



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

A report on

Ysgol Mynydd Isa

**Chamber's Lane
Bryn-Y-Baal
Nr.Mold
Flintshire
CH7 6SJ**

Date of inspection: May 2022

by

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

About Ysgol Mynydd Isa

Name of provider	Ysgol Mynydd Isa
Local authority	Flintshire
Language of the provider	English Medium
Type of school	Primary
Religious character	
Number of pupils on roll	559
Pupils of statutory school age	444
Number in nursery classes (if applicable)	62
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 21.3%)</i>	10.9%
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 20.6%)</i>	0.27
Percentage of statutory school age pupils who speak Welsh at home	*
Percentage of statutory school age pupils with English as an additional language	*
Date of headteacher appointment	September 2011
Date of previous Estyn inspection (if applicable)	22/01/2013
Start date of inspection	
Additional information	

Data reported is sourced from the latest available Pupil Level Annual School Census. These figures may be slightly different to those observed during the inspection.

Further information is available from the Welsh Government My Local School website: mylocalschool.gov.wales

- (a) The term 'additional learning needs' is being used to describe those pupils on the SEN/ALN register of the school.

Overview

The school is a happy and welcoming community in which all pupils and staff feel valued. Pupils enjoy the learning experiences and the extra-curricular activities that the school provides and have very positive attitudes towards school and learning.

The headteacher and his senior leadership team give the school strong strategic direction. They have a clear understanding of the school's strengths and identify areas that need improvement accurately. Their leadership skills through the pandemic period were very effective in ensuring that the school maintained a close relationship with pupils and their families. This helped to ensure that pupils learning continued as effectively as possible. At the start of this academic year, leaders and teachers identified the precise support for both learning and well-being that pupils needed following the disruption caused by the pandemic. They implemented a range of strategies and support programmes swiftly to meet individual pupils' needs. As a result, most pupils across the school have made exceptional progress since September 2021. Pupils' speaking, reading and writing skills in English are of a high standard. In particular, they use a mature vocabulary when speaking and writing. Teachers and leaders recognise the need to raise pupils' standards in Welsh.

The school has maintained momentum in developing its provision in line with the requirements of the Curriculum for Wales. Teachers and leaders are reflective practitioners who think carefully about how they are developing the provision for their pupils. The curriculum currently offers pupils a wide range of authentic, high quality learning experiences that engage and interest them successfully. However, opportunities for pupils to learn about diversity in society are less well developed.

Recommendations

R1 Improve pupils' Welsh oracy skills

R2 Develop the school's curriculum planning to reflect the diverse range of backgrounds and perspectives found in society

What happens next

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

Estyn will invite the school to prepare a case study on its work in relation to ensuring rapid progress for pupils following the disruption caused by the pandemic, for dissemination on Estyn's website.

Main evaluation

Learning

During their time at Ysgol Mynydd Isa nearly all pupils make good progress. This includes pupils in the school's language resource centres and pupils with additional learning needs in mainstream classes. Pupils across the school have made exceptional progress since September 2021, following the disruption to their learning caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Most pupils in the nursery classes listen well. They enjoy registration sessions where they carry out purposeful activities such as counting the number of children present and talking about the weather using simple Welsh words. Many pupils speak confidently and clearly, for example when buying and selling vegetables in the role-play areas.

Most pupils in all year groups listen effectively to adults and to each other. Most pupils throughout the school have well developed speaking skills. Many pupils of all ages talk using a wide range of vocabulary, often using words and phrases beyond those expected for their age. Many younger pupils speak confidently, for example in the reception class pupils give detailed explanations of how to keep safe in the school's forest area. Older pupils use their speaking skills well in their work across the curriculum such as when they are investigating the best location on the school site to locate a wind turbine. Pupils in the language resource centre develop their communication skills well. Many of the older pupils are confident to speak and express opinions. Younger pupils communicate orally in a variety of ways, for example singing songs about pirates supported by the Makaton language programme.

A majority of pupils make appropriate progress in developing their Welsh language skills. They listen to adults speaking using familiar phrases, for example to praise or to instruct, and respond to these appropriately. Across the school, pupils use simple Welsh words and phrases independently. For example, in Year 1 pupils role play short conversations in pairs. Older pupils read from simple Welsh books. However, in both speaking and reading, many pupils struggle to pronounce Welsh accurately.

