



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

A report on
Ysgol Ifor Bach

**Windsor Way
Abertridwr
Caerphilly
Abertridwr
CF83 4AB**

Date of inspection: December 2023

by

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

This report is also available in Welsh

About Ysgol Ifor Bach

Name of provider	Ysgol Ifor Bach
Local authority	Caerphilly County Borough Council
Language of the provider	Welsh
Type of school	Primary
Religious character	
Number of pupils on roll	259
Pupils of statutory school age	202
Number in nursery classes (if applicable)	30
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 23.7%)</i>	24.8%
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 13.2%)</i>	7.9%
Percentage of statutory school age pupils who speak Welsh at home	2.5%
Percentage of statutory school age pupils with English as an additional language	0.0%
Date of headteacher appointment	23/03/2023
Date of previous Estyn inspection (if applicable)	
Start date of inspection	04/12/2023

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 Ifor Bach is a successful learning community that celebrates Welshness, courtesy and respect and pupils' achievements particularly well. The acting headteacher provides clear and wise guidance and values everyone's efforts in contributing to pupils' well-rounded education. All staff are committed to ensuring a high quality of care and well-being for pupils across the school, in a homely and supportive learning environment. This has a strong influence on pupils' attitudes towards each other and towards others both inside and outside the school.

Teaching staff and assistants model language purposefully and enthusiastically, which has an effect on pupils' oracy skills from a young age. As a result, pupils' use of, and pride in, the Welsh language is a strong feature. Staff work together successfully to plan a range of stimulating and relevant learning and play experiences for pupils. Pupils' pride in their local area and the history of the coal mines is clear.

Most pupils develop knowledge, understanding and skills which are appropriate for their age and starting points successfully. For example, most develop their oral and reading skills skilfully, contributing purposefully to class discussions and expressing their opinions clearly and maturely. However, pupils' independent writing skills have not developed effectively enough.

On the whole, teachers provide regular opportunities for pupils to work independently and work together to solve challenges and complete projects. In the few cases where teaching is not as effective, there are limited opportunities for pupils to work independently and improve their work purposefully following feedback from teachers.

Provision to support the learning skills of pupils with additional learning needs is purposeful. As a result, they make good progress over time against their targets and previous attainment.

The school's self-evaluation and quality assurance arrangements are thorough. Members of the governing body support the acting headteacher and staff purposefully. They have a sound awareness of the school's strengths and priorities for improvement and provide an appropriate balance of support and challenge.

The acting headteacher, with the support of staff and governors, promotes a culture of safeguarding in a highly effective and supportive manner. As a result, pupils are happy and safe at the school.

Recommendations

R1 Develop pupils' independent writing skills

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' literacy, numeracy and social skills are below what is expected for their age. During their time at the school, most pupils, including those who have been identified as having additional learning needs (ALN), make sound progress in nearly all aspects of their learning.

Most pupils' listening skills across the school develop well. They listen attentively to adults and their peers and follow instructions correctly and confidently. Most listen and respond respectfully to the contributions of their peers during group work.

Most pupils' spoken Welsh is sound throughout the school. By Year 2, most discuss their tasks and express their feelings and ideas confidently. They show a willingness to talk about their learning experiences by using appropriate language with a good awareness of the audience, for example by creating various podcasts about the local area.

Many pupils' reading skills develop effectively as they move through the school. The youngest pupils develop their understanding of letter sounds and combine letters purposefully. Many of the oldest pupils develop their skills confidently and enjoy reading a relevant range of books and digital texts. The higher-order reading skills of a majority of the oldest pupils develop strongly, for example as they gather information about the local artist and miner Nicholas Evans.

Many of the youngest pupils develop their fine motor skills robustly before moving on to making marks purposefully, for example by using natural materials. This prepares them to develop early writing skills. By Year 2, they write simple sentences with increasing independence and pay due attention to basic punctuation. They develop their understanding and ability to write in different genres, such as Goldilocks's diary.

A majority of the oldest pupils write in different styles across the areas of learning and demonstrate a good understanding of grammatical rules, purpose, genre and audience, for example by writing a piece expressing an opinion about building new houses close to the school. However, their independent writing skills have not developed sufficiently.

