



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

A report on

Ysgol Penmachno

**Penmachno
Betws-Y-Coed
Conwy
LL24 0PT**

Date of inspection: February 2024

by

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

This report is also available in Welsh.

About Ysgol Penmachno

Name of provider	Ysgol Penmachno
Local authority	Conwy County Borough Council
Language of the provider	Welsh
Type of school	Primary
Religious character	
Number of pupils on roll	38
Pupils of statutory school age	32
Number in nursery classes (if applicable)	5
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 Primary is 23.7%)	6.7%
Percentage of pupils identified as having additional learning needs (a) (The national percentage of pupils identified as having an additional learning need in Primary is 13.2%)	31.3%
Percentage of pupils who speak Welsh at home	62.5%
Percentage of pupils with English as an additional language	0.0%
Date of headteacher appointment	01/09/2023
Date of previous Estyn inspection (if applicable)	20/10/2015
Start date of inspection	19/02/2024

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 'special educational needs' is being used to describe those pupils on the SEN register of the school.

Overview

Ysgol Penmachno is a familial, inclusive and caring learning community where all pupils are nurtured and encouraged to 'Grow and learn together'. Their behaviour is good and they show respect towards each other and towards staff and visitors. The school places a high priority on developing positive relationships between pupils, staff, parents and the wider community.

Teachers provide a range of stimulating and engaging experiences for pupils which support them in developing their literacy, numeracy, and digital skills appropriately by the end of their time in the school. In general, teachers' feedback to pupils is not effective enough in supporting them to know what to do to improve their work and how.

Every pupil is a valuable member of various councils, and their voice and work have a positive effect on the life of the school. The 'Llun Lles' ('Well-being Monday') and 'Gwener Gwych' ('Fab Friday') sessions provide valuable opportunities for pupils to undertake activities that promote diligent cooperation, for example in reinforcing a good range of skills in the outside learning areas. In addition, pupils are encouraged to develop resilience and take care of their emotional well-being. As a result, pupils are happy and proud that they belong to the school.

The curriculum offers a good range of interesting experiences that reflect the school's local context and are very successful in promoting pupils' awareness of their locality and the history and traditions of Wales. This is a strong feature of the school's provision. They encourage pupils to celebrate their Welshness through a range of memorable activities and visits which are very effective in cultivating their knowledge and understanding of their local area and their pride in it. Overall, a minority of pupils do not speak Welsh spontaneously with each other consistently enough as they learn and play.

The headteacher provides the school with clear and supportive strategic leadership. Governors support the school with enthusiasm and pride, and skilful use is made of their expertise to support the school's work. As a result, governors have a sound understanding of the school's main strengths and areas for improvement.

Recommendations

- R1 Ensure that teachers' feedback helps pupils to know what to do to improve their work and how
- R2 Support pupils to speak Welsh consistently in the classroom and around the school

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' communication, social and emotional skills are below what is expected for their age and stage of development. Over time, most pupils, including ALN pupils and those who qualify for free school meals, make appropriate progress from their starting points.

Most pupils listen attentively to instructions from adults and to each other's contributions and comments. They respond respectfully and cheerfully to others by using an appropriate tone of voice and gestures. Pupils across the school speak confidently about their learning experiences and when socialising. For example, the youngest pupils create engaging stories and discuss characters by using interesting, rich vocabulary. However, a minority of pupils across the school tend to discuss their learning and socialising experiences in English.

Many pupils' reading skills develop well in both languages. Year 2 pupils, for example, read enthusiastically and use purposeful strategies when reading less familiar words. They begin to discuss their favourite texts and offer sound reasons to support their choices. Over time, pupils build on their skills purposefully, and by Year 4, they show an increasingly good understanding of the content of text. They vary the intonation of their voices enthusiastically when reading to convey meaning effectively. Older pupils read more extensive texts fluently and discuss their favourite authors thoughtfully. They apply their reading skills confidently across the curriculum.

Most pupils' writing skills develop suitably. For example, the youngest pupils develop their creative writing skills successfully through choosing appropriate adjectives to describe creatures they discover in the sea. Over time, pupils develop into enterprising and creative writers. For example, older pupils begin to use similes purposefully to create a sense of fear and adventure when writing a description of a storm. Pupils apply their writing skills appropriately across a range of forms.

During their time in the school, most pupils' numeracy skills develop appropriately. The youngest pupils use early number skills successfully and count objects up to 10 reliably. Year 3 pupils, for example, build well on these skills and use purposeful methods for adding and subtracting 3-digit numbers. By the time they reach the top of the school, pupils develop a good understanding of place value and identify and compare numbers over one million with confidence. Most pupils apply their number skills successfully across the curriculum. For example, the oldest pupils form a business plan to run a stall at the Machno Festival and including detailed objectives about the profit they aim to make.