Most pupils' reading skills in English are good. Younger readers and pupils in the language resource centre develop an understanding of the relationship between letters and sounds and use this knowledge well to help them to read. By the end of Year 2, many pupils read fluently and with good understanding. They engage well with stories read aloud by adults, for example enjoying the humour in 'The Queen's Knickers'. As pupils move through the school, they develop a good range of reading strategies. For example, pupils in Years 3 and 4 scan texts effectively to find important details about healthy foods. They are developing strong critical reading skills. For example, they understand the importance of checking more than one written source when reading for information. In Year 6, most pupils express preferences for favourite texts and authors. Most read fluently with very good expression and intonation.

Many pupils have made outstanding progress in writing this year. They have improved their writing stamina to enable them to produce written work of a very high quality. Alongside this they have improved the skills that support effective writing including handwriting, spelling and punctuation. Younger pupils write simple sentences using full stops and capital letters and more able pupils extend their sentences to add detail, for example using a good range of adjectives to describe a pirate. In Year 6, pupils use their writing skills purposefully in many contexts, for example when considering whether the story of Oliver Twist is effective in persuading people to help children living in poverty. Pupils apply their writing skills well in their topic work. For example, Year 3 pupils produce well-structured leaflets with details of how to keep teeth healthy.

Most pupils make good progress in developing their mathematical skills and understanding. They regularly apply their numerical skills in real life contexts. For example, pupils in Year 2 make tally charts and bar graphs to record the number of birds seen during the Big Garden Birdwatch. Pupils in the language resource centre apply their skills well, for example to time how long it takes them to complete an assault course. Older pupils have worked closely with architects designing their new school building. This enabled them to apply a range of numeracy skills to contexts involving the world of work. They make models to scale and investigate the materials that could be used in the building.

Most pupils develop and use a wide range of digital skills. They apply these skills well in their work across the curriculum. Younger pupils film each other acting out short conversations in Welsh. In Years 1 and 2 pupils use tablet computers effectively to find out about the Queen. They present information in a variety of ways, manipulating images and changing text font and colour. Older pupils create codes and programs to move robots and create spreadsheets to convert pesos to pounds.

Most pupils develop their creative skills successfully, particularly in art. Younger pupils experiment with different paint colour combinations after studying the work of the artist Kandinsky. Older pupils design masks during their topic on Mexico and use these designs to paint the faces of pupils in the class.

Pupils across the school demonstrate good levels of independence in learning. Most pupils' interest in their work and their ability to sustain concentration and to avoid distractions is good. They begin tasks readily and persevere with more challenging tasks well.

Well-being and attitudes to learning

Nearly all pupils behave very well during lessons, moving around school and at break times. They are polite, courteous and respectful towards each other, staff and visitors. Nearly all pupils work and play co-operatively. Both younger and older pupils have a very good understanding of the school rules, 'ready, respectful and safe'. They apply these well in many situations during the school day including when working in the school's forest area. Nearly all pupils are proud of their school and feel safe and secure within its positive and caring learning environment. They are confident that adults will listen to their concerns and deal with any problems that arise.

Nearly all pupils understand the importance of online safety. Many pupils took part in a competition run by the digital wizard group to design a mascot to promote online safety. Pupils contributed effectively to a pupils' version of the e-safety policy and have shared this with pupils across the school.

Pupils speak maturely and discuss their work confidently with each other and visitors. They engage well with their learning and demonstrate positive attitudes towards their work. Pupils contribute enthusiastically to the development of new topics by offering their ideas on what they think should be included. For example, when pupils chose to study the local area as part of the Victorian theme 'What the Dickens?' they suggested a focus on local people and events including Daniel Owen and the Mold Riots.

Nearly all pupils have a sound understanding of how to keep healthy and know the importance of regular physical exercise. When studying their topic Burps, Bottoms and Bile they learn about the different nutrients the body needs and understand why these are important. Many pupils participate enthusiastically in a wide range of extra-curricular activities in addition to their regular physical education sessions. These include flag football, rugby, dodgeball and dance, which provide good opportunities for them to develop their physical skills.

