



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

A report on

Ysgol Gymraeg Cwm Derwen

**Beech Grove
Oakdale
Blackwood
NP12 0JL**

Date of inspection: November 2023

by

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

This report is also available in Welsh

About Ysgol Gymraeg Cwm Derwen

Name of provider	Ysgol Gymraeg Cwm Derwen
Local authority	Caerphilly County Borough Council
Language of the provider	Welsh
Type of school	Primary
Religious character	
Number of pupils on roll	203
Pupils of statutory school age	150
Number in nursery classes (if applicable)	22
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>	12.1%
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>	14.7%
Percentage of statutory school age pupils who speak Welsh at home	0.0%
Percentage of statutory school age pupils with English as an additional language	0.0%
Date of headteacher appointment	01/06/2013
Date of previous Estyn inspection (if applicable)	01/06/2015
Start date of inspection	06/11/2023

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

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

Overview

Ysgol Gymraeg Cwm Derwen is an inclusive school that promotes a positive environment and ethos. Pupils enjoy learning and are keen to please during lessons and activities. This is because of the strong working relationships with their teachers and other members of staff. The specialist resource base and its pupils play an important part in the school's daily life.

Learning is successful where teaching and feedback to pupils are purposeful and challenge them to perform at their best. This helps many pupils to make good progress in developing their listening, speaking, reading and digital skills. They also develop suitable extended writing skills and their numeracy across the curriculum is satisfactory. However, the quality of teaching and learning is not consistently good across the school.

Staff provide support and care for pupils conscientiously. Their shared philosophy encourages pupils to take responsibility for their own well-being and behaviour well. This contributes successfully to their positive attitudes to learning and their willingness to persevere with tasks. The school encourages pupils to trust their peers and staff while developing respect and courtesy towards the feelings of others.

Staff use the accommodation productively to target pupils' needs purposefully and, as a result, planning of activities to promote pupils' learning is effective. However, provision of outdoor learning experiences is not as effective, particularly for the youngest pupils. Leaders keep in close contact with the school's wider community and build on the positive relationship with most parents and carers.

Leaders evaluate the school's work to plan for improvements thoroughly. The headteacher provides purposeful leadership and is determined to succeed for the benefit of pupils and the community. The senior management team, staff and governors share her vision successfully. They work together diligently to ensure that the school is fully inclusive and promotes good learning opportunities. The headteacher shares responsibilities effectively among staff and provides beneficial opportunities for professional learning. This contributes to a positive whole-school ethos, where staff and pupils feel valued for their contributions to school life.

Recommendations

- R1 Ensure consistency in teaching practices across the school
- R2 Plan jointly to improve pupils' numeracy and extended writing skills
- R3 Improve the quality and provision of outdoor learning experiences, particularly for the youngest pupils

What happens next

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

Main findings

Learning

On entry to the school, many pupils' skills are lower than expected for their age. Many pupils achieve well across all areas of the curriculum and many make effective progress in their speaking, listening, reading and digital skills.

Most pupils with additional learning needs achieve effectively and pupils in the specialist resource base make good progress in their learning. Across the school, pupils who need additional support take advantage of all aspects of the curriculum successfully and make purposeful progress from their starting points.

Many pupils' listening and speaking skills develop quickly. As they move from the nursery class to Year 2, they gain confidence well and answer questions sensibly while discussing tasks with their peers. For example, pupils in the reception class express their feelings clearly in the home area while mixing magic medicine. From Year 3 onwards, pupils make good progress and develop a wider vocabulary in both Welsh and English. They listen well to each other and take part in perceptive discussions, such as reflecting on the development of Welsh education in the valleys. Many pupils in the learning resource centre develop beneficial speaking and listening skills to take part in a wide range of interesting and stimulating activities, such as decorating the project wall with the adventures of Guy Fawkes.

Many pupils make effective progress in developing their reading skills. Many of the youngest pupils learn letter sounds quickly and, by Year 2, many make sound progress. They make attempts at unfamiliar words by using a variety of phonic strategies. By Year 6, many are competent readers and are well-equipped to tackle a variety of different texts. For example, they discuss the features of schools in the past and compare them eloquently with facilities in schools today.

On the whole, many pupils make effective progress in their writing considering their starting points. By Year 2, a majority of pupils begin to write appropriately and use basic punctuation and grammar. As pupils progress from Year 3 to Year 6, many write effectively in different writing styles. For example, Year 5 pupils describe their self-portraits appropriately. A majority of older pupils edit their work suitably and use more sophisticated vocabulary and punctuation to improve their final drafts. However, pupils do not extend their writing effectively enough to reflect their true ability when writing across the curriculum.

