



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

A report on

Ysgol Cystennin

**The Old Highway
Mochdre
Colwyn Bay
Conwy
LL28 5AU**

Date of inspection: October 2023

by

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

About Ysgol Cystennin

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| Name of provider | Ysgol Cystennin |
| Local authority | Conwy County Borough Council |
| Language of the provider | English |
| Type of school | Primary |
| Religious character | n/a |
| Number of pupils on roll | 77 |
| Pupils of statutory school age | 77 |
| Number in nursery classes | n/a |
| Percentage of pupils eligible for free school meals over a three-year average (The national percentage of pupils eligible for free school meals over a three-year average in Primary is 23.0%) | 35.0% |
| Percentage of pupils identified as having additional learning needs (a) (The national percentage of pupils identified as having an additional learning need in Primary is 16.1%) | 19.5% |
| Percentage of pupils who speak Welsh at home | 6.5% |
| Percentage of pupils with English as an additional language | 9.1% |
| Date of headteacher appointment | 01/09/2017 |
| Date of previous Estyn inspection (if applicable) | 06/01/2015 |
| Start date of inspection | 16/10/2023 |
| Ysgol Cystennin is one of two schools in the Mochre Federation of schools. | |

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

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

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

Overview

Ysgol Cystennin is part of the Mochdre federation of schools, which includes Ysgol Babanod Mochdre. Ysgol Cystennin provides a nurturing environment where pupils feel safe and secure. Ensuring the well-being of pupils is a high priority for all members of the school community. As a result, pupils feel cared for and valued by staff.

The headteacher has maintained a positive team ethos during a period of significant challenge. She has established an inclusive and caring culture. However, long term staff absences have had a significant impact on the effectiveness of leadership and provision across the school. School improvement work does not focus well enough on outcomes for pupils. Currently, leaders do not show the capacity to secure the improvements needed at the school.

Provision to develop pupils' digital and Welsh language skills is appropriate and supports most pupils to make suitable progress. However, overall, the school's provision for developing pupils' skills as they move through the school is ineffective in many important areas. As a result, a majority of pupils, including those with additional learning needs (ALN), do not make effective progress in developing their reading, writing or numeracy skills.

The school is at a very early stage in reforming its curriculum in response to Curriculum for Wales. Teaching and learning experiences provided for pupils do not support them to make enough progress across the full breadth of the curriculum. The range of experiences to enhance the curriculum, such as visits and extra-curricular activities, is underdeveloped.

Leaders have introduced a beneficial approach to supporting positive behaviour and as a result most pupils behave well. Teaching engages pupils well and learning environments have recently improved. However, across the school, teachers do not have high enough expectations of what pupils can achieve.

The school has established an appropriate culture of safeguarding. However, rates of attendance are well below the national average and particularly low for pupils eligible for free school meals.

Recommendations

- R1 Strengthen the impact of leadership at all levels in order to secure the necessary improvements
- R2 Ensure that all groups of pupils, including those with ALN, and those eligible for free school meals, make effective progress in developing literacy and numeracy skills
- R3 Ensure that teaching is effective and demonstrates appropriately high expectations of what all pupils can achieve

- R4 Develop a rich curriculum that builds on pupils' skills, knowledge and understanding progressively
- R5 Improve attendance, particularly for pupils eligible for free school meals

What happens next

In accordance with the Education Act 2005, HMCI is of the opinion that special measures are required in relation to this school. 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 usually every four to six months.

Main evaluation

Learning

Around half of pupils enter the school with skills, knowledge and understanding appropriate for their age. Overall, during their time at school, a majority of pupils, including those eligible for free school meals and those with ALN, do not make good enough progress in line with what would be expected of their stage of development.

As they move through the school, most pupils make strong progress in their speaking and listening skills. The younger pupils actively engage with adults and are eager to share their ideas. They use a widening vocabulary to discuss information or topics that interest them. As pupils progress through the school, they continue to develop their speaking skills consistently and, by the time they reach Year 6, they demonstrate articulate speech and actively participate in class discussions. For example, they engage enthusiastically in discussions regarding effective approaches to storytelling using British Sign Language.

Overall, a majority of pupils acquire appropriate reading skills. Pupils in Year 3 read instructions competently, and carefully decipher unfamiliar words. Pupils in Years 4 and 5 display enthusiasm for reading and eagerly discuss their favourite authors. By the time they reach Year 6, a majority of pupils become fluent and expressive readers who enjoy reading and apply their skills across the curriculum. For example, they extract information from the internet about a class topic to create a fact file. However, a minority of pupils across the school struggle to decode unfamiliar words. As a result, they find it difficult to read with fluency and understanding.

