A report on

Ysgol Treffynnon

Penymaes Road
Holywell
Flintshire
CH8 7EN

Date of inspection: January 2024

by

Estyn, His Majesty's Inspectorate for Education

and Training in Wales

This inspection was undertaken as part of pilot inspection arrangements. As a result, this report may be slightly different in format to other published reports for providers in the sector.

This report is also available in Welsh.

About Ysgol Treffynnon

Name of provider	Ysgol Treffynnon
Local authority	Flintshire County Council
Language of the provider	English
Religious character	N/A
Number of pupils on roll	508
Pupils of statutory school age	508
Number in sixth form	No sixth form
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 Secondary is 21.2%)	29.9%
Percentage of pupils identified as having additional learning needs (a) (The national percentage of pupils identified as having an additional learning need in Secondary is 14.8%)	27.6%
Percentage of pupils who speak Welsh at home	3.7%
Percentage of pupils with English as an additional language	3.1%
Date of headteacher appointment	11/10.2015
Date of previous Estyn inspection (if applicable)	20/01/2016
Start date of inspection	22/01/2024

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.

Summary

At Ysgol Treffynnon, staff are committed to ensuring the well-being of each individual pupil and this is at the heart of the school's work. The school's ethos is based on SPIRIT – inspiring pupils' self-belief, perseverance, respect, integrity and trust. Staff know pupils well and strive to ensure that they attend school regularly and are ready to learn. During the current academic year, the school's work with the community has resulted in substantial unverified improvements in the attendance of all groups of pupils, although attendance overall remains slightly below pre-pandemic levels. Most teachers have positive working relationships with their pupils and many teachers provide engaging learning experiences. In many instances, teachers have effective classroom management and, as a result, behaviour in lessons is generally good. However, over time, there have been incidents of poor behaviour, which have led to the school's rates of exclusions being high.

The headteacher provides thoughtful leadership and is ably supported by the rest of the senior leadership team. They provide a clear strategic direction for the school and have high expectations of themselves, staff and pupils. Although there is variation in the quality of middle leadership, leaders at all levels know the school well. Many have a suitable understanding of the quality of provision in their areas of responsibility. They plan for improvement effectively, considering carefully what professional learning is required. This has led to marked improvements in many important areas of the school's work, including attendance, the provision to develop pupils' reading skills and the quality of teaching. The school is in a difficult financial situation and currently has a substantial financial deficit.

In many instances, teaching is effective. In these instances, teachers plan their lessons carefully to ensure that pupils are challenged to think deeply. They monitor pupils' progress closely and provide useful feedback that helps pupils know how to improve their work. As a result, in these lessons pupils, including those who have additional learning needs, make sound progress in developing their knowledge, understanding and skills. In a minority of instances, there are shortcomings in teaching, which leads to pupils not making as much progress as they should. In these lessons, pupils do not engage well enough with the work and do not develop their independent learning skills. The school has provided beneficial training for staff on effective strategies to develop pupils' literacy and digital skills. However, the provision to develop pupils' numeracy and Welsh language skills is underdeveloped.

Recommendations

We have made 4 recommendations to help the school continue to improve:

R1   Reduce the rate of fixed term exclusions

R2   Work with the local authority to eliminate the deficit budget

R3   Improve the provision for the progressive development of pupils' numeracy and Welsh language skills

R4   Improve teaching in a minority of instances so that pupils engage fully with the work and develop their independent learning skills

What happens next

The school will draw up an action plan to address the recommendations from the inspection. Estyn will review the school's progress.

Main findings

Teaching and its impact on engagement and learning

Most teachers have sound subject knowledge and are effective language models who promote good use of subject specific vocabulary. They foster good working relationships with pupils based on mutual respect. Many circulate the classroom regularly to support pupils and provide useful individual feedback to help them improve their work. Their instructions are clear, and they communicate their expectations to pupils on the requirements of completing tasks. They have well-established routines and successfully create a calm and engaging working environment for pupils to learn. They use praise to encourage pupils and manage any instances of low-level disruption well effectively. As a result, many pupils behave well in lessons.

