



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

A report on

Ysgol Maes Y Coed

**Heol Hendre
Bryncoch
Neath
SA10 7TY**

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 Maes Y Coed

Name of provider	Ysgol Maes Y Coed
Local authority	Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council
Language of the provider	English
Type of school	Maintained Special
Religious character	*
Number of pupils on roll	117
Pupils of statutory school age	96
Number in nursery classes	0
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%)	49.8%
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	1%
Percentage of pupils with English as an additional language	8%
Date of headteacher appointment	01/09/2009
Date of previous Estyn inspection (if applicable)	01/01/2015
Start date of inspection	27/11/2023
<p>Ysgol Maes-y-Coed is a local authority special school, maintained by Neath Port Talbot Council. The school provides education for pupils aged three to nineteen years.</p> <p>The school opened in 2007 and extended its age range to include pupils of secondary school age in 2012.</p>	

The school also has a satellite provision based on the Afan College campus named 'Ty Margam,' which caters for 7 post-16 pupils.

All the pupils have a local authority maintained statement of special educational needs or an IDP. The school provides for pupils with profound and multiple learning difficulties, severe learning difficulties and autistic spectrum conditions. Many have associated communication, behavioural or sensory difficulties, and a significant number have very specific health-care requirements.

The school accommodates specialist areas such as a hydrotherapy pool and a sensory room and gardens.

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 Maes y Coed is a happy community where pupils feel valued and safe. Staff place pupils at the heart of everything they do. They have an extensive knowledge of the pupils and build strong relationships underpinned by care and respect.

Teaching is a notable strength in the school. As a result, most pupils make strong progress and develop a range of important skills that support their learning and well-being effectively.

Staff consistently embed a range of communication strategies across the school to meet the wide range of pupils' needs. As a result, pupils' communication needs are well met, and they are able to share their thoughts and feelings as well as engage in their learning.

The curriculum at the school is broad and well balanced, with a clear rationale, offering a range of beneficial experiences for pupils. Staff work skilfully together to design a curriculum which is in line with individual pupils' learning needs. The provision for pupils' creative skills development is a notable strength.

The school has highly successful multidisciplinary working practices. Professionals collaborate effectively to support pupils to overcome individual challenges.

The headteacher provides exceptional leadership, which directs the school successfully and systematically on its improvement journey, creating a strong sense of community and mutual endeavour. As a result, staff and pupils thrive, developing a strong sense of identity and belonging. The headteacher is ably supported by the senior and middle leadership teams. Together, they have secured and rooted the vision; 'learning together, growing together and making a difference'. They create high-quality learning environments, which further strengthen the ethos of the school, and support and celebrate pupils' learning and achievements.

Recommendations

- R1 Strengthen the use of links with the community and other settings to enhance learning for older pupils

What happens next

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

Main evaluation

Learning

During their time at the school, most pupils make strong progress due to the extremely valuable support and encouragement they receive from staff. In relation to their individual starting points, most learners meet their personal targets and make secure progress towards fulfilling their potential. They develop a range of important skills that support their learning and well-being effectively. These skills prepare them successfully for the next steps in their lives.

Most pupils make effective progress in developing and improving their communication skills. In lessons, most pupils listen attentively to their teachers' and support staff's explanations and instructions. With effective support by staff, they respond by using communication systems that are appropriate to them, including signs and symbols. Pupils use objects of reference and assistive technology purposefully to make choices and communicate their needs effectively. In most cases, pupils who use signing to support their communication do so confidently. For example, they enjoy using signs when following Christmas songs. A minority of pupils develop effective oracy skills and the confidence to use these successfully. For example, they use subject relevant vocabulary well when discussing the reasons for ocean pollution and can express their ideas for keeping the seas safe for sea turtles.

Most pupils develop and improve their reading and writing skills at a level that is appropriate to their ability. For example, they consolidate their understanding of vowel sounds by matching letters to build familiar words. A few pupils read aloud competently and with fluency and tackle unfamiliar words successfully. In line with their abilities, older pupils extract useful information from a range of texts. For example, they read and follow instructions to draw pictures of different vehicles. In addition, they answer questions appropriately based on the information that they have read. Many pupils enjoy listening to staff reading stories. They respond confidently to questions and activities to develop their understanding.

