



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

A report on

Ysgol Hen Felin

**Gelligaled Park
Ystrad
Rhondda
RCT
CF41 7SZ**

Date of inspection: December 2023

by

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

About Ysgol Hen Felin

Name of provider	Ysgol Hen Felin
Local authority	Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council
Language of the provider	English
Type of school	Maintained Special
Religious character	
Number of pupils on roll	233
Pupils of statutory school age	198
Number in nursery classes	7
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 Maintained Special is 46.8%)	57.2%
Percentage of pupils identified as having additional learning needs (a) (The national percentage of pupils identified as having an additional learning need in Maintained Special is 100.0%)	100.0%
Percentage of pupils who speak Welsh at home	0%
Percentage of pupils with English as an additional language	0.86%
Date of headteacher appointment	01/01/2018
Date of previous Estyn inspection (if applicable)	02/02/2015
Start date of inspection	11/12/2023
<p>Ysgol Hen Felin is a day, community special school situated in of Rhondda Cynon Taf.</p> <p>It provides for 233 pupils aged from 3 to 19, nearly all with statements of special educational needs, individual development plans (IDPs) or equivalent. Pupils' needs include, severe learning difficulties (SLD), profound and multiple learning difficulties (PMLD), autistic spectrum disorders (ASD) or visual impairment (VI).</p> <p>Pupils are taught in 22 classes. There are 22 full time teachers and 75 learning support assistants.</p> <p>The headteacher was appointed in January 2018.</p>	

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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 Hen Felin is a happy school where pupils feel safe and secure. Staff develop highly effective relationships with pupils, based on a strong understanding of their individual needs. A strong safeguarding culture underpins all aspects of the school's work.

Nearly all pupils make strong progress towards their individual targets during their time at the school. Nearly all pupils make positive progress in developing their communication, digital and physical skills. They gain relevant accreditation or qualifications and progress to appropriate placements when they leave the school. Nearly all pupils demonstrate positive behaviour and attitudes to their learning.

Pupils are at the heart of school life. They are involved in important decision making, but also make decisions about their school experiences throughout the school day. For example, the well-established pupil voice groups, such as the 'criw cymraeg', provide pupils with beneficial opportunities to influence the work of the school.

A notable strength of the school is the wide range of internal interventions to support pupil well-being and skills development, for example, through links with communication specialists, physiotherapy, behaviour and well-being teams.

Staff use information gathered through multidisciplinary working effectively to plan relevant learning experiences which engage pupils successfully. The curriculum offer is broad and meets the needs of pupils well as they move through the school. Moving from developing key communication skills, to participating in work experience placements in the community.

The school learning environment is bright, welcoming and well-maintained. For example, outdoor play areas have a range of resources which support pupils to develop their social, communication and physical skills successfully. However, over time, the number of pupils at the school has increased and a few classes are crowded.

Leaders have established highly effective monitoring processes to oversee the work of the school. They have developed a dedicated team of staff, who collaborate successfully to move the school forward. Nearly all staff have a strong understanding of their role and participate meaningfully in school self-evaluation and improvement planning.

Recommendations

- R1 Work with the local authority to ensure that learning environments within the school can accommodate the number and needs of the pupils effectively

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 its work in relation to the work of the well-being centre and the distributed leadership approach, for dissemination on Estyn's website.

Main evaluation

Learning

At Ysgol Hen Felin, most pupils make strong progress in their learning and development from their starting points. Nearly all pupils successfully attain the short-term targets in their individual education plans.

Over time, nearly all pupils become increasingly competent in using their preferred approaches to communication to express their needs, feelings and choices or to answer teachers' questions. For example, they communicate well through gestures, sounds, communication boards, speech or using technology. Most pupils listen well, engage positively with staff and their peers and interact well with visitors. A few pupils develop exceptional oracy skills, for example when taking orders and delivering items at the school café or sharing a joke with their teacher.

Most pupils develop their reading skills well from their starting points and in line with their abilities. For example, they successfully segment and blend sounds to spell or read unfamiliar words, extract information from texts with support, or demonstrate their comprehension skills by sharing their opinions on the texts they read. A few pupils read well independently, and a few read aloud confidently, coping well with unfamiliar words or contexts, for example when narrating the Christmas play.