Overall, a minority of pupils are developing their writing skills well. A majority of younger pupils are beginning to write for a range of purposes and understand the features of a few different writing styles. They use a limited range of simple punctuation independently, such as full stops and capital letters. In a few instances, pupils redraft their work successfully and use feedback purposefully to enhance the quality of their writing. A minority of older pupils write skilfully, employing a rich vocabulary and varying their language well. For instance, they build suspense effectively in their 'spooky' stories. However, in general, pupils do not write at a high

enough level across the curriculum. A minority of pupils do not use an appropriate range of punctuation accurately or pay enough attention to the presentation of their work and have not developed a fluent handwriting style by the time they reach the end of Year 6.

In general, many pupils do not develop their numeracy and problem-solving skills well enough or apply their skills at an appropriate level in other areas of the curriculum. In Year 3, pupils begin to develop a sound understanding of number. For instance, most pupils understand the value of different coins and begin to combine them to make values up to £2.00. Older pupils find simple fractions of two-digit numbers and are beginning to relate these to equivalent percentages. By Year 6 pupils use their understanding of formal calculation methods to multiply and divide larger numbers with growing accuracy. However, overall, many pupils do not make effective progress in numeracy as provision does not build on their skills progressively.

Pupils' Welsh language speaking skills are developing appropriately across the school. Many gain confidence in holding simple conversations. They recognise the value of bilingualism and respond positively to learning the Welsh language. By Year 6, they use a range of language patterns effectively, such as when they describe the local environment.

In general, pupils develop their digital skills well throughout the school. They create increasingly sophisticated presentations related to class topics, including features such as hyperlinks, and short self-made videos. Older pupils are beginning to make progress in developing their coding skills, for instance when using programmable devices to create a digital compass.

Many pupils develop their creative skills appropriately throughout the school. For example, Year 3 and 4 pupils improve their performance skills when acting out the story of a local mythical creature. Older pupils create careful watercolour paintings to represent a Welsh folk tale or produce illustrations as part of their anti-bullying work. Most pupils across the school participate readily in activities that develop their physical skills successfully. For instance, they engage with enthusiasm and sustained effort in physical education sessions.

Well-being and attitudes to learning

Most pupils feel safe and valued in school. Nearly all pupils report that the school helps them to treat others fairly. They benefit from positive relationships with supportive staff and know who they can talk to if they are worried or upset. Most pupils demonstrate high levels of respect for each other and adults. As a result, behaviour in the classroom and around the school is good. Most pupils are aware of the importance of staying safe and have an appropriate understanding of keeping safe when online.

Most pupils have a secure understanding of how to keep healthy through eating a balanced diet and taking regular exercise. However, pupils do not always make healthy choices in the snacks and drinks that they bring to school. Most pupils demonstrate positive attitudes to outdoor physical activity, and many choose to engage in physical games led by their peers during break times. Most pupils enjoy

physical education (PE) sessions, developing their physical skills appropriately as they progress through the school.

Most pupils settle quickly into routines and are ready to learn at the beginning of lessons. They respect the efforts and contribution of others in class. Most pupils listen to their peers and respond to their thoughts and ideas with interest. Pupils take turns and support each other effectively when playing games and socialising during break times.

Many pupils have positive attitudes towards their learning. They work effectively in collaboration with their peers. For example, in Years 3 and 4, pupils work together to plan a drama performance retelling the story of a local mythical creature. They listen to each other well and overcome any difficulties through discussion and compromise to ensure that everyone is happy with their role.

Many pupils participate in a range of pupil voice groups confidently. A pupil group, focused on supporting positive behaviour and reducing bullying, is having a positive impact. Overall, many pupils feel that they are listened to and that they have valuable opportunities to make a difference to the life of the school. For instance, staff regularly encourage pupils to make simple decisions about their learning. During a few lessons and activities, pupils respond well to opportunities that they are provided with to improve their work. For example, they make simple improvements to their writing.

Many pupils have a sound understanding of their rights and responsibilities as ethical and informed citizens. Through planned activities and whole-school acts of worship, pupils demonstrate knowledge of the United Nation Convention on the Rights of the Child. This helps them to understand the need to look after those less fortunate than themselves.

Pupil attendance at the school is improving steadily. However, rates of absence remain too high particularly among pupils eligible for free school meals.

Teaching and learning experiences

The school has begun to explore a range of approaches to the planning and delivery of Curriculum for Wales. However, effective planning for the curriculum is at a very early stage and the school has not yet developed a clear overview of breadth and progression that meets the needs of pupils effectively. For example, plans that outline how each Area of Learning will be taught over time are not yet in place.

