



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

A report on
Ysgol Penmaes

Canal Road
Brecon
Powys
LD3 7HL

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 Penmaes

Name of provider	Ysgol Penmaes
Local authority	Powys County Council
Language of the provider	English
Religious character	
Number of pupils on roll	100
Pupils of statutory school age	67
Number in nursery classes	1
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%)	44.8%
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%
Percentage of pupils who speak Welsh at home	
Percentage of pupils with English as an additional language	
Date of headteacher appointment	01/09/2022
Date of previous Estyn inspection (if applicable)	01/06/2015
Start date of inspection	22/01/2024
<p>Additional information:</p> <p>Ysgol Penmaes is a day special school in Brecon for pupils aged 3 to 19 years old. There are currently 111 pupils on the roll of the school. All pupils have a statement of special educational needs or a statutory individual development plan (IDP).</p> <p>Many pupils have autism including speech and language difficulties. Around one third of pupils have severe learning difficulties. In addition, a few pupils have physical and medical needs and/or moderate learning difficulties. A very few pupils have profound and multiple learning difficulties and/or social and emotional needs.</p>	

A very few pupils have a hearing or visual impairment. A very few pupils are from ethnic minority backgrounds. Just over two fifths of pupils are eligible for free school meals.

There are 12 classes and pupils are generally grouped according to ability, additional learning need (ALN) and age. There are around nine pupils in each class. One of these classes is based at Crossgates Primary School in Llandrindod Wells, approximately an hour from the main school site in Brecon.

There are 15 teachers, including the deputy and assistant headteachers, and 43 teaching assistants. The headteacher has been in post since 2022 and was deputy headteacher prior to appointment. The school was last inspected in June 2015.

The school is commissioned by the local authority to provide an outreach service to mainstream schools. This was not included in the inspection.

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

Ysgol Penmaes provides a strong support system for pupils' emotional well-being. Nearly all pupils feel that their concerns are always taken seriously by all members of staff. Teachers and support staff work collaboratively to prepare meaningful learning experiences that meet the needs of pupils. Over time, nearly all pupils make suitable progress and develop valuable skills that are appropriate to their individual needs and abilities.

The headteacher has worked with staff, governors, pupils and parents to create a vision for the school that is firmly based on creating 'successful, healthy, individuals and nurturing excellence' (SHINE).

Pupils feel safe and secure within the school environment. Incidents of bullying are rare. Nearly all pupils are aware of the support system available to them when they experience sadness or unhappiness. This includes knowing who to turn to if they need assistance. The school works well with parents and other agencies. As a result, attendance at the school has shown an improving trend over a three-year period.

The school works collaboratively with the local authority to ensure swift and effective handling of safeguarding concerns raised. The school has a strong commitment to child welfare and safety.

Effective teaching focusses on well-planned, individualised and meaningful learning experiences tailored to pupils' needs, supported by a variety of familiar resources to maintain engagement. Teachers engage well with pupils through simple, targeted questioning and provide them with ample thinking time to think. Teachers use resources like pictures effectively to aide expression of emotions and as a result, pupils' communication skills progress appropriately. Pupils' skills to work independently develop gradually, with tasks such as preparing for breaks and choosing activities independently. However, teachers do not always consider pupils' prior learning well enough, and lessons' slow pace and insufficient challenge limits pupils' progress. Quality assurance of teaching does not provide enough detail on areas for improvement to support teachers to further develop their practice.

Recommendations

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

- R1 Ensure that planning and teaching takes sufficient account of the needs and abilities of pupils and builds effectively on their prior learning
- R2 Ensure that self-evaluation and improvement planning for curriculum design and, assessment, focus clearly on improving teaching and learning

- R3 Continue to work with relevant partners to ensure that the hydrotherapy pool is repaired and commissioned for use as soon as possible
- R4 Continue to work with relevant partners to ensure that there is a clear understanding of the support provided by the school nursing service

What happens next

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

Main findings

Pupils' social skills and behaviour

Overall, support staff are highly effective in supporting pupils' learning and in helping them to regulate their emotions. Pupils develop their social skills very well. They are confident greeting and speaking with visitors. Many older pupils initiate and sustain conversations confidently. Nearly all pupils behave well around the school, the satellite site and in class. There is a calm and welcoming atmosphere around both the school and the satellite site. Staff reinforce routines and know their pupils well. Pupils are polite and engage very well with visitors, staff and peers. Pupils take pride in their school and want to show their work and school to visitors. All pupils are confident and mature in being with one another. They show mutual respect and admiration for their classmates.