Most pupils improve their writing skills well over time. Pupils start with mark-making, overwriting or writing single words with support. A minority of pupils progress well towards independent writing. For example, they write for a range of purposes, such as shopping lists, recipes or noting key facts. In line with their abilities, a minority of pupils write extended texts successfully, for example when sharing their knowledge of facts about brown bears in America.

Many pupils recognise basic Welsh words such as colours, numbers and days of the week securely. They sing familiar songs confidently in Welsh and respond accurately to basic questions from their teachers. A few pupils say or repeat short phrases or sentences in Welsh in everyday contexts successfully.

Most pupils make strong progress in developing their numeracy skills during their time at the school. They progress well from identifying single numbers or sorting shapes to counting and developing their number skills in real-life contexts. For example, they recognise coins, sequence activities, estimate or tell the time. A few

older pupils record money taken in the café or successfully attain entry-level accreditations in money management.

Nearly all pupils make sound progress against their targeted digital skills. For example, pupils use technology competently to select items or make choices. They use the interactive whiteboard or software applications where appropriate to communicate and participate in activities. For example, pupils independently create music using an interactive piano. Older pupils make secure progress in developing the skills to use technology independently, for example when closing applications, shutting down and charging laptops at the end of a session.

Nearly all pupils develop their physical, gross and fine motor skills well through a variety of relevant and well-planned learning activities. For example, during hydrotherapy, they practise moving their limbs or objects in the pool with control. They develop their hand-eye coordination and thinking skills successfully during throwing practice, completing puzzles or using pincers to pick different-sized pom poms.

Generally, pupils develop their social skills well. From their individual starting points, they progress well to recognise and respond to facial expressions. They learn to take turns and support others sensitively in class.

Most pupils develop their independence skills appropriately over time, for example by following and settling quickly into routine tasks, moving around the classroom or using equipment safely. Older pupils benefit from a wide range of valuable provision to develop their independence and prepare them for their future lives. For example, nearly all participate in Duke of Edinburgh activities or work experience opportunities. This includes hairdressing, or in care homes or charities. They complete a range of meaningful courses relevant to further training or the workplace, such as personal safety or environmental awareness.

By the time they leave the school, nearly all learners complete a range of relevant external accreditations, including entry-level essential skills qualifications in literacy and numeracy. Over the last three years, almost all school leavers progressed to appropriate and beneficial destinations. For example, in 2023, many pupils progressed to further education or voluntary work placements.

Well-being and attitudes to learning

Pupils at Ysgol Hen Felin are happy to come to school. They arrive excited to see their peers and the staff who support them. Nearly all pupils feel safe at school.

Most pupils attend well and nearly all pupils exhibit a high standard of behaviour. During their time at Hen Felin and, in line with their ability, nearly all pupils make positive improvements in their behaviour and most develop strong self-regulation skills. Nearly all pupils understand the school rules and expectations, for example through well-established class routines. This means they behave positively, showing an admirable level of care and sensitivity when interacting with their peers.

Pupils play an active role in the life of Ysgol Hen Felin. Their participation, contribution and engagement are strengths of the school, for example through the

work of the eco committee, school council, criw cymraeg and digital champions. The presence of pupils at staff appointments means their views and opinions are pivotal to decision making at the school.

Many pupils demonstrate resilience when engaging in new activities. For example, the school council made a video to alleviate the anxiety of peers when the school introduced its new on-site hair cutting programme. In addition, the school council produced a video explaining the new curriculum for Wales. It used clear language and meaningful vocabulary to describe the changes at the school.

The nurturing ethos, along with the clear lines of support, ensures that nearly all pupils know who to go to if they have a problem. Pupils are confident that if they have concerns, these are listened to and addressed effectively. In line with their needs and abilities, pupils learn about ways to keep themselves safe online or in the community. For example, pupils practise road safety skills within the school before transferring these to real life contexts in the community.

A strong feature is that pupils of all ages develop well as enterprising members of the school community. For example, they host fund raising events to raise money for school initiatives and work in the school café which serves staff and visitors.