The school's provision for developing pupils' digital and Welsh language skills is appropriate. However, provision to develop pupils' reading, writing and numeracy skills has not been developed well enough. Staff provide regular opportunities for pupils to read and write. However, an effective whole-school approach to teaching these skills is not in place. As a result, provision is too varied and does not build systematically on what pupils already know and can already do.

Whole school planning for the development of pupils writing is underdeveloped. Teachers are beginning to have an overview of the types of text pupils are currently learning about. However, this work is incomplete and there is no long-term planning

in place. As a result, pupils do not write effectively in a wide enough range of contexts, and do not develop their writing skills as well as they could.

Leaders have recently introduced a new scheme of work for teaching maths. However, this has had limited success in improving teaching in this area and leaders are currently exploring other options. This has left the school without a clear strategy for teaching numeracy across each class. As a result, pupils are not given enough challenge, often repeating work already covered in previous year groups.

Many staff plan topics that engage the interests of pupils successfully. For example, within the topic 'Lights, Camera, Action', Year 4 and Year 5 pupils enjoy turning their classroom into a recording studio. The school demonstrates a commitment to celebrating Welsh heritage and culture suitably and staff provide stimulating activities that promote pupils' interest in the immediate locality of Mochdre. For example, pupils express their feelings effectively when creating water colour paintings of well-known local landmarks.

The school is beginning to use the outdoor environment to enhance learning experiences through, for example, regular gardening sessions and an outdoor course with an external provider. However, overall, the school's provision for learning outdoors is underdeveloped. Provision for pupils' personal and social education is effective and they are learning to understand their own well-being and that of others successfully. Teachers use a few international days to enhance learning in this area of the curriculum effectively. For example, pupils discuss the impact of World Mental Health Day with maturity and are learning a range of strategies to help them understand their feelings.

Nearly all staff develop caring and productive working relationships with pupils. They encourage respect and courtesy, which contributes well to pupils' positive behaviour and involvement in their learning.

Many teachers share learning objectives suitably and have appropriate subject knowledge. Where teaching is at its strongest, careful questioning encourages pupils to develop their thinking successfully. Many teachers plan tasks that help pupils make connections with previous learning. However, too often, they do not challenge pupils well enough to enable them to make effective progress. Many teachers use resources appropriately to enhance pupils' learning. For example, they provide a range of maps of Mochdre to support pupils' understanding of how Mochdre has changed over time.

Teachers are beginning to assess pupil progress suitably and use this information to target specific individuals and groups, for example those pupils who are at risk of underachievement. However, these procedures are too varied across the school and as a result the impact on pupil progress is limited. A few teachers provide pupils with effective feedback about their learning, and this supports pupils to understand what they need to do to improve successfully. For example, in Year 6, teaching provides opportunities for pupils to help each other identify areas to improve their work successfully. However, across the school, feedback does not systematically support pupils to understand their strengths and areas for improvement well enough.

Care, support and guidance

The school is a welcoming, caring community that supports the emotional and social needs of pupils effectively. Staff place pupil well-being high on their agenda and work successfully to support pupils through beneficial whole-school strategies. A strength of the school is its inclusive ethos. For example, pupils who arrive at school late are offered breakfast and time in the Dark Den, if needed, before joining their peers for lessons.

The school has introduced a new approach to supporting positive behaviour and as a result most pupils behave well. This work is enhanced through regular well-being sessions where pupils take part in a range of beneficial activities such as cooking. Staff monitor the progress of all pupils and provide extra support suitably when needed. Leaders organise pupil progress meetings to gather information and assess pupil needs. However, these meetings do not identify actions or next steps for pupils sharply enough. A range of focused interventions are in place for pupils identified as needing extra help. However, the impact of this work is not monitored well enough to measure its impact on pupil progress.

The school's provision to identify and support pupils with ALN is at an early stage of development. The recently appointed additional learning needs co-ordinator (ALNCO) and headteacher have introduced a suitable structure to identify and track the progress of pupils with ALN. Communication with parents of pupils with ALN is effective. The ALNCO provides staff with useful strategies to support pupils with a wide range of learning needs. Overall, staff use this information appropriately when working with individual pupils. However, this work is not yet embedded and a majority of pupils with ALN do not make sufficient progress towards their individual targets.

Opportunities for pupils to have an active role as leaders in the school are suitable. For example, the school council has introduced worry boxes to all classes. This provides pupils with an alternative way to share worries with a member of staff. However, overall pupil leadership groups are underdeveloped.