On the whole, most pupils across the school make appropriate progress in their digital skills. They apply their skills confidently to various purposes. For example, Year 6 pupils create a short film to explain to the viewer why leaves change colour over the seasons.

Many pupils make good progress in their physical skills. The youngest pupils develop valuable balancing skills while practising bicycle control energetically around the yard. The oldest pupils show positive attitudes to physical activities while practising their football skills and carrying branches and twigs for building shelters in the forest area.

Most pupils' creative skills develop well across a range of stimulating activities. For example, the youngest pupils showing enthusiasm in designing warm, colourful socks for Sally Sws the Octopus, while Year 2 pupils, for example, consider the well-being of sea creatures when creating a zoo to keep them safe using blocks and pieces of wood.

Well-being and attitudes to learning

Almost without exception, pupils show pride in their school and local area, and feel happy and safe in its inclusive and caring ethos. The oldest pupils take care of younger pupils naturally and maturely, for example by listening to them read in class and acting as 'Bydis Buarth' (playground buddies) during break times. Nearly all pupils are polite and show respect towards each other, and towards adults and visitors. They are friendly with each other and greet adults cheerfully and politely.

The behaviour of nearly all pupils is good in lessons and when moving around the school. They foster a positive working relationship with staff members and are confident that adults in the school are available to listen to them. This enables most pupils to engage with their learning consistently and to develop into confident contributors to the life of the school and the community. For example, they take part regularly in services and concerts in the village and perform frequently with the local choir.

Across the school, most pupils take regular advantage of the variety of effective methods available to support their emotional and social well-being. During their 'Llun Lles' sessions, nearly all pupils participate successfully in a good range of valuable experiences in outside learning areas. For example, the youngest pupils cook pancakes on an open fire, and the oldest pupils use clay and twigs skilfully to create models of imaginary characters living in the wild garden. As a result, nearly all pupils develop into happy, healthy, confident individuals.

Most pupils understand how to make healthy choices in relation to diet and how to keep themselves physically healthy. They bring fruit to school for their break time snack and are encouraged to taste and eat vegetables at lunchtime. Most pupils have a sound understanding of how to keep themselves safe online, and visits by a police officer reinforce this successfully.

As pupils move through the school, most listen and concentrate well for extended periods and respond confidently to questions from teachers and learning assistants. They apply themselves to their tasks promptly and display an interest in what they

are learning, by undertaking the activities that are provided with resilience and enthusiasm. They persevere diligently when solving problem, for example the oldest pupils cooperate inquisitively when building shelters from natural materials in the forest area.

Most pupils work well individually, in pairs and in small groups and offer to help each other when necessary. For example, the oldest pupils show wisdom in discussing and prioritising items according to their importance in terms of keeping them alive on an imaginary island. When given the opportunity, a majority of pupils use verbal and written feedback appropriately to move their learning forward appropriately when responding to comments from staff and peers.

The pupil's voice is prominent in the everyday life of the school. Nearly all pupils contribute ideas to their learning at the beginning of themes. For example, members of the school council and the well-being council acted on ideas by their peers to build a 'mates' bench' in the yard to encourage pupils to support each other and play together happily during break time. All pupils are members of a council, and they undertake their leadership responsibilities enthusiastically and conscientiously. They discuss their leadership responsibilities confidently and provide valid reasons for decisions they make. This is a strong feature of the school.

Most pupils show empathy towards others, on a local and international level, and appreciate opportunities to support and contribute to various charities and humanitarian activities in the local community. For example, they contribute generously to the food bank at St Tudclud's Church. As a result, they make a valuable contribution in providing help for families in need.

Across the school, most pupils develop a sound awareness of the importance of caring for their environment and sustainability. As part of the 'Nature House Project', pupils across the school are working together with Eryri National Park and Cartrefi Conwy to plant a hedge and fruit trees in the village.

Teaching and learning experiences

Staff cooperate extremely effectively with pupils and parents to develop a stimulating and exciting curriculum that meets the needs of most pupils well. They have established a clear vision based on providing learning experiences that inspire pupils, ignite their imagination, and nurture their natural curiosity in a skilful way. The school's curriculum is balanced and broad and shows skilful consideration for the local area. As a result, these experiences succeed in stimulating pupils' enthusiasm for their learning and their commitment to it.

Teachers and learning assistants work together effectively to provide learning activities by planning engaging themes for the whole school. They ensure that the provision builds on pupils' knowledge, understanding and interests in an intelligent and coherent manner. Provision for developing pupils' literacy, numeracy and digital skills has been planned carefully and ensures that pupils have rich opportunities to apply their skills across a wide range of stimulating contexts. These learning experiences encourage pupils to experiment, ask questions and cooperate effectively with their peers. In general, in a few activities, a small number of pupils are not challenged effectively enough by these tasks and learning experiences.