In many cases, teaching is effective in ensuring that all groups of pupils engage well with work and make sound progress. In these lessons, teachers:

- plan lessons at an appropriate level
- plan a suitable variety of tasks that build well on each other
- have useful resources that engage and maintain pupils' interest
- ensure that the level of challenge is appropriate and that the pace of lessons is matched well to the pace at which pupils learn
- question pupils suitably to check for understanding and provide worthwhile opportunities for them to develop their speaking and listening skills
- work in partnership with teaching assistants to support pupils with ALN and other vulnerable pupils and ensure that they make progress that is in line with their peers

In the few cases where teaching is most effective, teachers ensure that their questioning challenges pupils to think deeply. They plan clear learning outcomes and share helpful success criteria. They ensure that pupils are immediately on task and plan highly engaging lessons, which maintain their interest and develop their curiosity. These teachers model their expectations consistently well and share effective examples of good work. The most effective teachers ensure that all pupils are provided with high challenge and supported to succeed with suitably challenging tasks. They help them to make links between key concepts and ideas and assess pupils' progress well, using this information to adapt their teaching accordingly.

In a minority of lessons, pupils do not make as much progress as they should. In these lessons, a minority of pupils do not engage fully with their work, lose concentration at times, or give up easily when the work is challenging. Where teaching is less effective, it is often because teachers in these lessons:

- do not always ensure that pupils are listening and do not intervene quickly or effectively when pupils fail to engage with work or exhibit low-level disruption
- do not use appropriate strategies to meet the needs of all pupils
- do not have expectations that are sufficiently high and do not challenge pupils well enough
- talk for too long and do not provide sufficient opportunities for pupils to work independently
- use only basic questioning that does not probe pupils' understanding well enough

The school has a clearly defined assessment policy with regular assessment points, success criteria and feedback for improvement. Overall, teachers provide useful written feedback on pupils' work. Where this is most effective, teachers' comments guide pupils clearly on how to improve the quality of their work. They plan effective follow-up tasks, and the majority make sure that pupils respond appropriately. The introduction of 'dot marking' is helping pupils to take more responsibility for improving their own technical accuracy, although this is applied inconsistently.

Interim reports provide parents with suitable information about their child's progress, attendance and attitude to learning. The school provides parents with full narrative reports annually which provide useful detail on the main strengths and targets for improvement in each subject area.

The school's curriculum

Overall, the school's curriculum offers appropriate breadth and balance to pupils. Currently, the three-year Key Stage 4 means that pupils in Year 9 do not have the opportunity to study a full range of subjects, but the school has well-considered plans in place to address this from next year. At Key Stage 4, the school provides a suitable range of general and vocational courses.

The school has a clear vision for the development of its curriculum for Wales and has consulted widely with stakeholders to formulate this. Departments have adopted a range of suitable approaches, and there is a strong emphasis on improving teaching as part of curriculum development. Staff work with partner primary schools to ensure that the curriculum builds suitably on prior learning, but this is at an early stage of development.

There is a broad range of extra-curricular opportunities available to pupils. These include many lunchtime and after-school clubs for sports, performing arts, crafts and IT as well as provision for homework support and revision. In addition, teachers plan for a wide variety of educational visits and enrichment activities which complement the curriculum. These include visits to local historical sites as well as theatre visits and opportunities to visit local businesses and employers.

Leaders have begun to develop pupils' appreciation of Welsh culture through the celebration of Welsh events such as Diwrnod Santes Dwynwen and an annual school Eisteddfod. Pupils learn traditional Welsh songs in expressive arts lessons and the choir are preparing for a Dydd Gwyl Dewi celebration. The school's personal and social education programme is comprehensive and helps pupils to understand how to keep themselves both physically and mentally healthy. It is responsive to pupils' needs and the school's context and makes particularly good use of links with a wide range of external partners.

Pupils have appropriate opportunities to gain understanding of the history and experiences of Black, Asian and minority ethnic communities, and of the challenges faced by other vulnerable groups such as young carers. A weekly club is in place to support pupils who identify as LGBTQ+.

The provision for skills and the standards that pupils achieve.

Oracy

Many teachers provide suitable opportunities for pupils to develop their oracy skills by questioning pupils during class discussions or giving pupils opportunities to share their thoughts in pairs or small groups. Many pupils listen attentively in lessons and a majority contribute willingly to classroom and group discussions. A minority produce some thoughtful responses to explain their ideas. For example, they speak clearly and use subject specific vocabulary accurately when explaining how certain problems in right angled triangles can be solved using either Pythagoras' Theorem or trigonometry.