Pupils, including representatives from the language resource centres, undertake leadership roles and responsibilities conscientiously. They display a good understanding of the importance and purpose of their roles and feel that their contributions are valued. Members of the councils influence school life successfully. For example, the eco-council has introduced an effective recycling scheme for crisp packets. The school council worked with senior leaders to devise a pupil questionnaire to find out if pupils feel safe at school. Pupils from this group contribute to the writing of child friendly versions of school policies. The Criw Cymraeg support Welsh language use in school, for example by promoting 'Patrwm y Pythefnos'. Nearly all pupils have made valuable contributions to the plans for the new school site. Older pupils met with the architect and put forward their suggestions, for example to include a wind turbine

In lessons, nearly all pupils are attentive to their teachers and are eager to participate. They work effectively and co-operatively together well. They listen to each other respectfully and apply themselves purposefully when working collaboratively. Across the school pupils sustain concentration on tasks and activities very well. Pupils respond well to feedback and understand what they need to do to improve their work. For example, they have a clear understanding of the whole school marking system of green for great and pink for think.

Owing to the coronavirus pandemic, inspectors will not report pupils' rates of attendance during the academic year 2021-2022. Inspectors will, however, consider the school's provision for monitoring and improving attendance as part of inspection area 4 (care, support and guidance).

Teaching and learning experiences

Leaders have a clear vision for the school's curriculum. Staff work effectively together to improve teaching and learning through their reflective approach to curriculum reform.

Teachers know their pupils well. They create warm, respectful relationships with them and provide an engaging and inclusive environment, which makes the school a delightful place to learn. As a result, pupils are highly motivated, often make exceptional progress, and develop as positive, independent learners. They listen well, discuss articulately and develop their thinking effectively during lessons. Younger pupils, for example, think about how to create the royal family line of succession using pictures and lollipop sticks, whilst older pupils consider how Rosa Parks' outward character may differ from her inner feelings.

Across the school, teaching is of a consistently high quality. Teachers use a wide range of resources and purposeful approaches to develop pupils' skills, knowledge and understanding effectively and have high expectations for all. They find exciting and sometimes intriguing ways to introduce themes. For example, to spark interest in the whole school topic *Fi a fy Nheulu*, a 'strange video' interrupts all lessons and pupils discover that a spaceship has left its imprint in the grass outside.

The rich curriculum the school is developing is unique to Ysgol Mynydd Isa and is highly effective in meeting the needs of all pupils. Teachers carefully consider progression in their planning to build systematically on pupils' knowledge, understanding and skills in most aspects of their learning. As pupils move through the school, for example, they develop their recount writing from oral descriptions to using pictures and questions and finally to planning and creating a news article. In art, early on they begin to draw themselves as simple line drawings, developing later to express their emotions through their portrait work. Teachers plan suitably challenging opportunities for pupils to apply their numeracy skills in other aspects of their learning. When designing an owl sanctuary, they use mapping and grid references as part of the design process and, when planning a Jubilee party, they work out how best to cater for a party of twelve within a given budget. Pupils use digital technology in lessons and develop their digital skills appropriately across the curriculum.

Teachers meet regularly to discuss individual pupil progress and are beginning to develop a shared understanding of progression. They provide regular verbal feedback to support pupils to understand what they need to do to improve. As a result, most pupils talk confidently about their work, explaining how what they have learned relates to their real life experiences. Younger pupils adding sets of coins to create a new total say, 'You need money for everything!' Older pupils reflect on how pay cuts for miners in the 19th century affected people in their local area. They write purposeful letters to Lord Shaftesbury clearly outlining their reasons for resignation and pleading for change. They explain that looking at the past helps them to become ethical, informed citizens and reflect that having empathy also helps them maintain friendships. Pupils use self-assessment and success criteria well to check their work and think about their next steps. A few pupils in Year 5 and Year 6 are beginning to think more critically about their own and others' learning to further aid their understanding of how they learn.

Reports to parents contain useful information about their child's learning and suggest helpful ways they can support progress at home.

Teachers and support staff make good use of the extensive and thoughtfully developed school grounds and pupils thoroughly enjoy their outdoor learning opportunities. Younger pupils complete problem-solving activities such as building a castle in the forest following instructions that include time limits, height limits and painting a flag with strawberries. They also learn about the flowers and leaves they collect, using a fact file to identify them. The school places importance on providing a wide range of clubs for pupils to enjoy, such as netball, chess and gardening. They also benefit from a wide variety of opportunities to visit venues including galleries and theatres, as well as residential outdoor pursuits centres.