Nearly all pupils enjoy whole school celebrations. For example, during the Christmas concerts, pupils perform, sing and sign for parents and families. Nearly all pupils engage in a wide range of purposeful activities to develop their understanding of their role in the local community. Recently, pupils supported a local primary school to rebuild their damaged garden. Through activities such as these, pupils develop a strong understanding of rights and learn how to treat others fairly and with respect.

Nearly all pupils develop highly positive attitudes to learning. They engage happily in lessons and settle into activities well. Throughout the school day, in line with their abilities, pupils use staff feedback effectively to redirect and evaluate their learning, for example using the 'core four' characters: independent Ian, respectful Rex, resourceful Roxy and well-being Wanda.

Nearly all pupils engage purposefully in a range of learning experiences, both in and out of the classroom. These include a wide range of activities in the community such as swimming lessons and cycling at the local leisure centre.

Nearly all pupils are aware of the importance of eating and drinking healthily. They enjoy a range of physical activities such as regular PE and trampolining sessions. Generally, pupils enjoy the lunch and playtime activities, such as ball games and using outdoor gym equipment. Pupils and families benefit from holiday clubs, residential adventure trips, after-school clubs and events in the local community, for example a recent family fun day pumpkin picking to celebrate Halloween.

Teaching and learning experiences

Ysgol Hen Felin has developed a broad and balanced curriculum that is firmly embedded across the school. Curriculum plans are well considered and map progression in skills carefully. Teachers plan effective areas of learning and

experience, through focus weeks across the year. The school ensures that therapeutic approaches are threaded skilfully into its curriculum.

The school successfully promotes reading across the curriculum, with a strong focus on reading for pleasure. 'Reading huts' and a 'reading vending machine' act as libraries, with a range of high-quality books that ignite the pupils' curiosity. Within the school grounds a story trail of 'The Stick Man' takes pupils on a journey of purposeful and exciting story related activities. The school grounds are used to further support the curriculum, with learning stations and communication boards. For example, the 'numeracy shack', 'alphabet hunt' and the 'body percussion station' enhance provision for literacy, numeracy and the expressive arts.

The curriculum evolves and broadens over time to meet the needs, interests, and abilities of pupils. In partnership with a local college, the school provides a range of inclusive pathways to prepare pupils for their future lives. These pathways include opportunities for pupils to develop their practical and vocational skills, such as carpentry, painting and decorating and construction. Older pupils access work experience within the local community, including sports coaching at a local primary school. Within the school setting pupils gain further work-related experience in the onsite café.

In nearly all lessons, teachers demonstrate a high level of skill in meeting the needs of pupils. Teachers use a range of specialist teaching strategies to support complex learning needs. For example, their use of total communication approaches is consistently high across the school. Where appropriate they focus suitably on Welsh language skills.

Staff plan lessons with a wide range of engaging activities and resources. Teachers plan effectively for skills progression, using IEPs to underpin this. Feedback records the level of support pupils need to complete tasks, and this allows staff to monitor pupils' progress carefully. Teachers provide specialist support for visually impaired pupils, for example using braille to enhance learning and engagement.

Teachers and support staff's use of questioning skilfully supports pupils' communication, engagement, understanding and learning. For example, they offer choices using symbols and single words for the most complex pupils. Teachers' expert questioning helps older pupils to respond positively and recall their prior learning experiences successfully.

Teachers use a range of assessment strategies effectively, for example using the 'core four' to engage pupils and encourage them to reflect on their learning. Where feedback is most effective, it identifies what has gone well in pupils' work and their next steps in learning. In a few cases, this feedback is not clear enough.

Support staff develop exemplary relationships with pupils, which contributes successfully to pupils' positive behaviour and learning across the school. They know their pupils very well and know how best to support them. For example, staff build strong and trusting relationships, which support pupils with profound and multiple learning difficulties particularly well to develop their independence.

Care, support and guidance

The school provides a safe and nurturing learning environment where pupils flourish. Pupils demonstrate a strong sense of compassion, care and tolerance towards each other. This is a strength of the school.