By Year 2, many pupils use mathematical principles and concepts effectively. They use numbers confidently and gather and record information and results in simple tables and graphs. For example, they create bar charts and graphs on how to

advertise recycling in the community. They also experiment with volume by filling and emptying different-sized boxes with water and soil. From Year 3 to Year 6, many pupils show sound mathematical skills. Older pupils develop effective strategies to round-up and compare decimals. They use data appropriately and present it effectively in various forms. For example, many pupils use line and scatter graphs purposefully to record the temperature in Antarctica and their lung capacity. However, across the school, most pupils do not apply their numeracy skills regularly enough in real-life situations.

Many pupils have good digital skills and use them across the curriculum successfully. For example, many younger pupils program electronic robots to move around a course effectively. Most older pupils handle text effectively, create fact files on famous world leaders and prepare presentations and animations on the history of the school. Many create and use simple databases and spreadsheets well.

Most pupils develop their artistic and creative skills successfully. The youngest pupils create art and role-play in a wide range of contexts. For example, Year 1 pupils use a menu to order food and drink in the role-play café. Most pupils in the specialist resource base also experiment and develop their creative talents by building different structures with blocks.

Well-being and attitudes to learning

Most pupils show pride in and respect for their school. They feel safe within its inclusive and familial ethos, which is an integral part of the vision of the headteacher and staff. Through shared values and morals, pupils feel safe and know whom to approach should anything worry them. Most pupils appreciate that adults respect them, which contributes firmly to developing a close working relationship based on respect and trust.

Most pupils are polite and respectful as they move around the school. Many behave well in the classrooms without encouragement from adults and, on the whole, they are caring towards each other. Nearly all pupils also have a sound awareness of how to keep themselves and others safe online. Pupils' attendance is good and is higher than the national average.

Most pupils are proud that adults listen to their views and consider them in decisions that affect them. Nearly all pupils, including those with additional learning needs, are willing to undertake leadership roles and responsibilities and play a full part in the life and work of the school. Pupils who are members of various committees, such as the eco committee, the school council, the Welsh Language Chartists and the Digital Learners make effective contributions to the school's day-to-day life. For example, members of the Digital Learners groups have created a film on keeping themselves safe online to teach parents and carers about the dangers associated with using the internet. The Welsh Language Chartists also reward pupils who use the Welsh language regularly on the school playground.

Most pupils across the school have positive attitudes to learning. They listen well to teachers' instructions and concentrate diligently on their work during lessons. Many are enthusiastic learners who apply themselves confidently to new experiences. Most

also work conscientiously with their friends and adults and support each other voluntarily.

Many pupils concentrate regularly for extended periods. They treat their work with respect, resilience and motivation in what they learn. They work with their peers in pairs or groups to solve problems without support from adults, for example as they use 'three before me' strategies. As a result, most develop as independent learners. Many discuss their work confidently and are willing to listen to the views and ideas of others effectively.

Most pupils mature to be healthy and confident individuals and understand how to make the right choices in relation to diet and physical exercise. For example, in Year 5, pupils plan a balanced diet effectively which includes fruit, vegetables, carbohydrates, proteins, dairy products and fats. Across the school, most pupils value the importance of regular exercise. They enjoy taking part in fitness lessons and activities to develop their physical skills, such as gymnastics sessions.

Most pupils take advantage of opportunities to work together in the school's extra-curricular well-being activities, such as the Cooking Club. Pupils also make effective use of the well-being areas and calm corners to promote their emotional health effectively. As a result, most pupils are aware of how to make wise decisions to care for their mental health. A good example of this is the use of colour monsters that coincide with their emotions at the start of the day.

Most pupils develop a good understanding of the importance of moral citizenship through their awareness of the values that are promoted by the school. Older pupils are completely aware of the importance of equality and inclusion as part of their work on diversity and children's rights. Most pupils learn about values to support others successfully and are keen to raise money for local and national charities. For example, they have raised a significant amount of money for children in need through a number of practical activities, such as wearing red clothes. This increases their awareness of the importance of their contributions to creating a caring society.

Teaching and learning experiences

Teachers plan a range of engaging experiences, in line with the Curriculum for Wales, which motivate many pupils to make good progress from their starting points. Planning experiences builds systematically on pupils' knowledge and understanding and promotes their independent learning purposefully.