Many pupils' mathematical skills develop robustly. The youngest pupils calculate numbers up to 100 confidently and recognise the value of money. They apply their skills successfully in the learning areas, for example by giving change to a customer in the class shop. By Year 6, they develop as competent mathematicians. They deal

with angles confidently and calculate the value of missing angles in a circle. They use their knowledge sensibly when planning and building a mechanism for lifting weights.

Many pupils' digital skills develop purposefully. The youngest pupils develop their skills well when using an electronic tablet and apps that promote their oral skills and number development. By the end of Year 2, they develop their skills purposefully, for example when beginning to handle data in a pictogram and using software to produce a simple animation. As they move through the school, many pupils' skills build consistently on previous learning by using an increasing range of software and digital equipment. For example, they use a coding app to control a device to follow a path successfully and produce a variety of presentations about the class's theme work. However, their digital data-handling skills have not been developed in full. Pupils are aware of how to stay safe online.

Nearly all pupils' creative skills develop successfully. For example, they use a range of media to emulate the work of a Welsh artist. Pupils across the school take pride in their finished work, which is displayed attractively on the school walls.

Most pupils demonstrate positive attitudes towards physical activity. They enjoy taking part in physical education sessions and respond confidently to instructions. They respect each other and the rules of activities. The oldest pupils develop their gymnastics skills skilfully during these sessions.

Well-being and attitudes to learning

Nearly all pupils feel happy and safe within the school's inclusive and stimulating environment. They show obvious pride in their school and value the rich range of experiences that are provided for them. This is reflected in pupils' enthusiasm and healthy attitude towards their learning.

Nearly all pupils behave excellently during their activities, when working independently and when playing with their friends during break and lunch times. They are considerate of their peers and respond maturely when pupils who are facing specific challenges need support. They know what to do if they are worried about any aspect of their experiences at school. Most express their feelings confidently and are willing to share any concerns they may have.

Most pupils develop a clear understanding of the essential values that contribute to their development as well-rounded individuals and responsible citizens, including treating everyone with respect. The way in which the oldest pupils provide reading and physical activities for the youngest pupils during break times reflects this effectively.

During activities, most pupils are ready to learn. The youngest pupils develop their learning skills with increasing independence by enjoying hands-on experiences. As they move through the school, most develop increasing confidence and concentrate for extended periods when learning and playing in the classroom or the outdoor areas. For example, pupils persevere when building a cottage for the gingerbread man by using natural resources.

They know that maintaining a healthy body helps to maintain their well-being. Activities such as the weekly well-being session for each class promote their positive attitudes towards well-being successfully.

Most pupils demonstrate positive attitudes to their learning. They talk enthusiastically about their work and engage positively with class topics. From an early age, they familiarise themselves with the routine of the nursery class quickly by beginning to choose activities in different areas. They develop their understanding of seeking another way when they encounter difficulties in their learning.

They respond positively to purposeful opportunities during sessions to consider their personal progress and methods to improve their work, which strengthens their development as independent learners. As a result, many take ownership of their learning, for example by participating actively in the process of setting individual targets. Many respond positively to feedback from teachers and assistants to improve their work. Pupils develop self-worth by celebrating the whole-school theme work '*Fi ar fy ngorau*' ('Me at my best').

Most pupils are willing to assume responsibilities enthusiastically. They make good use of opportunities to develop their leadership skills through a range of roles and 'pupil's voice' councils. As a result, they explain confidently how their work has made a difference to school life. For example, members of the 'Criw Cymraeg' speak enthusiastically about inviting pupils from a neighbouring school to learn Welsh.

Most pupils have a thorough understanding of the importance of equality and respect for others. The oldest pupils consider and discuss children's rights meaningfully and the responsibilities that accompany them. They are aware of the importance of sustainability and are considerate of the effect of people on the environment. The oldest pupils have a mature understanding of the effect of natural disasters on communities.

Most pupils develop a sound understanding of how to take care of their mental and emotional well-being. They develop the ability and confidence to discuss and share their feelings, which helps them to understand and show empathy towards others who are in distress.

They show an understanding of a variety of cultures intelligently, for example when learning about different religions and influential people such as Martin Luther King. They are beginning to understand some of the ethical issues that the world faces, such as the challenging situation in Gaza as a result of the dispute in the middle east.

Most pupils have a sound understanding of procedures for keeping safe, including while using the internet. They are aware of the importance of attending school regularly and punctually, which contributes effectively to maintaining high attendance rates at the school.

