governing body support the school enthusiastically. They are dedicated and passionate about doing their best for the benefit of the pupils. On the whole, they understand and discharge their statutory duties appropriately in most areas. For example, they are aware of the school's financial situation and support the headteacher in making strategic decisions, such as creating a layer of middle leaders. Governors have basic general knowledge of the school's strengths and areas for development. They are over-reliant on receiving information and guidance from the headteacher without being a sufficiently robust part of the school's self-evaluation processes. As a result, they do not provide sufficient challenge in their role as critical friends.

Leaders have ensured opportunities for staff to receive training that is relevant to a few of the school's priorities, for example in developing the school curriculum and ensuring procedures for setting specific targets for pupils. However, as there is no process to monitor the effect, the school is not completely clear about the effect of training on pupils' standards and the quality of provision.

The school has given due attention to the majority of national priorities, such as developing the Curriculum for Wales and complying with the statutory requirements of the Additional Learning Needs and Education Tribunal (Wales) Act 2018. Staff have given these aspects detailed attention. Leaders give suitable consideration to responding to the effects of poverty on educational attainment by ensuring that eligible pupils receive all of the appropriate resources and every opportunity to engage with a wider curriculum, such as musical instrument sessions. However, the school has not given sufficient attention to developing literacy, numeracy and digital skills and, as a result, pupils do not develop these skills systematically over time.

The headteacher and governors manage the school's budget sensibly. They have earmarked a significant amount of underspend to restructure leadership roles within the school. Firm priority is given to ensuring that the school's staffing levels are appropriate to meet the individual needs of pupils.

Leaders communicate effectively with parents and forge productive relationships with them. They make good use of a digital method of communication between the school and the home. Parents use this regularly to see their children's work and communicate important messages to the school. Staff also share useful guidance with them on how to support their children's learning and well-being through this system.

## 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:

Publication Section

Estyn

Anchor Court, Keen Road

Cardiff

CF24 5JW or by email to [publications@estyn.gov.wales](mailto:publications@estyn.gov.wales)

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