



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

**A report on**  
**Ysgol Penglais**

**Waunfawr**  
**Aberystwyth**  
**Ceredigion**  
**SY23 3AW**

**Date of inspection: May 2022**

**by**

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

**This report is also available in Welsh.**

## About Ysgol Penglais

Name of provider	Penglais School
Local authority	Ceredigion
Language of the provider	English Medium
Type of school	Secondary
Religious character	N/A
Number of pupils on roll	1092
Pupils of statutory school age	831
Number in sixth form (if applicable)	261
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 secondary sector is 18.7%)</i>	12.8%
Percentage of statutory school age pupils identified as having additional learning needs (a)  <i>(The national percentage of pupils identified as having an additional learning need in the secondary sector is 21.7%)</i>	34.8%
Percentage of statutory school age pupils who speak Welsh at home	9.4%
Percentage of statutory school age pupils with English as an additional language	3.1%
Date of headteacher appointment	September 2017
Date of previous Estyn inspection (if applicable)	27.03.2019
Start date of inspection	16.05.2022
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](https://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

Effective leadership and a culture of trust has strengthened the teaching and learning experiences at the school over time. Strong positive working relationships between pupils and staff are a consistent and important characteristic of Ysgol Penglais. Most pupils have mature attitudes towards their education and work with staff to ensure that the school is a calm and pleasant learning environment. Most behave well in lessons, and many have positive attitudes towards learning.

The headteacher provides assured leadership and is well supported by leaders at all levels. Together, they provide a clear strategic direction and know the strengths and areas for improvement of the school well. They improve quality successfully.

The school has a clear vision for the development of its curriculum which is based on the findings of research on effective education practice. Professional learning is a strength, and the development of teaching is central to these curricular developments. Teachers are involved in a wide range of both whole school and individual initiatives to improve their practice. This has resulted in consistently high-quality teaching that leads to secure development in pupils' subject knowledge and skills. Pupils who attend the Hearing Resource Centre and Learning Support Centre also make good progress from their starting points.

Many teachers plan purposefully to ensure that pupils develop their thinking skills well. Provision for pupils' literacy skills is strong, and, as a result, pupils' oracy, reading and writing skills are well developed. However, provision to develop pupils' digital skills is at an early stage of development.

Pupils who studied Welsh first language in their primary schools continue to do so at Ysgol Penglais and most pupils are entered for a Welsh first or second language qualification in Year 11. However, the school does not promote a Welsh ethos well enough, and there are insufficient opportunities for pupils to develop their Welsh language skills.

The school has a wide range of strategies to support the wellbeing of all pupils, including those that have additional learning needs and those who require emotional support. The school has provided good support for vulnerable pupils as they returned to school life following the COVID-19 pandemic. Leaders make effective use of pupil voice surveys to evaluate well-being priorities and implement plans to improve provision for this aspect. As a result of the care and support provided by staff, most pupils feel safe at the school. However, work to improve the school's provision for personal, social and health education is at an early stage of development. In addition, the school does not always communicate well enough with parents and pupils on how incidents of poor behaviour or alleged bullying are addressed.

## **Recommendations**

- R1 Increase the opportunities for pupils to develop their Welsh language skills
- R2 Strengthen the safeguarding culture of the school by communicating clearly with all pupils and parents how incidents of behaviour and alleged bullying are addressed, as well as improving the provision for personal and social education
- R3 Improve cross-curricular provision to develop pupils' digital skills
- R4 Address the health and safety concerns shared with the school during the inspection

## **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 case studies on its work in relation to its professional learning programme and its work implementing a Curriculum for Wales for dissemination on Estyn's website.

## Main evaluation

### Learning

In lessons and over time, many pupils make secure progress in their knowledge, understanding and skills and a few pupils make particularly strong progress. Many recall prior learning well and are able to apply their knowledge and understanding successfully in new contexts. For example, in history, pupils successfully apply their prior knowledge to evaluate a range of historical sources and draw conclusions about the causes of the Holocaust.

A particular strength of the school is the way in which pupils develop their thinking skills. Many develop their ability to think deeply, persevere and solve problems well. For example, in their mathematics lessons, pupils are able to adapt their understanding of one algebraic concept to solve a connected problem without the teacher needing to explain this new concept. In geography, pupils work in small groups successfully to consider the implications of economic decline on aspects of society.