On the whole, teachers work together productively to develop an interesting curriculum that supports pupils to achieve well. Across the school, the pupils' local area or *cynefin* is given prominent attention, such as the Year 3 and 4 studies of the history of the area's coalmines. Year 1 and 2 pupils are also given valuable experiences when visiting an owl sanctuary. Teachers at the learning resource centre plan authentic and effective learning experiences that target pupils' needs successfully.

Most teachers encourage pupils to contribute their views sensibly about what they would like to learn by completing mind maps together at the beginning of a theme. They pay attention to pupils' suggestions intelligently when planning across the

curriculum. They welcome these views and use them purposefully as part of pupils' learning experiences. For example, they visit a coal museum following the class's suggestions. As a result, pupils share their experiences well with others as their learning is relevant to their interests.

On the whole, teaching is good across the school. Overall, teachers challenge pupils to produce their best work in lessons. However, the level of challenge for pupils varies from one class to the next and is not consistent across the school.

Pupils are given comprehensive experiences to develop their listening, speaking, reading and digital competence skills. For example, there are interesting opportunities available for pupils in the nursery class to discuss and mix colours while painting fireworks. Year 6 pupils also create an animation to reflect the geographical locations of the Welsh-medium schools in the area. Teachers ensure that there are suitable arrangements to develop pupils' extended writing and numeracy skills. However, they do not plan jointly wholly effectively and, as a result, pupils do not make enough progress in applying these skills across the curriculum.

Provision for personal and social education develops pupils' understanding of their well-being and identity successfully. The curriculum gives good consideration to global events and the diversity of the world. For example, pupils in Years 1 and 2 hold whole-school assemblies on diversity and the school's older pupils study natural disasters across the world. Planning also reflects the cultural heritage of Wales and Welshness successfully and all staff promote the advantages of learning Welsh purposefully.

The professional relationship between staff and pupils is strong. Staff know their pupils well. They provide activities that are tailored purposefully to meet pupils' needs, including those who need support with their work. Assistants provide valuable support for these pupils and know when to intervene and when to allow the pupil to persevere independently. Most lessons move quickly, engage pupils' interest and motivate them to persevere and succeed. However, at times, the pace of teaching is slow and too much time is spent discussing tasks. This hinders pupils' enthusiasm and desire to begin their work.

Teachers use appropriate assessment activities and practices to respond to pupils' work during lessons. In the most effective practices, most teachers share oral feedback skilfully to challenge and assess the quality of pupils' learning and target any indifference or incorrect work promptly. However, the quality of feedback across the school varies. Teachers often tend to write the same feedback, without having enough of an effect on pupils' next pieces of work.

The school provides an interesting learning environment where specific areas are used purposefully to support pupils' learning. As a result, staff create useful displays and learning areas inside the building to support pupils. Staff use the outdoor areas that are available appropriately. However, there is a lack of stimulating and regular outdoor provision and learning experiences, particularly for the youngest pupils.

Care, support and guidance

The school is a caring community and its ethos is inclusive and co-operative. Positive working relationships are a strong feature between staff and pupils and between most pupils. Teachers and assistants know pupils well and respond warmly to their emotional and social needs. This contributes firmly to their happiness and well-being. Staff attitudes and the positive environment help pupils to settle easily into school life. The school's beneficial practices encourage pupils to foster resilient attitudes to learning.

The school has a comprehensive system to gather information about pupils' achievements as they move through the school. Teachers use the tracking system to monitor pupils' progress in their classes regularly. Staff assess pupils' achievements and well-being purposefully, which means that teachers develop a deeper understanding of the needs of all pupils. When staff identify issues for improvement, the school provides valuable support and interventions to improve pupils' learning and their personal and social development. This includes integrating pupils from the specialist resource base with their peers on a daily basis.

The wide range of intervention programmes to improve pupils' speaking, reading, well-being and social skills is structured and effective. Provision motivates most pupils to enjoy and take part in activities in a lively manner. As a result, most targeted pupils make good progress from their individual starting points. Intervention sessions, which focus on pupils' well-being, are effective and enable pupils to take part in lessons purposefully. This enriches their self-respect and social skills and enables them to share their feelings with each other successfully.

The school works effectively with external agencies to provide specialist support for pupils. They support pupils with educational, emotional and social needs successfully. For example, the additional learning needs co-ordinator works closely with local schools through their co-ordinators' group. This leads to valuable support for staff to understand their changing roles while supporting pupils with additional needs. As a result, pupils receive caring and inclusive support.