Younger pupils practise and improve their letter formation and handwriting skills appropriately. These skills include prewriting skills such as sensory mark making and overwriting. With sensitive support from staff, pupils progress from handheld interventions, where they also develop fine motor skills, to independent writing. For example, they develop extended sentences about the 'Grinch' and write simple poems about chocolate, which include effective adjectives such as silky and sweet.

Many pupils make beneficial progress in developing their numeracy skills, particularly in areas that have relevance to real life contexts. Many pupils enjoy identifying single numbers using a range of multi-sensory approaches. Over time pupils differentiate between concepts such as big and small and heavy and light. Many pupils make good progress in understanding shape and space. For example, they use construction kits to make two-dimensional shapes, including squares, rectangles, and triangles. Where appropriate, pupils build their confidence to use money in real-life contexts such as identifying coins to buy items in the school bistro.

Where appropriate, pupils make strong progress in developing their independent living skills during their time at the school. For example, they make good use of well-established classroom routines and visual schedules to take responsibility for their own learning. They collect the resources needed for their learning and move safely around the school building to go to the toilet. Pupils acquire and develop valuable skills that will assist their independence when they leave school, in areas such as road safety and food preparation. For example, in the school bistro, pupils take orders for food from their peers and staff, prepare snacks and drinks and manage payments. A few pupils benefit from work experience provision in areas that relate well to their interests.

Most pupils make strong progress in developing their physical skills. Where appropriate, and with effective support, pupils progress from using standing frames to walking independently. They improve their fine motor skills by using paintbrushes to form letters and shapes, they press leaves to extract the chlorophyll and knead dough when making biscuits. Pupils develop their confidence and stamina in a range of exciting activities, which include building dens out of natural materials in the forest school area, enjoying time on the outside trampolines and swings, and by taking part in a worthwhile range of sports activities such as swimming and yoga.

The creative skills of pupils are a notable strength. Most pupils develop their skills well and implement original ideas successfully. For example, pupils produce highly effective self-portrait pencil drawings as well as attractive pointillism paintings using small dots to create imaginative images. Pupils successfully follow simple melodies on a score and play Christmas carols enthusiastically on colourful handbells and on the glockenspiel. On a visit to a London theatre, pupils relished the opportunity to sing alongside the chorus of *Les Misérables* and participated eagerly in a recent school production of *Pride Rock*.

Overall pupils make suitable use of information and communication technology (ICT) to support their learning. For example, a minority log onto their devices independently, send emails to their peers and to staff, research for information and produce presentations to share their learning. A few pupils successfully code small toy cars and direct them around a track in the classroom.

Many pupils make appropriate progress in developing their understanding and use of the Welsh language. They respond enthusiastically to Welsh greetings and praise in the classroom and around the school.

By the time they leave school, nearly all pupils gain purposeful accreditation in a wide range of areas to support their transition to the next stage in their lives. This diverse offer includes awards in areas such as travel training, cookery, and sculpture.

As a result of the progress they make at the school and the carefully considered support and guidance the school provides, most pupils move on to specialist colleges or the local further education college when they leave the school. This is a considerable strength of the school.

Well-being and attitudes to learning

Most pupils enjoy coming to Ysgol Maes y Coed and feel safe when they are there. They arrive happily, settle quickly and are ready to learn. Most pupils engage excitedly with a wide range of beneficial learning experiences that impact positively on their well-being and engagement.

Most pupils behave well in school and interact positively with staff and peers alike. This means there is a calm relaxed atmosphere where pupils can develop their learning in line with their needs. Most pupils take part in a wide range of engaging experiences that build their confidence and well-being effectively. For example, they help plan and then attend a Christmas lights festival at the school.

Most pupils develop their social and communication skills successfully during their time at the school. As a result, they are confident in their ability to engage with others, and this positively impacts on how pupils interact with their families at home. Most pupils develop their independence skills through a range of meaningful activities. For example, they brush their teeth every day after lunch.