Most pupils listen well to their teachers' instructions and the contribution of their peers. Many contribute well to group and class discussions using a wide range of subject specific vocabulary. For example, pupils provide extended responses when explaining their choice of the key words in the poem "The Boxer" and how they convey the thoughts of the poet. In Welsh second language, a majority of pupils are able to speak in full sentences appropriately. However, a minority of pupils following this pathway do not have a sound enough understanding of sentence structure or sufficient vocabulary to respond independently. In Welsh first language lessons, most pupils respond to teachers' questions with suitable levels of fluency. However, they lack confidence in conversational Welsh with other pupils.

Most pupils have secure reading skills. They skim read to ascertain the main points and are able to scan a range of texts confidently in order to locate information. Many pupils interrogate and analyse texts well to draw relevant inferences and derive deeper meaning successfully, such as when they analyse Shakespeare's language to show how Macbeth displays confidence. Many synthesise and summarise information well. A few pupils demonstrate excellent understanding and interpretation of what they have read through sophisticated responses to questions.

Many pupils produce good quality extended writing. They write with sound technical accuracy and convey their ideas clearly. Many use a range of language structures competently to improve the fluency of their writing and engage the reader. They demonstrate a good awareness of audience and purpose in their writing. They provide well-reasoned and logical opinions and conclusions such as when considering whether the tsunami in Palu was preventable.

Most pupils who study Welsh first language write at length competently, for example when using similes effectively to describe the appearance and mannerisms of a relative. The majority of pupils who are studying Welsh second language are able to write short pieces suitably. They spell most words correctly and vary their sentence

starters. However, a few pupils who study Welsh second language struggle to form complete sentences.

Many pupils have secure basic number skills and use the four arithmetic rules competently. They are confident in their use of decimals, fractions and percentages. They apply their understanding of ratio and proportion to adapt recipes for different numbers of portions. Many pupils have a secure understanding of shapes and measures. They calculate compound measures such as speed and density, and can apply their understanding of Pythagoras' Theorem to solve problems in three dimensions, such as when calculating the height of pyramids. These pupils make logical connections between different areas of mathematics and as a result, they are able to apply their understanding to solve problems set in different contexts. They analyse data well and calculate averages and plot accurate graphs confidently, using them to draw well-reasoned conclusions. For example, in science, pupils use data to explain the relationship between the power of a lamp and the resistance. A minority of pupils identify successfully anomalies and the limitations of data used to plot a graph.

Due to the lack of purposeful opportunities, pupils do not develop their digital skills well enough.

In general, pupils develop their creative skills well. For example, in design and technology pupils show a particular aptitude for creativity when designing a coat hook or when varying ingredients while making chicken curry. In physical education lessons, pupils make good progress such as when improving their technique to hit a ball in rounders or developing their sprint starts.

Pupils with additional learning needs (ALN), including those that attend the Hearing Resource Centre and the Learning Support Centre, make good progress in relation to their abilities and recognised needs. Many make sound progress in their communication, literacy and numeracy skills. For example, pupils in the Hearing Resource Centre make strong progress in learning British Sign Language. Generally, pupils with additional needs interact well with peers, staff and visitors to the school. Pupils at the Hearing Resource Centre and the Learning Support Centre gain valuable qualifications.

Pupils in the sixth form show maturity and positive attitudes towards their learning. They generally make strong secure progress in lessons, for example when developing their understanding of different artists' techniques such as surrealism in the work of the artist Charles Luna. Many have secure recall of prior knowledge, such as when they explore the significance of the moon in literature when analysing poems they haven't seen before, or solving dynamics problems in mathematics. They contribute confidently to classroom discussions using sophisticated vocabulary and convey their views clearly.

### **Well-being and attitudes to learning**

Most pupils display strong social skills and interact maturely with staff, their peers and visitors. Most behave well in lessons and when moving around the school. They arrive promptly to lessons and nearly all understand the school's expectations of behaviour, including the rewards and sanctions system.

Most pupils listen respectfully in class, allow others to speak without interruption and engage well in class discussions. Many take pride in the presentation of their work and respond purposefully to their teachers' comments for improvement. They have positive attitudes towards their learning and show resilience when faced with challenging tasks. However, a few lose concentration, particularly towards the end of lessons.

Pupils in the Learning Support Centre and Hearing Resource Centre enjoy attending school and as a result they participate well in lessons. Many understand and follow well-established routines appropriately and work positively with their peers and staff. Most work independently in completing tasks and ask for help when needed. They are able to complete tasks with growing independence.