The school has provided valuable training for staff on how to develop pupils' oracy skills by encouraging them to use their 'professional voice'. This is when teachers require pupils to extend and improve their verbal contributions by providing greater detail and using formal language, including the use of subject specific terminology. In the best examples, teachers use of this strategy effectively. However, there is inconsistency in how well and how frequently teachers use this strategy. A minority of pupils do not listen with sufficient attention to their teacher or their peers, and a similar proportion provide only brief underdeveloped responses or are reluctant to participate in oral tasks.

Reading

The school has beneficial strategies to develop pupils' reading skills in English and across the curriculum. As a result, many pupils are able to extract and organise key points from text. They annotate a range of different texts appropriately and use relevant quotations to support their views. Although a few do this effectively, and integrate references confidently in their writing, a minority of pupils often do so in only a simplistic way. Many pupils are able to use basic inference and deduction, for example when considering how injustice and power are presented in 'The Maze Runner'. A few use this skill perceptively and thoughtfully. They show a sound understanding of how the structure of text and the use of punctuation affects the audience.

Writing

Pupils are provided with a wide range of valuable opportunities to develop their extended writing skills. The majority write with suitable clarity and accuracy. They use paragraphing appropriately to structure their work. These pupils write appropriately for a range of purposes and audiences. For example, in science they summarise their findings, write reports and respond to literature about current topics such as climate change, the use of plastics and how animals control their temperature. A very few pupils write at length well, expressing themselves clearly and using a variety of sentence structures and a sophisticated vocabulary. However, teachers do not always ensure that pupils develop their ideas fully enough in their extended writing. In addition, pupils often rely too much on short, basic sentences and do not vary their writing style sufficiently. A minority make frequent basic errors in their writing.

Numeracy

There is a suitable range of beneficial opportunities for pupils to develop their data handling skills, and their understanding of shapes and measures. As result, the majority of pupils make sound progress in the development of these aspects of numeracy. They plot graphs suitably and use them to draw sensible conclusions such as when they analyse graphs for cooling substances in science. They can read and interpret maps and scales appropriately in geography, and in design and technology they display a secure grasp of the concept of tolerance and the requirement to measure with accuracy. A few pupils have strong numeracy skills. They can adapt and apply their understanding of mathematical concepts to solve multi-step problems and problems based on real-life situations.

About half of pupils have a secure grasp of number and convert between fractions, decimals and percentages successfully. They apply their understanding to solve numerical problems such as when they calculate the value of investments under simple and compound interest. However, the provision to develop pupils' understanding of number concepts is underdeveloped, both within mathematics and across the curriculum. As a result, about half of pupils do not have a secure enough understanding of number. They lack fluency and as a result struggle to apply their numeracy skills in real-life situations.

Digital skills

In general, pupils develop their digital skills suitably. In information technology lessons and other relevant subjects, staff plan appropriate opportunities for pupils to develop aspects of their digital competency. For example, in music, pupils use software to experiment with effects on their recording of a familiar piece of film music, while pupils use spreadsheets successfully in business studies to analyse the effects of different levels of outputs on fixed, variable and unit costs. During design and technology lessons, pupils use a 3D design package to manipulate images before cutting them out on laser cutters.

Welsh language skills

The majority of pupils are eager to make progress in their Welsh lessons and have expressed frustration with current staffing limitations within the department. Despite

the difficult staffing situation, around half of pupils show resilience and persevere to complete all tasks. The majority have a sound knowledge of basic nouns and adjectives and around half recall prior learning appropriately when completing translation tasks. They use simple sentence structures in their oral and written work. A few pupils are starting to use more complex sentence structures, experimenting with different clauses and expressing opinions. The majority of pupils are able to recognise simple words in text and translate them into English. A few show sound reading skills and are able to recognise more complex words and sentence structures. However, many pupils lack confidence to respond in Welsh and, in general, pupils do not make enough progress in developing their Welsh skills over time.

Other skills

The majority of pupils develop their creativity appropriately. For example, in expressive arts, pupils work in groups to create and record their own short samba rhythms and Chinese melodies, selecting a suitable range of instruments to play. In English, pupils write descriptions that aim to evoke tension and suspense, although sometimes they are hampered in doing so by the shortcomings in their use of different sentence structures. Generally, pupils develop their physical skills suitably. In physical education lessons they show appropriate co-ordination and ball skills when passing and catching a basketball. Pupils undertake practical activities successfully in different subjects. For example, they show well-developed fine motor skills and good awareness of health and safety risks when chopping ingredients during food technology lessons.