Most pupils benefit from an extensive range of opportunities to take on leadership roles and responsibilities and play a full part in the life of the school. This is a notable strength. For example, through the school council, they influence significant changes such as developing their own school improvement plan or supporting staff appointments. Across the school, pupils also engage in a mentoring programme, which positively impacts on their independence and self-esteem.

In line with their needs and abilities, pupils learn how to keep themselves safe. For example, older pupils benefit from sessions from the police on how to stay safe when using mobile phones. Most pupils develop their physical skills well and learn to make healthy choices. For example, in line with their needs, pupils learn how to throw and catch accurately during health and well-being sessions and choose to make sugar free biscuits.

Most pupils develop their confidence and resilience effectively through a wide range of learning experiences. For example, they use perseverance to develop their fluency when reading and are happy to read aloud to visitors. Most pupils develop their social skills through an exciting range of learning activities. For example, they successfully develop their skills in surfing and work together playing tag rugby for the school team.

Most pupils demonstrate very positive attitudes to learning. In line with their needs, they can sustain concentration for focused periods of time. For example, they show high levels of interest and engagement in learning activities across the school. Most pupils respond well to feedback and make improvements to their learning. For example, pupils improve their accuracy when identifying crockery and cutlery. As a result, most pupils make strong progress in their learning experiences.

Most pupils develop as ethical and informed citizens. For example, they raise money for well-known charities such as Children in Need by completing a range of activities including cake sales and washing cars.

Many pupils enjoy attending school regularly. Partly due to the complex health care and emotional needs of pupils, a few pupils have low levels of attendance.

Teaching and learning experiences

The curriculum at the school is broad and well balanced, with a clear rationale, offering a range of beneficial experiences for pupils. Staff have worked skilfully together to design a curriculum that is in line with individual pupils' learning needs. The curriculum builds effectively on prior learning and has a strong focus on skills development, including supporting the development of creativity, critical thinking and problem solving. As a result, learning activities are engaging and well-matched to the interests and needs of pupils.

The provision in the school for the development of the health and well-being area of learning experience is highly effective. The school has embedded relationships and sexuality education (RSE) throughout the curriculum to ensure that pupils develop important skills such as knowing how to stay safe. Teachers plan skilfully for this area of the curriculum, demonstrating sensitivity and showing empathy to pupils. This aspect of the curriculum is further enhanced through close working relationships with outside agencies, for example through Barnardo's or the therapy team.

Pupils benefit from an enriched curriculum with opportunities to extend pupils' learning experiences through local trips and visits, for example visiting local parks and museums such as the Egypt Centre in Swansea. Furthermore, the school has introduced exciting opportunities for pupils to engage with new ideas through immersion days. These whole-school events bring pupils together and enhance learning. For example, during a recent 'bubble day', pupils learned about the concept of change through multi-sensory experiences.

Teaching is a notable strength in the school. There are extremely positive relationships between staff and pupils. Staff know and understand pupils' needs and interests well. As a result, staff consistently plan effectively to ensure that most pupils make good progress. Learning activities are bespoke and personalised to meet the needs of the pupils. For example, in a maths lesson, a few pupils overwrite numbers whilst others identify number bonds.

Staff provide a high level of support and challenge for pupils. As a result, most pupils make good, and often, very good progress. Teachers set individual targets that are relevant to the pupils and at an appropriate level of challenge, carefully tracking progress against these targets throughout the day. For example, in the 'Forest School', teachers support pupils to recognise and locate targeted letters, numbers, shapes and colours.

Teachers use incidental Welsh successfully throughout lessons. Opportunities for Cynefin, developing a sense of belonging, are embedded through the curriculum. Lessons provide meaningful opportunities for pupils to develop skills in purposeful real-life activities, for example buying items in a café or making reindeer for enterprise week.

The school environment enriches pupils' experiences, with a range of high-quality resources that are well organised and matched effectively to meet the individual needs of pupils.

Staff plan for the development of pupils' skills well, resulting in extensive opportunities for pupils to develop and apply their numeracy, thinking, creative, physical and independence skills across the curriculum.