Most pupils feel safe and secure in school and feel well cared for by staff, including those pupils who are young carers. Many pupils feel that they are free from bullying and know where to go if they need support. Many pupils feel the school is an inclusive environment and that it celebrates diversity in a positive manner. They feel that they are encouraged to respect others' views and opinions. During tutor time, pupils discuss topical themes maturely such as what different family units look like in modern society. However, a minority say that they do not always feel that the school encourages pupils to respect all people, taking account of their race, gender, sexuality, religion, background or disability. A few pupils feel that the school does not deal well enough with incidents of bullying.

Many pupils feel that they are treated fairly and about half feel that the school listens well to their views and opinions and acts on suggestions for improvement made by the Student Leadership Team. Pupils from the Learning Support Centre and Hearing Resource Centre are represented in pupil voice activities, for example, Student Leadership Team, sports ambassadors and delivering British Sign Language training to staff and pupils. This supports their feeling of being valued members of the school community. However, pupils feel that, in general, they do not have enough opportunities to make their voice heard. A majority of pupils feel that they are encouraged to lead a healthy lifestyle by making well-informed food choices and participating in sporting activities both in school and after the school day.

Pupils in the sixth form display maturity, independence and ambition. They feel well supported by the school and prepared for the future. They appreciate the pastoral and academic support that the school provides. This includes the regular progress meetings with a learning coach. They are confident that they can get help or advice whenever it is needed.

Owing to the coronavirus pandemic, inspectors will not report pupils' rates of attendance during the academic years 2020-2021 and 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**

Most teachers have strong subject knowledge and are enthusiastic about their subjects. In general, teachers foster positive working relationships with pupils, and many have high expectations of their behaviour and what they can achieve. They



work well with learning support staff to adapt their teaching to support pupils with additional learning needs. Many teachers are good language role models and help pupils to develop their vocabulary.

In many cases, teachers plan their lessons carefully and provide pupils with high-quality learning resources that engage them well in their learning. They offer pupils clear explanations and break down complex concepts into smaller, more manageable steps. They check pupils' understanding and offer them valuable support when necessary. When appropriate, many teachers reinforce pupils' learning beneficially by connecting new learning to related concepts they have previously studied.

Many teachers use a wide range of techniques skilfully to get pupils to discuss their ideas. They check pupils' recall and use open questions to get them to think. Often, they follow up on pupils' answers beneficially to encourage them to extend their responses and develop their reasoning. In the majority of cases, teachers foster a learning environment in which pupils are unafraid to make mistakes.

In a few cases, there is inspirational teaching that results in pupils making very rapid progress. In these instances, teachers have very high expectations of what pupils can achieve. They know their pupils very well and plan their lessons meticulously. These teachers provide pupils with a series of increasingly challenging tasks that require them to think deeply. They monitor progress closely, adjusting the pace of teaching deftly so that it closely matches the pace of learning. They use skilful questioning techniques to probe pupils' thinking and demand high quality responses from them.

Many teachers share examples of what constitutes high quality work and engage pupils in beneficial discussions around how to assess their own work and that of others. In many cases, teachers provide pupils with helpful written feedback on their work and useful opportunities to improve particular aspects. They ensure that pupils respond purposefully to their comments. In a few cases, however, teachers' feedback does not help pupils understand how to improve their work. Their comments are not precise enough or they do not ensure that pupils respond appropriately to the feedback provided.

In a few lessons, teachers do not have high enough expectations of what pupils can achieve. These teachers do not plan their lessons well enough. They give pupils work that keeps them busy but does not bring about progress in their knowledge or skills. They do not use questioning well enough to get pupils to think, often making overly long presentations where pupils lose interest.

The school has a clear vision for its curriculum which is based on the principles that the school has identified around Communication, Wellbeing and Positivity, Knowledge, Creative Culture and Inclusiveness. Curriculum design is research-based and beneficially linked to the development of teaching. Leaders have provided staff with purposeful, research-informed training and departments are creating a curriculum that aims to ensure progression within their subjects and areas of learning. The school's curriculum principles have been formulated in consultation with staff, pupils, parents and governors. The school has beneficial arrangements with local primary schools to ensure that the curriculum in Year 7 builds well on

pupils' experiences during Key Stage 2. Work with these primary schools to develop the progression of learning in the Curriculum for Wales is in its infancy.