Care, support and well-being

Ysgol Treffynnon prioritises well-being and promotes its ethos of inspiring self-belief, perseverance, respect, integrity and trust (SPIRIT) amongst its pupils. The school's work with external agencies helps to provide a wide range of emotional intervention programmes. The pastoral team has a sound understanding and recognition of the pupils and their families, and tailor the provision to meet the needs of each individual child. As a result, the school offers a safe, inclusive and nurturing environment where pupils are encouraged to develop and mature with confidence. While the school's work in this area has been successful in many instances, a few pupils do not behave or engage with work well enough.

Leaders have created a strong culture of safeguarding. All staff and governors are aware of their responsibilities regarding safeguarding and receive regular training. Arrangements to keep pupils safe are clear and robust. The safeguarding team respond to concerns promptly and diligently and makes the necessary referrals to outside agencies. They follow appropriate procedures and maintain a current record of checks to ensure the suitability of staff and others to work with pupils. Leaders are responsive to current safeguarding and child protection issues and have ensured provision and support on an individual and curricular level to address current concerns, for example to promote positive behaviour amongst boys. Many pupils feel safe in school and all pupils are aware of the safeguarding procedures and who to turn to if they have a concern.

The school applies clear anti-bullying procedures within its policy and as result most pupils feel free from bullying and harassment. When incidents do occur, the school deals with them effectively and efficiently. Nearly all parents feel that their children are safe at school and feel valued members of the school community.

Pastoral transition arrangements are secure and there are plentiful opportunities for older primary pupils to experience taster days at the school. A notable strength is the transition week in the summer term of Year 6 consisting of curriculum work and a residential course where Year 7 pupils act as 'buddies' in order to help them settle in. Leaders attend Year 6 reviews in order to establish positive relationships with families early and identify the pupils' needs as part of the enhanced transition arrangements for pupils who have ALN.

The school has developed its provision appropriately in line with the requirements of the Additional Learning Needs and Education Tribunal (Wales) Act. The ALN team have a secure understanding of pupils' learning needs and purposefully co-ordinates the interventions available to pupils with additional learning needs (ALN). This detailed planning and tracking of interventions provides the faculty with a comprehensive understanding of the progress made by these pupils. As a result, teaching assistants support pupils proficiently in the ALN faculty and in classrooms to promote a calm and caring atmosphere that helps these pupils make secure progress.

Leaders have designed a responsive and broad personal and social education programme using analysis of health questionnaires and pupil voice to ensure that the provision is individualised and relevant. As a result, many pupils understand the importance of making healthy lifestyle choices. Pupils develop their spiritual, moral, social and cultural awareness suitably through a range of activities.

Pupils enjoy participating in extra-curricular activities and clubs, which enhance their confidence and creativity, for example the crochet and trampoline clubs. Pupils who are adversely affected by poverty benefit from a wide-ranging programme of support including free fruit at mealtimes and subsidised extra-curricular activities.

The school provides residential and daily trips ranging from cultural visits to sporting events which helps to broaden pupils' learning experiences. It offers helpful advice and guidance to support pupils to make informed subject choices and provides a varied programme of activities to increase pupils' aspirations and awareness of future opportunities. The school monitors the destinations of pupils closely and currently nearly all pupils proceed to further education, training or employment. Pupils from all backgrounds take on leadership roles within the school as members of the school council or on various committees such as sports and eco groups. The school council has brought about positive changes such as decreasing the price of food in the canteen by negotiation with the catering company as well as developing the outside area for pupils.

School leaders analyse attendance data forensically and have established a range of effective interventions in partnership with the community. This includes the use of rewards for regular attendance and staff visiting homes to work with families on encouraging pupils to re-engage with education. This has led to a notable improvement in attendance for all groups of pupils. The number of pupils who are

persistently absent has reduced considerably and is lower than that seen before the pandemic. However, overall attendance remains slightly below pre-pandemic levels.

There is a clear positive behaviour policy in place to encourage pupils' healthy attitudes to learning. This policy is understood and applied by most staff and reinforced by a team of pastoral support staff who respond quickly to minimise disruption in classes. Many pupils behave well in lessons and around the school, although in a few instances the behaviour and attitude of a few pupils hinders and disrupts the learning of themselves and others. The 'Reflection Room' and the internal exclusion facility is generally used appropriately to encourage reflection and restorative work. This provision is monitored carefully, and the school has a secure understanding of the barriers for learning faced by pupils. However, there are occasions when this facility is used too frequently by some pupils and consequently, their resilience and perseverance in their learning within lessons is not developed sufficiently. Currently, fixed-term exclusions are notably high, and the three-year trend shows that they are increasing.