Teachers use skilful questioning, appropriate to the needs of each pupil, providing them with time to think and extend their answers. Nearly all staff provide clear instructions through an inclusive communication approach, supporting pupils' understanding effectively, for example through the use of communication boards, objects of reference, visual timetables and signing. Nearly all staff use feedback well to deepen pupils' understanding. Staff sensitively correct mistakes and misconceptions so that pupils can progress in their learning. As a result, there are good opportunities for pupils to reflect on their learning and achieve higher levels of success.

Staff manage transitions consistently well through established routines, ensuring that most pupils settle quickly and are ready to learn. This promotes a calm and purposeful learning environment.

Teaching assistants are active participants in learning, demonstrating a highly developed knowledge of pupils and adapt this quickly to ensure engagement and progress. For example, across many lessons, they ensure that pupils have short sensory breaks before moving on to the next task.

Assessment information is used effectively by staff to plan suitably challenging tasks, which further develop most pupils' skills and reflect the next small steps in progress. This approach enables most pupils to make good progress in their learning across the school.

Care, support and guidance

Ysgol Maes y Coed is a happy community where pupils feel valued and safe. Staff place pupils at the heart of everything they do. They have an extensive knowledge of pupils and build strong relationships underpinned by care and respect.

The school has a highly effective inclusive communication approach. Staff consistently embed a range of communication strategies across the school to meet the wide range of needs of pupils. These include communication boards, signing and assistive technology. As a result, pupils' communication needs are well met and they share their thoughts and feelings, as well as engaging in their learning.

The school has highly successful multidisciplinary working practices. Professionals collaborate effectively to support pupils to overcome individual challenges, for example using input from occupational therapy to meet sensory needs throughout the school day. Staff have strong links with the therapeutic and medical team to support pupil well-being and progress skilfully. For example, teachers collaborate with physiotherapists to support pupils to develop their physical skills.

The school's approach to well-being and health care support is sensitive, caring, and individualised. Further, the range of appointments provided within the school day improves pupils' tolerance of these new activities, as well as their attendance, for example the school hairdresser, dentist, or epilepsy clinic. Leaders implement a range of worthwhile strategies to target low attendance, including links with the education welfare officer, social workers, and the local authority. In addition, leaders offer clear support and regular communication with parents about their expectations. However, partly due to their complex medical and emotional needs, a few pupils have low levels of attendance.

The school has a clear and positive approach to supporting pupil behaviour. Behaviour staff carefully track and analyse trends and use this information to make meaningful changes, for example teaching pupils the skills or strategies needed to replace the behaviour. The school's work in this area is clearly underpinned by a strong set of values. This is a strength of the school.

The school enriches the lives of pupils with a range of exciting extracurricular activities. For example, pupils relish the opportunity to celebrate at the school prom during their last year. Pupils also benefit from residential visits, swimming galas and sporting competitions. As a result, pupils engage confidently with the school community.

The school provides pupils with beneficial opportunities to learn about other cultures in a meaningful way that links celebrations and their own lives. For example, pupils celebrate Diwali, learn about the importance of this celebration, and try new foods.

Provision for pupil voice ensures that pupils feel heard and can make changes to their school. This is a well-established and significant strength of the school. The school offers pupils a meaningful range of ways to impact on practice, for example through the school council or regular questionnaires. Further, the school embeds pupil voice throughout all aspects of its work, for example asking pupils to vote for which film they would like to watch at the next school movie night.

The school plans carefully to prepare pupils for the next stage in their lives. For example, at Tŷ Margam there are a range of resources that support pupils to develop their independent living skills well. Pupils practise making a bed, ironing clothes, and preparing basic meals. Across the school, opportunities for pupils to develop skills for their future life in the community are less well developed.

Leaders provide pupils and their families with skilful support as they transition in and out of the school. Staff ensure that important information is shared with new placements, support pupils to visit new settings and build positive relationships with a new team. Further, staff offer training and guidance for these new settings to ensure consistency of support for pupils as they leave the school.

The school supports pupils to learn how to stay safe and healthy effectively. For example, they encourage them try new foods, enjoy a range of physical activities, such as Tai Chi, and learn how to stay safe online.

Staff manage risk carefully and have a positive approach to ensuring that this is well considered and does not inhibit pupils' learning experiences. For example, staff plan

ambitious activities such as trips to Llangrannog, or learning how to use a drill safely in enterprise lessons.