The school offers a balanced curriculum which is successful in meeting the needs of most pupils, including those in the two resource centres where they receive relevant and appropriate learning opportunities. From Key Stage 3 to the sixth form, the school provides a wide range of curriculum options and offers the opportunity to follow courses with external providers, meeting different learning needs. Valuable support and guidance are provided by staff to pupils regarding their options and next steps. The school's provision for personal and social education is broadly appropriate.

First language Welsh lessons are provided for those pupils who have joined the school from a Welsh-medium primary school. However, there are insufficient opportunities for pupils to use the Welsh language in other subjects. The school does not promote the advantages of learning and speaking Welsh well enough and has not secured a strong Welsh ethos.

The school provides a wide range of useful opportunities for pupils to apply their numeracy skills in different contexts across appropriate areas of the curriculum. In addition, there are a wide range of beneficial opportunities for pupils to solve worded and multi-step problems in mathematics. The provision to develop pupils' literacy skills is a notable strength. Leaders have provided highly effective professional learning to staff on how to teach aspects of literacy. As a result, there is a wide range of worthwhile opportunities for pupils to develop their oracy, reading and extended writing skills in many subjects. Leaders work effectively with the school librarian to create purposeful opportunities for pupils to read, which promote a culture of reading for pleasure within the school. The school provides a range of beneficial interventions to support both pupils with weak literacy and numeracy skills. Provision for the development of pupils' digital skills is underdeveloped.

The school provides well for more able and talented pupils. For example, a teaching assistant in the English department stretches the learning of the most able pupils through developing their thinking and vocabulary. There are a wide range of general option subjects, including three modern foreign languages and separate sciences at GCSE and further mathematics at A level.

### **Care, support and guidance**

Ysgol Penglais is a caring community, and staff know their pupils well. Since the pandemic, the school has provided beneficial support for pupils to return to school and re-engage with learning. The school provides a supportive and caring environment. Senior leaders have recently strengthened this aspect of the school's work. For example, they have provided useful training for form tutors and introduced a protocol to guide their care for pupils. Leaders make important information about individual pupils available to all staff who use this sensitively to support pupils' learning and well-being. As a result, many pupils, including those that have ALN make good progress and enjoy school.

Leaders have recently carried out surveys to monitor pupils' well-being and give them opportunities to express their opinions about the school. They analyse the findings

carefully and use this information well to plan improvements. An equality and diversity group, including representatives from governors, staff and pupils, is an important forum for establishing principles and agreeing actions to further develop a culture of respect across the school.

Pupils benefit from counselling and youth work services on the school site. The school works closely with a range of external partners to provide support for pupils and families where necessary. In the sixth form, four learning coaches meet regularly with all pupils and provide additional assistance to many, for example in helping with university applications.

The school has a wide range of innovative programmes to support vulnerable pupils and has employed specific staff to strengthen this aspect of its provision. 'Caban' is a safe space for pupils with social and emotional difficulties. Staff in 'Y Bont' teach appropriate courses to a small group of pupils in partnership with local providers. The school has recently gained an award for its work with young carers, who meet regularly in their own area to support each other's well-being. A member of staff provides beneficial full-time support for children who are looked after. The school has appropriate arrangements to promote good attendance and to work with families where pupils' attendance is weak.

The school's provision for pupils with additional learning needs is a notable strength. A teacher coach trains all staff in the most effective strategies for supporting pupils with different needs across the curriculum. The ALN co-ordinator has a comprehensive overview of the provision for and progress of pupils with ALN. Many of these pupils make good progress through the provision of beneficial targeted interventions, for example, teaching assistant support to improve their spelling in multi-sensory lessons.

The Learning Support Centre and Hearing Resource Centre provide a calm and welcoming atmosphere for pupils. Staff know pupils well and develop supportive, positive relationships with them. They have high expectations of pupils' behaviour and progress and support pupils' learning and independence well, for example by helping them to regulate their emotions and emotional responses to others.

The school has appropriate provision to support pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Following the pandemic, the school is beginning to reintroduce a suitable range of beneficial extra-curricular activities, such as in sport and music.

The school has relevant policies in place for safeguarding, anti-bullying and e-safety and provides all staff with beneficial training for safeguarding. As a result, staff understand well their role and responsibilities in keeping pupils safe. The school responds effectively to child protection concerns and makes relevant referrals to outside agencies.