The school provides plentiful opportunities for pupils to develop their understanding of the history and culture of Wales. Teachers incorporate authentic opportunities for pupils to learn about their locality through history and the issues that affect them today. They contribute to high level discussion about the advantages and disadvantages of wind turbines for example, consider renewable energies, and investigate appropriate places to site a turbine nearby. They learn about and imitate the work of Welsh artists Janet Bell and Rhiannon Roberts, celebrate special days and create presentations on influential Welsh people. However, opportunities for pupils to practise their Welsh language skills are less well developed. The school's plans for teaching pupils about the history and experiences of Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic communities and people who are LGBT+, are at a very early stage of development.

Care, support and guidance

The school supports pupils' emotional and social needs well. Staff create an exceptionally warm and caring learning environment where pupils feel valued and safe. They provide a range of successful nurture programmes that support pupils' emotional and well-being needs effectively. The introduction of mindfulness strategies across the school, accompanied by appropriate staff training, has enabled all pupils to benefit from these approaches. Following the pandemic period, the school has introduced a range of 'talking' interventions that support pupils in exploring their emotions and reactions more analytically. The calm atmosphere across both sites reflects the success of this provision.

The school's two language resource centres offer rich and stimulating opportunities for pupils to follow the school's broad curriculum at the same time as providing effective support for their speech and language development. Staff in the resource centres have a highly effective relationship with the local authority speech and language service. Therapists from the service visit each class on a weekly basis to work with each pupil, review their targets, suggest strategies and offer helpful professional learning to the centres' staff. This year the successful provision has resulted in around a quarter of pupils becoming ready to make the transition to mainstream classes.

The school's processes for tracking and monitoring pupils' learning are precise and detailed. This supports the early identification of those with additional learning needs in the mainstream classes effectively. Highly trained staff offer a wide range of

programmes to support pupils' learning needs. Staff consider these needs carefully and match them with well-planned interventions, including adapting programmes when necessary. This ensures that nearly all pupils achieve the well-defined targets that are set for them and make good progress in numeracy and literacy skills. This is a strength of the school.

The school provides good opportunities for pupils to take responsibility and contribute to the life and work of the school. Members of the school council collaborated with staff to produce the school's 'Challenging Bullying' policy, which aims to prevent discrimination and raise pupil awareness of such issues.

Staff provide good opportunities for pupils to consider ethical issues such as fair trade and renewable sources of energy through the curriculum. They also provide opportunities for pupils to learn about different religions, including Islam and Christianity. Pupils' moral development is supported effectively by three clear school rules, 'ready, respectful and safe'.

The school provides regular opportunities to promote pupils' spiritual development through regular collective worship. Staff deal with issues sensitively during these sessions and encourage pupils to take part and to lead worship sessions. The school provides worthwhile opportunities for pupils to perform in celebrations including the annual Eisteddfodau.

The school has robust arrangements in place to safeguard pupils. Leaders and teachers ensure that the learning experiences they provide help to develop pupils' understanding of how they can keep themselves safe, for example online and when using the school's forest area. Leaders work purposefully to promote the importance of regular attendance, including with the education welfare service. Leaders provide regular reminders to families about good attendance through the school newsletter and social media channels.

Leadership and management

The headteacher is a highly effective leader. He has a clear vision for the school based around the school motto, 'Learning Together, Succeeding Together', and promoting five agreed core values. He communicates this effectively to all staff and stakeholders. He has established a strong and effective leadership team who have clear roles and responsibilities and a positive influence on the work of the school. School leaders and staff have a sound understanding of the needs of the pupils and the local community. The school works well in partnership with parents who have plenty of opportunities to get involved in school life. Leaders know their school well and carefully select the most appropriate areas for improvement, focusing directly on developing provision to improve pupils' standards and well-being. This leads to a safe and inclusive ethos across the school, which ensures that nearly all pupils achieve well within a caring environment. The school provides a very strong start for pupils, which allows them to learn productively.