Teaching and learning experiences

All staff work together diligently to offer a rich curriculum and provide learning experiences that ignite pupils' imaginations successfully. This valuable provision covers the Curriculum for Wales's areas of learning and experiences purposefully,

ensuring progression in pupils' skills and engaging their interest and enjoyment. They ensure that there is an appropriate balance and breadth in pupils' experiences across the curriculum.

Teachers create beneficial learning environments in which pupils develop their skills successfully. For example, in the school's lower years, teachers plan a series of stimulating activities that develop pupils' understanding of what makes them special and unique. In the school's upper years, pupils enjoy learning about the history of the local area by developing their understanding of the Senghennydd disaster, the impact this had on the community and how their valley has developed to this day. Teachers extend this work to enable pupils to learn about the wider world. These experiences help pupils to have a sense of belonging and a better understanding of life in the past compared to the present. Staff link this learning to their own aspirations and consider the attributes needed to choose careers in the future.

Staff provide valuable opportunities for pupils to develop their oral skills, for example by enabling them to perform on the youngest classes' stage. They plan opportunities for them to read a range of different materials and write in a range of genres during the year. There are purposeful opportunities for pupils to develop their numeracy skills in different contexts. For example, they reinforce their knowledge of doubling and measuring skills when calculating the perimeter of material to create a class patchwork. Teachers extend and enrich curricular provision through interesting educational visits, such as a trip to Big Pit to learn more about the experience of miners and a visit to Cardiff to listen to a professional orchestra. They invite parents to the school regularly, for example by taking part in '*Caffi Clonc*' and '*Ifor Ffest*' events. This is a good opportunity for staff, parents and pupils to socialise and take pride in their school and their Welshness.

All staff have high expectations of pupils and work together purposefully to foster strong attitudes of perseverance and resilience in all pupils. They have a close and warm working relationship with pupils. They treat everyone with kindness and respect, which creates an inclusive and caring environment throughout the school. They give a prominent place to pupils' ideas and include them as part of the process of planning learning activities. Most teachers and assistants use polished spoken language and encourage pupils to use correct vocabulary and language patterns on a regular basis. Across the school, assistants use their expertise to contribute effectively to developing pupils' learning.

Nearly all teachers plan learning skilfully to ensure that the level of challenge for pupils is appropriate. In the best practice, teachers use a range of effective teaching techniques regularly. They question pupils skilfully, which enables them to build on their previous learning and extend their understanding further. They ensure that pupils understand the aim of learning sessions and include them purposefully in the process of setting the success criteria for activities. They maintain a suitable pace and pause learning at purposeful times to emphasise an important point or reinforce pupils' understanding.

In the best teaching practices, many teachers provide purposeful opportunities for pupils to work independently and to work together to complete interesting challenges and projects. They provide beneficial opportunities for them to consider the quality of their own work and, at appropriate times, the work of other pupils. In many classes,

the standard of oral feedback given by teachers is good. This leads to pupils understanding how to improve their work there and then, for example by reminding pupils of the features of an interesting story. Teachers give attention to written work alongside pupils. This means that many pupils have a sound awareness of their successes and the areas they need to improve. On the few occasions when teaching is not as effective, there are few opportunities for pupils to work independently and to improve their work purposefully following feedback from teachers.

Care, support and guidance

Staff are committed to ensuring high quality care and well-being for pupils across the school. They work together successfully to create a happy and inclusive environment that celebrates diversity and Welshness very effectively. Staff support pupils' emotional, health and social needs particularly well so that they are able to engage positively with the school and benefit from the variety of opportunities it provides.

The culture of promoting pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is effective. This includes daily collective worship sessions with opportunities for pupils to reflect on values such as respecting everyone, convincing them of the importance of children's rights and providing opportunities to celebrate their successes. The school takes advantage of purposeful opportunities to invite visitors to talk to pupils about their life, work and heritage. A good example of this is inviting a scientist to talk about volcanoes, which encourages pupils to have high aspirations in terms of future opportunities.

One of the school's highly effective strengths is the provision for pupils with ALN. Pupils are given measurable and achievable targets that outline their educational, emotional or social needs clearly. All pupils have a detailed individual profile which provides important information about their interests, suitable learning methods and how to take care of their well-being. These include a clear outline of particular strategies and support that succeed in ensuring that pupils reach their targets.