The school has suitable processes for pupils to report concerns about their well-being. Staff keep detailed records of all serious behavioural incidents and bullying incidents and utilise school partners to support pupils involved. As a result, most pupils feel safe at school. However, the communication between the school and relevant stakeholders following incidents of bullying and poor behavioural is not

always effective. A few health and safety matters were brought to the attention of the school.

## **Leadership and management**

The headteacher has a clear vision for a happy, ambitious and high-achieving school where everyone is respected and valued. This has been communicated well with all stakeholders. She provides calm and assured leadership and is well supported by the senior leadership team. This has helped to secure a strong culture of improvement.

Despite the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic, leaders have maintained their focus on improving quality and continue to engage purposefully in quality assurance where possible. The school's planning for improvement considers most national priorities and the impact of the pandemic on pupils' learning well. Staff understand the school's improvement priorities well and are committed to achieving them. Overall, improvement planning at middle leader level aligns well with the school's short term aims and longer-term strategic direction. However, strategic planning does not consider the national priorities of developing the Welsh language and digital competence well enough.

The school is currently moving towards providing autonomy and flexibility for middle leaders in the way that they lead their areas of responsibility. This is based on high expectations of and trust in middle leaders to take ownership of quality in their area. Most middle leaders carry out a wide range of self-evaluation activities to identify their improvement priorities. For example, they carry out 'deep-dive' evaluations to assess the impact of actions taken to address targeted areas, such as the provision for literacy and for pupils with ALN in classroom teaching. Leaders regularly review teaching and learning and the provision for skills. They seek the views of pupils to check the impact of provision. As a result, many leaders have a strong understanding of the strengths and areas for development in their areas of responsibility and use this information well to share good practice and plan for improvement.

In a few instances, leaders do not consider well enough the impact of provision on pupils' progress and well-being. As a result, their evaluation is not always precise or rigorous enough. This affects how accurately these leaders identify shortcomings and plan for improvement. While the school has begun valuable work on identifying and improving aspects of care, support and guidance for pupils, there are a few shortcomings in the analysis of behaviour incidents.

The school's governing body generally provides suitable support and challenge, particularly around financial matters. Governors have a sound understanding of their role in ensuring that the school has appropriate arrangements to promote healthy eating and drinking. School leaders monitor the use of resources effectively, and grants, including the pupil development grant, are used well to support pupils' progress and wellbeing.

Most staff feel valued and are supported well by those that line manage them, including by the school's senior leadership team. Regular meetings with agendas that are linked to the school's strategic priorities ensure close monitoring of practice and

progress in many cases. Faculty and extended leadership meetings are used well to discuss the quality of teaching, share good practice and drive forward improvements.

The school places a strong focus on using findings from research to inform decision-making in many aspects of the school's work. All teachers engage in research to develop their practice. While staff have autonomy to experiment and explore new ideas, there is a suitable requirement that research focuses are linked closely to faculty or school improvement priorities. Performance management aligns well with these priorities and is used effectively to ensure staff have sufficient resources to explore their areas of interest. This approach is successfully developing a culture of honest self-reflection where staff feel safe discussing their strengths and areas for development.

Professional learning is a significant strength of the school. Leaders have carefully considered a wide range of research on how to improve teaching. They share findings from this with staff in open discussions around how particular strategies could be applied in a well-considered programme of activities. To support this, staff receive useful weekly briefings on how to improve their provision for pupils with additional learning needs and their teaching in general. In addition, particular staff have been trained as coaches to work with teachers to improve specific aspects of their practice. Staff are also given beneficial opportunities to gain additional qualifications to support their professional knowledge and development. All staff are given time to pursue their own professional interests. The continuous focus on improving practice within the school is having a notable impact on the quality of teaching and learning.

## **Evidence base of the report**

Before an inspection, inspectors:

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

During an inspection, inspectors normally:

- hold a meeting with parents to hear their views on the school and its effectiveness
- meet the headteacher, governors, senior and middle leaders (where appropriate) and individual teachers to evaluate the impact of the school's work
- meet pupils to discuss their work and to gain their views about various aspects of their school
- meet groups of pupils in leadership roles, such as representatives from the school council and eco-committee, where appropriate
- visit a broad sample of lessons, 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 (<http://www.estyn.gov.wales/>)

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

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

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