Staff ensure that the learning environment both inside and outside is attractive and encourages a productive and exciting learning community. They ensure regular access for pupils to undertake activities in the outside areas which motivate pupils by facilitating increasingly independent learning. This contributes robustly to supporting pupils to immerse themselves in their learning experiences. For example, the oldest pupils are extremely inquisitive in experimenting with how to filter water to sustain them on an imaginary island.

Staff make very effective use of visitors to enrich learning experiences. For example, local farmers bring machinery and a range of animals to the school to deepen pupils' learning when completing thematic work on 'The Farm'. These visits stimulate pupils' imaginations and expand their knowledge about work and their personal aspirations for various careers. Educational visits strengthen provision effectively and build purposefully on pupils' knowledge and understanding.

In general, teachers use a good range of teaching methods that promote learning purposefully. They have established a supportive working relationship with pupils, based on respect and the desire for all pupils to have the opportunity to succeed. Learning has clear objectives and teachers are effective language models. They use probing questioning methods that work well in recalling previous learning and confirming pupils' understanding. Overall, staff encourage pupils to speak Welsh spontaneously. However, a minority of pupils turn to English too frequently.

Teachers offer feedback to pupils on their work. However, the feedback often focuses on spelling mistakes and praising effort rather than important aspects that are relevant to the task. At times, teachers provide suitable opportunities for pupils to respond to feedback and improve their work, but these opportunities are not sufficiently regular. As a result, pupils do not always know clearly enough how to improve their work and do not get enough opportunities to make valuable improvements to their work.

Leaders monitor and track pupils' progress intelligently. The information is used in valuable professional discussions among staff. They use the information effectively to respond to pupils' specific needs and to plan the next steps in their learning.

Care, support and guidance

The school is a caring and inclusive community where pupils, staff and families feel valued and respected. Staff encourage pupils to embrace and contribute to its supportive and friendly ethos. As a result, the supportive and productive working relationship that exists between staff and pupils is an extremely effective feature.

The school's curriculum supports pupils to develop their awareness and understanding of the importance of their emotional well-being. For example, teachers provide valuable opportunities during 'Llun Lles' sessions for pupils to create a personal 'Bocs Hapus' ('Happy Box'). These contain positive messages from staff and peers together with objects that are comforting to individual pupils, such as a teddy bear or a picture that they treasure. They have access to the box at any time if they feel sad or in need of emotional support.

The headteacher and staff use effective procedures for tracking and monitoring pupils' progress and well-being. These procedures enable teachers to identify the needs of individuals and groups of pupils early in their journey through the school, and to provide them with appropriate support, where necessary. This includes provision for pupils with ALN. The school has individual development plans and detailed one-page profiles for these pupils, which include clear and purposeful targets for responding robustly to their needs. Teachers review these plans regularly with pupils, parents and relevant agencies in order to plan purposefully for the next steps in their learning. The additional learning needs co-ordinator (ALNCo) plans bespoke support programmes, together with the rest of the staff, to support the needs of pupils in the classroom, individually or in small groups, where appropriate.

A strong feature of the provision is the way in which staff encourage pupils from all backgrounds and of all abilities to undertake leadership roles effectively in a variety of dedicated groups. This provision expands pupils' understanding of the importance of becoming active citizens in the school community. For example, pupils schedule weekly 'Gwener Gwych' sessions which cover a range of humanitarian activities, fun afternoons, and various trips. This is an extremely effective feature of the provision that enriches pupils' learning experiences. Staff foster these opportunities successfully and ensure valuable opportunities for pupils to contribute to decisions on the school's further development, in addition to contributing positively to supporting their peers' well-being.

The school promotes pupils' spiritual, moral, and cultural development well. The youngest pupils work effectively to produce a creative dance to celebrate Diwali, and write touching aspirations based on Martin Luther King's speech, for example. In addition, members of St Tudclud's Church visit the school to tell the story of the Posada. As part of Christmas celebrations, pupils take their turn in caring for models of Mary and Joseph and giving them a night's accommodation.

One of the strongest qualities of the school's work is staff's use of pupils' "cynefin", or local area, and the wider community. Staff place a strong emphasis on providing a rich and varied range of visits to places of interest in the local area, and this succeeds in reinforcing the curriculum. A positive example is the visit by the youngest pupils to a local farm to ask a farmer about his life and his work. The school makes highly effective use of visitors to develop pupils' knowledge and understanding of Welsh culture. For example, pupils go on a nature walk with a well-known Welsh naturalist, and visit Tŷ Mawr Wybrnant to learn about Bishop William Morgan. This ensures that pupils foster a sense of belonging to their "cynefin" and encourages them to take pride in their heritage.