Leaders have developed a strong safeguarding culture at the school. Staff understand the importance of their role in keeping pupils safe. Staff benefit from a range of important training in this area. Leaders carefully track concerns, respond appropriately and communicate with outside agencies effectively.

Leadership and management

The headteacher provides exceptional leadership, which directs the school successfully and systematically on its improvement journey, creating a strong sense of community and mutual endeavour. Through her compassionate and empathetic leadership, she creates the cultural conditions where staff and pupils thrive, developing a strong sense of identity and belonging.

The headteacher articulates clear expectations and ambition, which leads to significant improvement in securing the provision, well-being and learning for pupils. For example, the school has made very good progress since the last inspection in securing a holistic approach to delivering an impressive range of extensive therapeutic and medical support for pupils, which is delivered from the school. This is a notable strength.

The headteacher is ably supported by the senior and middle leadership teams and together they have secured and embedded the vision, 'learning together, growing together and making a difference'. They create high-quality learning environments, which further strengthen the ethos of the school and support and celebrate pupils' learning and achievements.

Leaders expertly nurture, support and develop staff at all levels and there is a very good range of professional learning, which supports the school well in driving improvements. Good examples include the improvements to teaching and planning, and the consistency of the support for pupils to manage their emotions.

Leaders provide good opportunities for staff to visit other schools and there are many significant examples of how they share their effective practice across the sector. For example, the school has worked closely with the local authority to develop an early years assessment centre for younger pupils with autism. Leaders provide a range of outreach and training for other schools, for example on improving strategies for developing pupils' communications skills and implementing the Curriculum for Wales.

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 substantial impact. Leaders' focus on pupils' skills and attitudes has led to strong provision in the development of pupils' communication and creative skills. There is a relentless focus on developing pupils' skills in real-life contexts and on improving pupils' attitudes to learning, especially their independence and resilience.

There are strong lines of accountability and line management arrangements, which focus well on the support and development of staff. Discussions in meetings focus

well on pupils' well-being and learning, as well as aspects of teaching and provision. Leaders provide a good balance between support and challenge. The school has ensured that all members of the senior leadership team are trained in coaching and mentoring. This approach is used successfully across the school to support and develop staff and ensure a highly successful team. Performance management processes are embedded, and any underperformance is dealt with swiftly and effectively.

The school has a clear and well-structured calendar of activities to gain first-hand evidence about the quality of teaching and learning. This includes full lesson observations, learning walks, listening to learners, scrutiny of pupils' work and canvassing pupils' and parents' opinions. Leaders reflect on and evaluate the impact of their work and set clear expectations for quality in various key aspects, for example support for developing pupils' emotional well-being, improving pupils' skills, and ensuring comprehensive therapeutic approaches.

Leaders identify accurate priorities for development. For example, they have recently identified improving the attendance of a few pupils as an area for development. They have been successful in securing significant improvements. For example, teachers are developing a shared language of progression and use assessment information well to plan for the next steps in learning.

Governors know the school well. They regularly visit the school and participate in a range of quality assurance activities, for example learning walks and data evaluation. They have identified the need to extend these activities to include, for example, looking more carefully at pupil progress. Governors have a clear understanding of the school's strengths and areas for development. As a result, they provide an appropriate balance of support and challenge and hold senior leaders to account effectively. They demonstrate a strong understanding of the school's finances. The governing body has appropriate arrangements to promote healthy eating and drinking.

Leaders at all levels collaborate well with stakeholders. For example, they work skilfully with an extensive range of professionals to provide very good therapeutic and emotional support for pupils. Leaders create a strong sense of trust and mutual respect with parents. This is a significant strength of the school's work. They provide weekly information sessions and workshops with school staff and other visiting professionals. As a result, parents are well informed about their child's progress and better equipped to support their individual needs.

Leaders and governors monitor the school's finances rigorously to ensure that all spending is closely aligned with its development priorities. Grant funding, including the Pupil Development Grant, is used effectively to support the well-being and progress of pupils who are eligible for free school meals and those from low-income households. As a result, the school is successfully reducing the effects of disadvantage and individual challenges on educational attainment. This is having a positive impact on the aspirations and outcomes of pupils.

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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