Pupils thrive at the school as a result of the consistent interventions and integrated therapeutic approaches. Speech and physiotherapy services have been remodelled well to support the needs of pupils. The provision of full-time therapies at the school is a strength. As a result, pupils and staff benefit from the increased access to support and advice throughout the week.

All pupils have a communication target set in collaboration between the speech and language therapist and teacher. Targets are regularly reviewed and updated for the termly IEP meetings. Speech and language therapists provide worthwhile training and support to staff. As a result, there is a highly trained workforce on site to support the needs of pupils.

Physiotherapy support is targeted well to support individual pupil needs. In addition, the physio service supports the work of the daily walk, PE and hydrotherapy sessions resulting in a joined up service provided across the school. The physical movement programme adds additional strength to this area and benefits pupils' increased range of mobility experiences well. As a result, pupils have access to important provisions to support and develop their communication and mobility needs effectively.

There is a wide range of targeted intervention support available. These interventions are class based and are integral to the delivery of the curriculum. For example, a social and emotional approach strongly supports the identification and support for the emotional needs of pupils. As a result, this strengthens the staff's understanding of pupils' individual needs and develops effective approaches to address the underlying cause successfully. Intervention work is a notable strength of the school.

There is a robust, well-established system in place to track and monitor pupils' progress towards meeting their IEP targets. Detailed analysis of the data is purposefully used to inform the target setting process. As a result, leaders and staff have an accurate understanding of the areas for development for groups and individual pupils. The whole-school provision map is comprehensive and provides a robust overview of all provision for each pupil across the school.

The reporting, monitoring and tracking of behaviour incidents are highly effective. Incidents are analysed well to inform support and interventions for pupils, and at a whole school level. The use of physical interventions has been consistently low over the last few years. Similarly, processes for the tracking and monitoring of attendance are robust.

The school provides a wide range of opportunities across the curriculum for pupils to experience their heritage and culture, both locally and in the wider community. The school has forged effective partnership working arrangements and strong links with the community. These have been further strengthened with the introduction of the school community and partnership co-ordinator role.

Provision across the school to ensure equity of opportunities and experiences for all pupils is strong. There are a wide variety of approaches available to support pupils and their families such as the food bank, support in applications for funding and arrangements with local charities. As a result, pupils access all aspects of the curriculum regardless of family situations.

Opportunities for pupils to contribute meaningfully to the life of the school are strong. Pupils are central to the planning and delivery of the curriculum offer. Most pupils actively engage with opportunities to share their ideas for improvement and what is working well.

The provision of effective support, advice and guidance for future destinations is robust. The school works well with the careers adviser to ensure that pupils' post-school destinations are appropriate to their needs and expectations. The establishment of the off-site college provision for older secondary aged pupils is a highly beneficial provision to support the transition of pupils towards post school destinations. This is a strong feature, providing effective opportunities for pupils. In addition, this supports parents well when considering with their child their post school destinations.

Partnership working is soundly embedded across the school. All partnerships links are recorded and the purpose of each is identified. For example, working with the Rhondda Heritage Park, pupils at Key Stages 2 and 3 took part in a project that led to an exhibition of their work at the Heritage park. 'Lucy's Adventure' was based on an enterprise project to create a book based on mining in the Rhondda. This led to a digital resource, shared with local primary school children. As a result, pupils develop a strong understanding of their local community and its history.

The school employs a pastoral team of staff to deliver the intimate care needs of pupils. This approach limits interruption to the planned delivery of lessons and learning time. It supports the dignity of pupils by having a minimum number of staff involved in their intimate care arrangements. In addition, these staff are trained in all safeguarding procedures and are a key source of information in providing updates on any concerns relating to individual pupils.

The school has a strong safeguarding culture which underpins the curriculum and work of staff across the school. There are robust systems in place to monitor and track all safeguarding concerns. Staff and governors have regular safeguarding training and are fully aware of their roles and responsibilities.

Leadership and management

Ysgol Hen Felin is a happy school where staff work and learn together to achieve the school mission to 'promote excellence and enrich lives'. Leaders have a strong vision for the school underpinned by the core values of honesty, integrity and nurture. This vision is well understood and shared by the wider staff team who place pupils at the heart of their work.