Opportunities for pupils to develop their understanding of equality and diversity are appropriate. For instance, pupils learn about the work of influential people such as Malala Yousafzai. Teachers provide suitable opportunities to support pupils' understanding of how disabilities impact people's lives and they are encouraged to consider a world where genders are equal.

The school promotes pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development appropriately. School assemblies support pupils to develop a sense of belonging and positive moral standards. Staff provide useful opportunities for pupils to develop their understanding of religion. For example, Year 5 pupils create interesting presentations on a religion of their choice. However, opportunities to learn from visiting places in the local community or attending after-school activities are limited.

The school has a suitable culture of safeguarding. Leaders ensure that there are effective policies and procedures in place, which all staff follow to ensure the safety of learners and staff. The school curriculum supports pupils' understanding of how to keep themselves safe. For instance, most pupils have a suitable understanding of how to stay safe online.

The school has developed a range of approaches and procedures for monitoring attendance and for encouraging pupils to attend school. For instance, staff support pupils to take on responsibilities such as caring for the school rabbits. As a result, rates of attendance are slowly beginning to rise. However, overall, these procedures are not having sufficient impact on improving attendance which remains too low. Pupils eligible for free school meals continue to have a significantly higher rate of absence compared to other pupils.

Leadership and management

The headteacher ensures that the well-being of pupils and staff is a central focus of the federation's work. This has resulted in staff maintaining a positive team ethos during a period of significant challenge. The headteacher models and promotes professional values and behaviours that contribute positively to creating an environment where staff feel supported and valued. She promotes a caring, inclusive climate where most pupils feel happy and safe in school.

Long term staff absences have had a significant impact on the effectiveness of leadership and provision across the school. Currently, leaders do not show the capacity to secure the necessary improvements. Leaders are at an early stage of developing a culture of mutual support and collaboration across the schools in the federation.

The headteacher has a clear vision for the federation of Mochdre schools. This is based on pupils developing a passion for learning and the skills needed for life-long learning. However, aspects of the vision are at an early stage of being implemented and reflected throughout the school. For instance, provision for the progression of pupils' skills is limited.

Leaders have identified many areas for improvement accurately such as numeracy skills, writing and assessment. However, over time, leadership at all levels has not identified additional important areas that require significant improvement such as the quality of teaching. The school's track record of making improvements is not strong enough. For example, a majority of areas identified for development during the school's previous Estyn inspection remain weak.

Leaders undertake a few monitoring activities such as learning walks and looking at pupils' work. However, monitoring activity does not focus well enough on the quality of teaching or pupils' progress. As a result, areas identified for development are too general and not specific enough to support improvement effectively. Improvement work does not focus well enough on pupils' skill progression in important areas such as numeracy and literacy.

Across the federation, roles and responsibilities are at an early stage of development. For example, leaders have allocated specific curriculum responsibilities to teaching staff. However, time is not allocated effectively to enable these roles to be developed or to have any meaningful impact on improving the curriculum.

The governing body are supportive of the federation and its place in the wider community. Governors demonstrate a keen interest in the life of the school and are enthusiastic about what the school is trying to achieve. However, they do not have a

sound understanding of the progress pupils make or the quality of the learning experiences across the federation. This limits their capacity to act as a critical friend to the school. Governors promote healthy eating and drinking suitably. They know that water is provided in school and that staff encourage pupils to eat healthy snacks. However, a few pupils do not make healthy choices in the snacks and drinks that they bring to school.

The federation has placed a strong emphasis on developing the Welsh language and this has resulted in pupils developing their skills appropriately in this area. However, the federation does not address other national priorities well enough. For example, developments in response to Curriculum for Wales are too slow and the school is at an early stage of implementing ALN reform.

A recent success of the federation's professional learning programme for staff has been the training to develop the quality of learning environments. This training has had a positive impact on the quality of the learning environments across the federation. However, in general, professional learning opportunities for staff are not planned strategically enough and are too reactive. They do not focus well enough on improving the quality of teaching.

Leaders do not ensure that the performance of all staff is reviewed effectively. For example, teaching staff do not receive performance review in a timely manner. Where performance review is in place, targets are often too general to support improvement and do not focus well enough on outcomes for pupils. For example, success criteria focus on actions rather than outcomes. Therefore, targets can be achieved without considering the impact on pupils.

Overall, school leaders develop productive relationships with parents, particularly those who have children with ALN. However, a minority of parents feel that communication could be improved including communication about their child's progress. Leaders place a strong focus on improving attendance and attendance rates are slowly beginning to improve. However, strategies in place are not having a great enough impact, and rates of attendance remain too low.

Evidence base of the report

Before an inspection, inspectors:

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

During an inspection, inspectors normally:

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

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

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

Copies of the report

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

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

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

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