Pupils have valuable opportunities to celebrate Welsh culture, for example by creating striking works of art with a local artist, performing regularly in Eisteddfod competitions, and being able to attend residential courses. Staff provide numerous opportunities for pupils to perform in the school and in the local community; for example, the choir entertains older residents of the community in a local hotel. This is extremely successful in developing pupils' self-confidence and their pride in their school.

The school has appropriate arrangements for developing pupils' awareness of the importance of healthy eating and drinking. As a result, most pupils speak confidently

about healthy eating habits and understand the importance of a balanced diet. A range of beneficial opportunities is provided to develop pupils' fitness and physical skills through physical flexibility sessions, swimming, and cycle training, for example. Staff provide purposeful opportunities for pupils to take part in competitions; for example, the school's football team won an Urdd tournament.

The school's arrangements for monitoring attendance and punctuality are robust. The headteacher contacts parents promptly to discuss any concerns. As a result, pupils' attendance across the school is effective. All staff have a thorough awareness of safeguarding processes and the school's arrangements for safeguarding pupils are sound and comprehensive and give no cause for concern.

Leadership and management

Within a short period of time, the headteacher has set a robust and clear strategic direction for the school. She works conscientiously with staff, pupils, parents, and governors to develop a collective vision while setting high aspirations for the school. The school is based on establishing a close-knit school community that 'Grows and learns together' in a happy and inclusive learning environment where the child's voice is central to all its work.

A very strong sense of family has been established in the school, and the headteacher enthuses all staff to do their best for the school and its community. Staff cooperate effectively and happily with each other to ensure rich and memorable provision within local and Welsh contexts. Across the school, there is a strong emphasis on developing Welsh culture among pupils. Nevertheless, a minority of pupils tend to speak English with their peers during learning sessions and when playing.

The headteacher has high expectations of her own performance and that of staff, and the well-being of pupils and staff is at the heart of all her work. The headteacher is supported effectively by a small team of staff who understand their roles and responsibilities well, and they undertake valuable opportunities to develop their skills and knowledge successfully. All staff members have a good understanding of the school's strengths and areas for improvement. Regular staff meetings are held to organise and implement activities to achieve agreed priorities. As a result, staff act successfully to meet local and national priorities. Learning assistants are key members of the school's team and all staff members are focused in their approach on meeting the well-being and learning needs of each pupil.

The school's self-evaluation and quality assurance arrangements are purposeful and include an appropriately broad range of monitoring activities in which the headteacher and teachers participate. They scrutinise pupils' books and drop in on learning activities, where teachers visit classes to evaluate a specific aspect of the school's work. The headteacher also considers evidence derived from comments by pupils, staff and parents through analysing questionnaires when evaluating the school's performance. As a result, this enables the headteacher to identify strengths and aspects for improvement correctly.

Governors are strong advocates for the school and are very familiar with its community. They fulfil their roles very effectively, by ensuring that they provide a

sensible balance of support and challenge to the headteacher and staff. The school makes skilful use of governors' expertise. For example, the school makes valuable use of the skills of one member by holding a challenging mathematics workshop for Year 5 and Year 6 pupils. This is a useful contribution in supporting the development of the oldest pupils' numeracy skills. Governors visit the school regularly and participate in learning walks, scrutinise pupils' work and have discussions with staff to evaluate pupils' progress and achievement, and provision. As a result, they have a sound understanding of the school's strengths and areas for improvement, and this enables them to contribute knowledgeably to specific discussions on determining strategic priorities for the school and to fulfil their roles effectively.

Arrangements for managing staff performance are incisive and make a valuable contribution to their development. The headteacher creates a positive culture of promoting and supporting staff members' professional learning, and there are suitable opportunities for them to attend courses and training that is linked directly to their individual needs and the school's priorities. Opportunities are provided for staff to cooperate closely with staff from other local schools, for example on joint planning of themes and sharing good practice.

The headteacher and governors manage the school's finances prudently. This includes the pupil development grant, which is used carefully to provide programmes that support the development of pupils' literacy, numeracy, and emotional skills. The headteacher, staff and governors have created an effective safeguarding culture where pupils and staff feel safe, and that they are valued. Governors ensure that the school has appropriate arrangements for promoting healthy eating and drinking, for example by providing a water fountain for pupils.

One of the school's notable strengths is the very productive and close relationship that exists between the headteacher, staff and parents. The parents' association is very active in organising several fundraising activities for the school to contribute towards the costs of educational trips and musical instrument lessons for pupils, for example. In addition, staff welcome parents to the school regularly, and hold valuable sessions for sharing ideas with them, for example to support the development of their children's reading skills. As a result, parents feel that they are valued within the school's supportive, familial, and extremely caring community.

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/committee members through their questionnaire responses

During an inspection, inspectors:

- hold a meeting with parents to hear their views on the school and its effectiveness
- meet the headteacher, governors, senior and middle leaders and individual teachers to evaluate the effect 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 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
- 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
- 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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