Cameo – pupil voice and leadership roles

Pupils have many opportunities to participate in and develop leadership roles at the school, for example through the school council and being sports coaches. Pupils take great pride in being appointed to such positions, respect these responsibilities, and value building collaborative working relationships with staff. As a result, most pupils feel listened to and that their opinions are valued. Members of the school council recently met with members the Welsh Parliament's Children and Young People's Education Committee and contributed to discussions on equal access to education for children and young people with ALN. They shared their experiences and view on support and resources within Wales for those with additional needs. Pupil voice is a strength of the school.

There is growing concern and frustration with parents and pupils alike that the school's hydrotherapy pool has not been in use for several years. This potentially impacts negatively, for example on pupils' balance, co-ordination, joint mobility and muscle relaxation. In addition, the school does not benefit consistently from the school nursing service. This makes it difficult for the school and parents to plan for and support pupils' needs.

Nearly all pupils participate in daily regulation activities, which they independently choose. These activities include yoga, dance and singing, reading, check-in with staff or casually chatting with friends. These sessions provide valuable opportunities for pupils to reacclimatise with school each day. This is particularly important for those that may have had lengthy journeys to school.

The school develops pupils' understanding of the wider world and preparation for adulthood through a wide range of activities. Older pupils participate in work experience both off and on site as well as participating in the Duke of Edinburgh Award. Pupils across the school develop their understanding of rights and responsibilities.

Pupils have opportunities to collaborate with their peers from the local secondary school, for example on a sustainability project. A wide variety of trips and activities enhance pupils' understanding of both the local area and the diversity within Wales. These experiences positively support the development of pupils' confidence and self-esteem.

Cameo – transition for new pupils and those progressing onto further education

The school has secure transition arrangements for pupils joining and leaving Ysgol Penmaes. Prior to pupils joining the school, staff visit pupils in their current place of learning. They observe pupils and have important conversations with staff. In addition, parents visit Ysgol Penmaes. They meet key staff and become familiar with the provision offered by the school. The school uses the information gathered to establish meaningful relationships with families and to plan the provision at Ysgol Penmaes. Pupils who are leaving the school are supported with visits, appropriate guidance, and careful consideration of course suitability. Nearly all pupils who are leaving the school feel prepared for the next stage in their education. The headteacher keeps in contact with leavers and appropriate action is taken by the school if pupils are at risk of dropping out. Former pupils return to deliver presentations to older pupils about their experiences of leaving and how they are doing currently.

Changes at Ysgol Penmaes

The senior leadership team is relatively new and members are beginning to work collaboratively with one another and the wider staff team. The senior leadership team includes a seconded assistant headteacher. It is not clear if this secondment will continue, and this will potentially impact on the pace of delivering school improvement priorities.

Senior leaders are very clear on the new curriculum structure that has been put into place and the curriculum is being developed collaboratively with teaching staff. Planning is detailed and focused. Development plans allow for valuable reflection. However, actions for improvement do not focus as well as they could on teaching and learning.

Leaders of areas of learning experience take responsibility for planning themes. Each theme includes the expected knowledge and skills pupils will develop, and a common theme is explored termly. Class teachers have the freedom to organise the learning experiences for pupils within learning intentions and progression plans. However, and in part due to the infancy in the implementation of the curriculum, the links between the strategic planning, schemes of work and what is taught in classrooms are still developing.

A whole-school approach to evaluating the appropriateness of the new curriculum arrangements and their impact on pupil progress is at an early stage of development.

Curriculum provision for older pupils has recently been strengthened by senior leaders and now includes a more appropriate range of vocational learning options. The school is leading on actions to further enhance its post-16 provision in collaboration with the local authority. Older learners generally have clear and realistic aspirations for the future. Where appropriate, pupils access GCSE qualifications in partnership with the local pupil referral unit.