The headteacher provides highly effective leadership, which directs the school successfully and systematically. He has established clear roles and responsibilities across the school, setting high expectations for pupils and staff alike. He is well

supported by the wider leadership team; they collaborate effectively with the aim of continuous improvement.

There is a well-established culture of distributed leadership at the school. Staff know what is expected of them, and how they contribute to aspects of continued school improvement and the learning of pupils. Leaders have developed a highly effective team of dedicated staff.

Leaders' work in addressing national priorities is effective. The school's planning for Curriculum for Wales is progressing well and the whole-school approach to developing pupils' skills is having a positive impact on learning. Leaders have a clear vision for the curriculum. This is pupil centred and guided by the school's mission statement. They have established effective working groups to develop the curriculum offer to continue to meet the needs of pupils as they progress through the school. As a result, the curriculum offer at the school is highly effective and meets the diverse needs of pupils.

School self-evaluation is the driving force of school improvement. Leaders promote the ethos of 'better never stops'. The school has a clear and well-structured calendar of monitoring activities to gain first-hand evidence about the quality of teaching and learning. School self-evaluation processes are strong and draw on feedback from a wide range of stakeholders. Staff have a clear understanding of their part in evaluating provision. As a result, leaders develop a comprehensive understanding of the strengths and areas for development of the work of the school.

Leaders have a strong track record of making sustainable improvements at the school. For example, in strengthening the school well-being offer. Leaders develop improvement plans that link well to school and national priorities and ensure that progress is closely monitored. Nearly all staff understand and articulate clearly their role in achieving the school improvement priorities. This is a strength of the school.

All staff benefit from performance management which challenges them, holds them to account and supports them to develop. Staff benefit from a valuable range of professional learning opportunities. This includes visits to other schools to observe best practice, attending training courses and participating in forums. Leaders carefully review the effectiveness and impact of these opportunities, for example evaluating the impact of literacy training through learning walks. They then use this information to inform self-evaluation and plan future professional learning experiences for the staff team.

Leaders carefully track a range of important data and performance indicators. For example, incidences of behaviour, IEP target achievement and attendance. They respond swiftly where required, for example by providing targeted support for non-attenders.

The learning environment is well-maintained, bright and welcoming. There are a range of important and engaging resources at the school to engage pupils and meet their additional needs. Leaders allocate resources effectively to meet the needs of pupils and respond to changes swiftly. For example, there has been a significant investment in the outside play areas, which are engaging and safe, and meet the communication needs of pupils well. However, due to the significant increase in the

number of pupils at the school, the range of learning experiences for pupils is limited by the environment. For example, areas such as the school cookery room and ICT suite have been repurposed. Further, a few learning environments are crowded.

Leaders have established a strong safeguarding culture and respond swiftly and sensitively to the changing needs of pupils. All staff and governors are clear about their responsibilities in safeguarding pupils and understand the processes in place thoroughly. Leaders place the well-being of pupils and their safeguarding at the heart of their work. The school promotes healthy eating and drinking successfully.

The school governing body provides high levels of support and challenge for leaders. Governors know and understand the school's priorities for improvement well. They benefit from regular visits to the school and have clear roles and responsibilities. Leaders provide governors with a range of beneficial training, including safeguarding. Leaders use the skills of governors purposefully to provide pupils with an increased range of learning experiences, for example through the establishment of a disability triathlon. The financial planning arrangements at the school are robust.

Staff at all levels are valued, and leaders place a high importance on their well-being. As a result, staff believe that leaders are invested in their personal development, as well as the development of pupils.

Leaders have developed highly positive relationships with parents and the wider school community. They share pupil achievements and new school initiatives, for example using social media. Support and communication with parents such as the onsite weekly parents' meetings, training events, newsletters and reports about their child's progress are robust. The well-being centre is an invaluable strength of the school's provision. This is a strategic approach to widen community and family engagement at the school through a whole-school approach. This significantly improves the working relationships with families and the approaches that will best support their child during their time at the school. For example, parents have the opportunity to meet weekly and there are regular focused training events, such as the delivery of signing training. These are safe spaces for parents to meet and discuss with professionals any areas of concern.

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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