The Additional Learning Needs Co-ordinator (ALNCo) tracks pupils' progress and nearly all pupils with ALN make good progress over time against their targets and previous attainment. A notable aspect is provision to support the mental health and emotional well-being of particular pupils. Knowledge of the pupils is used effectively to meet their needs, in addition to making direct use of advice and support from specialist agencies, where necessary. As a result, staff have a thorough knowledge of the strategies that are effective in meeting pupils' needs, for example in supporting pupils who have signs of dyslexia.

Staff place a clear emphasis on including pupils' input when planning the curriculum, which includes contributing towards choosing the class theme, providing ideas for activities and formulating questions to which they would like to find answers during their work. A very good example of this is the oldest pupils choosing aspects they would like to learn about during the '*Gwefr y Gorffennol*' theme, and showing enthusiasm when learning about the lives of local people during the coal mining era.

The school has a good range of councils which are an effective means for pupils to express their opinions. The well-being and eco committees, the ambassadors and the Welsh language charter group provide purposeful opportunities for pupils to

influence the school's life and work. For example, the well-being committee decided to reward class attendance and establish a 'buddy' system to support pupils during break time.

Provision to promote health and fitness is popular among pupils and has a good effect on their well-being and physical development. Experiences include using water fountains as well as opportunities to learn about healthy eating in the classes. There are beneficial opportunities in the outdoor areas to support pupils' well-being, including the regular use of bicycles and scooters.

The school promotes pupils' understanding of Welsh identity, heritage and culture very effectively. These include celebrating and remembering the significance of the history of Ifor Bach and competing in a St David's Day Eisteddfod with pupils from a nearby English-medium school to promote the Welsh language.

Staff monitor pupils' punctuality and attendance effectively. The procedures that are used to challenge low attendance are comprehensive and have a positive effect on attendance rates. Leaders work successfully with authority officers to ensure the safety of pupils, staff and visitors. The school's arrangements for safeguarding pupils meet requirements and are not a cause for concern.

Leadership and management

The acting headteacher has a clear vision for the school which is based on providing well-being, happiness and the best learning experiences for all pupils. She has shared this vision successfully with pupils, staff, governors and parents. Leaders are very dedicated and hard-working in providing an interesting curriculum that engages pupils' interest and pays due attention to the context of the local area.

The acting headteacher sets high expectations for herself, staff and pupils and promotes highly effective teamwork between the teachers and assistants. The school's shared vision is based firmly on developing pupils' well-being and maintaining healthy and happy relationships. As a result, most pupils show strong attitudes to learning.

The school has appropriate procedures for gathering evidence that enables leaders to identify strengths and areas for development. As a result, they are beginning to address important areas for improvement in terms of provision and teaching. As a result, most pupils make sound progress across the curriculum.

The school has robust self-evaluation processes that include staff, parents and pupils. Conducting activities such as scrutinising books, visiting classes and holding discussions with staff helps leaders to identify the school's improvement priorities. They plan improvement activities that respond effectively to national and local priorities. For example, leaders ensure that the school promotes the well-being of pupils, develops its strategies for introducing and implementing the expectations of Curriculum for Wales and responds successfully to the requirements of the ALN act.

Governors operate highly effectively as critical friends. They have a sound knowledge of provision and the effect of the school's procedures on pupils' progress and well-being. They share responsibilities conscientiously and conduct purposeful

visits to evaluate the effect of provision on standards and progress. They receive and respond to useful information and presentations from the acting headteacher, leaders and pupils about the school's work. They challenge the headteacher and teaching staff in a meaningful way and contribute appropriately to drawing up improvement priorities. They work with staff and pupils to ensure that the school has appropriate arrangements to promote healthy eating and drinking.

Leaders ensure a very good supply of resources that support learning purposefully. They make the best use of the building and the resources available. They manage funding effectively and make purposeful use of a variety of additional grants, for example by using the pupil development grant sensibly to improve pupils' early oracy and social skills.

Leaders and teachers communicate effectively with parents by using a good range of sources, in addition to discussing with them directly, when necessary. This ensures that staff respond promptly to any concerns. As a result, parents appreciate the school's familial ethos and the eagerness of each member of staff to support all pupils.

The acting headteacher, with the support of staff and governors, promotes a culture of safeguarding in a highly effective and supportive manner. As a result, pupils are happy and safe at the school.

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:

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