The governing body is knowledgeable and supports the school skilfully. Governors are supportive of the headteacher and hold him to account robustly. Senior leaders share helpful information with governors about the standards that pupils achieve. Many governors participate in activities that help them to understand the work of the

school. For example, governors undertake learning walks and look at the quality of pupils' work alongside teachers. This helps them to develop a valuable understanding of the school's current practices. The headteacher, with the support of the governing body, monitors spending plans rigorously. The school allocates grant funding sensibly, including the pupil development grant, to employ skilful teaching and support staff to deliver a range of interventions. This helps ensure that identified pupils make good progress in their learning. Expenditure links effectively with priorities in the school improvement plan.

Senior leaders have established a culture of self-evaluation that is embedded into the daily life of the school. These processes are rigorous and based on a wide range of first-hand evidence. The systems to improve quality include listening to pupils, gathering the views of parents, lesson observations and a thorough scrutiny of pupils' work. As a result, leaders build a clear picture of the school's strengths and areas for development. They use this information accurately to identify a manageable number of relevant priorities, which they set against realistic timescales. For example, senior leaders identified that a focus for this year should be to support pupils to recover from the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. Through comprehensive and specific target setting and through the implementation of carefully considered actions, leaders have ensured that nearly all pupils have made rapid progress in aspects of literacy and numeracy during this academic year. The leadership team measures the impact of its strategies on school improvement regularly and judges the effect of changes robustly against improvements in pupils' outcomes.

The school has an effective staffing structure with clearly defined roles, expectations and responsibilities for all staff. Leaders have established a positive culture of collaboration and support amongst staff. Staff understand their roles in supporting improvement and know they play a pivotal role in influencing what happens next. They work with leaders to evaluate the progress of school improvement priorities as part of regular review meetings. Their views influence effectively any refinements to school improvement actions.

The school's performance management procedures are effective and link closely with school improvement priorities. Leaders ensure that all staff have access to relevant learning opportunities to support their professional development. A notable example of success is the development of staff digital skills to aid home learning. During performance progress meetings, leaders engage staff in constructive professional dialogue that identifies personal areas for development for individual staff members.

Evidence base of the report

Before an inspection, inspectors:

- analyse the outcomes from the parent/carer and pupil questionnaires and consider the views of teachers and the governing body through their questionnaire responses

During an inspection, inspectors normally:

- hold a meeting with parents/carers to hear their views on the school and its effectiveness
- meet the headteacher, governors, senior and middle leaders (where appropriate) and individual teachers to evaluate the impact of the school's work
- meet pupils to discuss their work, to listen to them read and to gain their views about various aspects of their school
- meet groups of pupils in leadership roles, such as representatives from the school council and eco-committee
- visit a broad sample of classes, including learning support groups and undertake a variety of learning walks to observe pupils learning and to see staff teaching in a range of settings, including classrooms, support groups and in outdoor areas
- where appropriate, visit the specialist resource base within the school to see pupils' learning
- observe and speak to pupils at lunch and break times and at a sample of after-school clubs, where appropriate
- attend assemblies and daily acts of collective worship
- look closely at the school's self-evaluation processes
- consider the school's improvement plan and look at evidence to show how well the school has taken forward planned improvements
- scrutinise a range of school documents, including information on pupil assessment and progress, records of meetings of staff and the governing body, information on pupils' well-being, including the safeguarding of pupils, and records of staff training and professional development

After the on-site inspection and before the publication of the report, Estyn:

- review the findings of the inspection alongside the supporting evidence from the inspection team in order to validate, moderate and ensure the quality of the inspection

Copies of the report

Copies of this report are available from the school and from the Estyn website (www.estyn.gov.wales)

The report was produced in accordance with Section 28 of the Education Act 2005.

Every possible care has been taken to ensure that the information in this document is accurate at the time of going to press. Any enquiries or comments regarding this document/publication should be addressed to:

Publication Section

Estyn

Anchor Court, Keen Road

Cardiff

CF24 5JW or by email to publications@estyn.gov.wales

This and other Estyn publications are available on our website: www.estyn.gov.wales

© Crown Copyright 2022: This report may be re used free of charge in any format or medium provided that it is re used accurately and not used in a misleading context. The material must be acknowledged as Crown copyright and the title of the report specified.

Publication date: 13/07/2022