Leading and improving

The headteacher has a clear vision for the school based on caring for and valuing everyone in the school community. He provides passionate and committed leadership and is a strong role model who has high expectations of himself and others. He is supported well by the senior leadership team, whose roles and responsibilities are well defined and understood. Together, they provide strong strategic direction and have ensured that the school has sustained and further built on the improvements seen since the school was removed from special measures in 2019.

Senior leaders have clearly identified the school's key improvement priorities, and these are well understood by staff. Line management arrangements are clear, focus suitably on the quality of teaching and pupil progress and provide middle leaders with a helpful balance of support and challenge. In general, middle leaders have a suitable understanding of their role and are enthusiastic about their work. However, there is too much variation in how effectively they carry out their roles. The school has appropriate procedures for managing staff performance, including for support staff. This is supported by professional learning activities that align suitably to school priorities. Staff benefit from helpful opportunities to share good practice both within and across subject areas, and with other schools.

Senior leaders have developed a well-thought-out calendar of quality assurance activities that enables them to gather valuable first-hand evidence, including the views of pupils. In these activities, senior leaders focus closely on the impact of provision on pupil outcomes. They use this information well to monitor progress against whole-school improvement priorities. Monthly '360 Reviews' are starting to help leaders to synthesise self-evaluation evidence and monitor progress against priorities more strategically.

Overall, middle leaders have a suitable, broad understanding of the main strengths and areas for improvement in their areas of responsibility. The majority have a detailed understanding of the specific aspects that need to be improved, and this helps them to set clear targets for improvement. In around half of cases, middle

leaders focus appropriately on the impact of their provision on pupil progress and well-being. However, around half do not evaluate pupil standards rigorously or precisely enough.

In general, leaders address national priorities suitably. They arrange beneficial opportunities for pupils that help to tackle the impact of poverty on learning. For example, they offer alternative provision for pupils who are in danger of disaffection. Leaders ensure that pupils and their families benefit from access to school uniform and local food charities. They have developed a suitably clear vision for their Curriculum for Wales and senior leaders support staff in the planning and implementing the curriculum appropriately. However, they have not secured strong provision for the development of pupils' Welsh language skills.

Grant expenditure, including the pupil development grant, is used appropriately to ensure that pupils from low-income households are not at a disadvantage. This includes subsidising educational trips, providing a free breakfast club and accessing support available in the community. This spending is evaluated thoroughly, with due attention to impact on pupils' well-being, attendance and satisfaction with provision.

The school communicates suitably with parents, for example through newsletters and social media. Leaders have taken suitable steps to further strengthen parental engagement, for example through evening events to share information about GCSEs, Curriculum for Wales and revision strategies.

Governors are supportive of the school and take on their roles enthusiastically. They have a sound understanding of many of the main strengths and challenges that the school faces. They challenge leaders appropriately in meetings and sub-committees.

The school is in a very difficult financial situation where the deficit is large and forecast to increase. It has an agreed licensed deficit plan with the local authority. The business manager, headteacher and governors monitor spending closely and adhere to the terms of the license.

Overall, leadership has had a positive impact on several important aspects of the school's work, including the quality of teaching, the effectiveness of improvement processes and increasing pupil attendance. However, it has not had sufficient impact on the level of fixed-term exclusions.

Statutory compliance

The school's arrangements for safeguarding pupils do not give any cause for concern.

The school has appropriate arrangements for promoting healthy eating and drinking.

The school is in a very difficult financial situation where the deficit is large and forecast to increase. It has an agreed licensed deficit plan with the local authority. The business manager, headteacher and governors monitor spending closely and adhere to the terms of the license.

The school's arrangements for site security do not give any cause for 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

Appendix 1: Numbers – quantities and proportions

The report makes references to different quantities and proportions e.g. *'most pupils…'* or *'very few pupils…'*. We use these terms to describe quantities and proportions as outlined in the table below:

nearly all =	with very few exceptions
most =	90% or more
many =	70% or more
a majority =	over 60%
half =	50%
around half =	close to 50%
a minority =	below 40%
few =	below 20%
very few =	less than 10%

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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