Older pupils value and appreciate the opportunities to go to a local college for taster sessions in a range of vocational areas. These opportunities, plus the support they receive from school, supports them well deciding what they would like to study at college. Pupils recount learning about relationships and sexuality education, including changes to their bodies and emotions. They do this with considerable maturity.

The school holds a broad range of data that demonstrates the progress that pupils make over time. Approaches to tracking pupil progress have recently changed and the analysis of this is being strengthened.

Teaching and learning

Where teaching is most effective, staff plan individual and meaningful learning experiences that are matched to pupils' needs. Where staff plan and make available a range of resources that pupils are familiar with using, pupils are more likely to remain engaged in activities. The use of questioning by staff is most effective when it is simple and directed to individual pupils, with pupils being given sufficient thinking time before responding. However, teaching does not always fully consider pupils' prior learning or understanding. The slow pace of lessons limits the progress that pupils can make in those lessons.

Overall, teachers manage classes and pupils effectively. Many pupils are compliant and remain on task. They persevere with activities even when they do not fully understand what they have been asked to do.

Teachers' assessments of pupils are carried out through individual pupil learning journeys, which are linked to IDP objectives. The explicit planning of literacy, numeracy and digital competency is not yet embedded but is being built into the curriculum provision incrementally.

Overall, the communication skills of pupils develop at a pace that is appropriate to their needs. For example, when recording observations of people being afraid pupils communicate their ideas and correctly use a range of adjectives to convey their observations, for example anxiety, adrenaline, sweating and adjectives that demonstrate the opposite of being afraid, such as feeling awesome, confident and brave. Where appropriate, staff use signing and symbols to communicate with pupils throughout activities. This is embedded well into practice and supports pupils in their learning.

Most pupils develop their skills for independence throughout their time at the school. They are encouraged to prepare for breaks times by putting on coats and wellies, and older pupils independently choose their own activities during regulation time. However, tasks that require pupils to work independently are not always challenging enough.

Pupils benefit from an extensive outdoor area. There is a variety of outdoor play equipment, including swings, outdoor gym equipment, netball hoops and football goals, that are used well and enthusiastically by many pupils. Pupils develop important skills, including gross motor skills, balance and co-ordination. In the covered gazebo, pupils socialise with one another.

Self-evaluation and improvement planning

Leaders engage well with parents, pupils, staff and governors as part of their self-evaluation arrangements and use feedback to determine improvement priorities. Improvement priorities are broadly appropriate and include suitable actions for leaders and timelines for completion of tasks. However, areas for development identified in relation to teaching are not included with the improvement priorities. The school captures a broad range of information, but the routine collation and analysis of this to inform leaders on the quality of provision and to influence planning are underdeveloped.

As part of their annual quality assurance, leaders at the school observe teaching. Observations that are part of performance management provide a more evaluative account of teaching and learning than other observations. The whole-school summary of strengths and areas for improvement in teaching, for example, does not provide staff with the necessary information for them to know what and how to improve their practice.

The governing body is passionate about and committed to the school. Governors have an appropriate overview of finances. The chair and vice chair have regular meetings with the headteacher and are appropriately appraised of developments within the school. Governors have a general understanding of national developments in relation to curriculum and ALN reform. The extent to which the governors have a secure understanding of the impact of these changes at Ysgol Penmaes is developing. Despite the school having a strong school council, there have been no formal meetings between the school council and the governing body. The oversight that the governing body and senior leaders have of the satellite provision at Crossgates Primary School is underdeveloped. Nonetheless, the inspection team

have no concerns regarding the progress of pupils, teaching or day-to-day leadership at the site.

Recent staff absence has meant that some classes have been closed. The headteacher has managed this situation by rotating those classes that were closed and minimising the amount of time that pupils were absent.

There are a broad range of appropriate professional learning opportunities for staff. Staff work collaboratively both internally and with external partners to enhance the learning and care, support and well-being of pupils.

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.

Leaders and governors manage the school's finances appropriately, including use of the pupil development grant.

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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