The school places a strong emphasis on providing a rich and varied range of trips and visits to support the curriculum. These engage pupils' interest in their learning and include, for example, trips to watch plays in local halls and to industrial museums. Studies of global disasters, such as wars, drought and famine, promote pupils' understanding of the importance of values such as tolerance and the right to be free from harassment. These activities contribute positively to pupils' social skills and cultural understanding. There are also purposeful opportunities to celebrate Welsh heritage and culture. This includes local stories, such as the history of the Chartist Bridge in Blackwood and the lives of the area's heroes, such as the boxer Joe Calzaghe.

The school delivers sensible lessons that explore human rights and make a valuable contribution to pupils' spiritual and moral development. A positive aspect of lessons is that they encourage discussions by pupils, which develops their thinking and communication skills successfully. These structured approaches in personal and social lessons include opportunities to explore issues relating to equality, diversity and inclusion from all parts of the world.

Staff ensure that pupils' well-being and safety are an integral part of school life and are at the forefront of their daily responsibilities. The school provides a good range of opportunities for pupils to learn about the importance of staying safe. For example, the school uses police officers to draw pupils' attention to the dangers of substance misuse and to teach them about online safety.

The school's processes for monitoring attendance and punctuality are efficient. Any persistent absences are monitored thoroughly and the school addresses any alleged instances of bullying well. The school's safeguarding arrangements are good and are not a cause for concern.

Leadership and management

The headteacher places pupils' care and well-being at the heart of her vision. Governors support her philosophy and staff act diligently on leaders' expectations and do their best for pupils. Leaders ensure that a caring and inclusive ethos permeates the school and staff take pride in the school motto, 'From the smallest acorn to the highest branch, we grow together'. This has a good effect on pupils' attitudes to learning, their care towards each other and their positive behaviour.

Arrangements for distributing leadership roles and to hold staff to account for the quality and impact of their work are purposeful and derive from thorough performance management practices. Leaders focus on improving the quality of teaching and embedding a common understanding of professional values among the staff. As a result, they ensure that many pupils make good progress from their individual starting points.

Leaders' processes for evaluating the effectiveness of provision are robust and based on a wide range of first-hand evidence. Quality improvement systems include scrutinising pupils' books, listening to the pupil's voice, monitoring teaching and analysing data that measures pupils' progress. Leaders seek the views of other stakeholders effectively. For example, they consider the views of parents and carers and act sensibly on any findings, such as adapting the homework arrangements and processes for blended learning.

Leaders have a clear picture of the school's strengths and areas for development. The link between self-evaluation activities and improvement planning is sound. As a result, leaders prioritise their findings effectively and set reliable targets to move the school forward. Leaders also share the school's culture of safeguarding effectively with all staff.

Governors promote effective practices to ensure that pupils eat and drink healthily and advise parents and carers on the importance of nutritious food in their lunchboxes. Leaders keep in very close contact with the school's wider community and build on the strong relationship that exists with most parents and carers. For example, the school supports the school's parents and friends' association to distribute school uniforms to families during the year.

Leaders ensure that staff make good use of the building and allow pupils to use the support areas, such as the quiet room, effectively. However, there are shortcomings

in the provision and use of resources for younger pupils in the outdoor area. This hinders their learning experiences and opportunities to enrich their skills further.

Governors are knowledgeable and their regular input creates systematic changes across the school. They are supportive of the headteacher and hold her to account as critical friends. The headteacher informs governors purposefully about pupils' learning and the need to improve provision, such as improving digital hardware and training to support the well-being of pupils and staff.

Governors take advantage of developing a first-hand understanding of the school's activities, which is beneficial in making improvements. For example, they conduct learning walks and discuss pupils' work to measure its quality alongside teachers and pupils. This promotes a valuable understanding of the school's current practices. Governors monitor funding wisely and ensure that decisions about expenditure align with the school's priorities for improvement. They use the pupil development grant sensibly to invest in the expertise of assistants to provide relevant interventions.

Leaders ensure that there are good learning opportunities available for staff to support their professional learning, which links closely to the school's improvement priorities. A positive feature of this process is that staff develop skills that they use effectively to improve pupils' outcomes. An effective example is training to develop cross-curricular planning to enrich pupils' learning.

The school shares good practice with local schools and this supports the school's ability to improve continuously. It provides valuable opportunities for teachers to compare and share their effectiveness with other professionals. As a result, staff are given productive opportunities that develop their professional knowledge and leadership skills. For example, staff at the specialist resource base provide an outreach service for schools in the area. This culture of continuous professional learning creates caring provision which, in turn, leads to enthusiastic pupils who achieve well from their starting points.

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

This and other Estyn publications are available on our website:

<http://www.estyn.gov.wales/>