



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

A report on

Sandycroft C.P. School

**Leaches Lane
Mancot
Deeside
Flintshire
CH5 2EH**

Date of inspection: September 2022

by

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

About Sandycroft C.P. School

Name of provider	Sandycroft C.P. School
Local authority	Flintshire County Council
Language of the provider	English
Type of school	Primary
Religious character	
Number of pupils on roll	366
Pupils of statutory school age	269
Number in nursery classes	52
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 21.3%)	23.3%
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 22.2%)	17.1%
Percentage of pupils who speak Welsh at home	
Percentage of pupils with English as an additional language	10.4%
Date of headteacher appointment	September 2004
Date of previous Estyn inspection (if applicable)	20/05/2014
Start date of inspection	26/09/2022

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

Pupils at Sandycroft CP School are very proud of their school and enjoy attending every day. They especially thrive in the extensive and well-developed outdoor areas, no matter what the weather. Pupils feel safe and well cared for, and they trust that adults will always support them appropriately. During their time in school, many pupils, including those who are vulnerable and those with additional needs, make appropriate progress in most areas of learning and receive sensitive and highly effective support for their emotional well-being. Pupils themselves feel they make a difference through authentic opportunities to suggest ways to improve their school and to see their ideas realised.

Pupils' well-being is at the core of school organisation and staff work hard to ensure that the school is a thoughtful, inclusive and supportive environment for all pupils and for their families. Relationships across the school and community are strong. Many teachers are adept at finding interesting ways to engage pupils in their learning, particularly in the outdoors. They are beginning to collaborate to consider how best to develop their professional knowledge and skills following an unsettling period during the Covid-19 pandemic. The care, support and guidance provided across the school community is exceptional and ensures that pupils are well prepared for learning and for life.

Many pupils enter the school with literacy and numeracy skills below the expected level, with a few considerably below the expected level. As pupils move through the school, they make sound progress in many aspects of learning including reading and digital skills, and in their understanding of mathematical concepts. They are beginning to transfer their skills across the curriculum, for example through their writing in the topics they study and the oldest children begin to demonstrate creativity in their work. However, they do not apply their learning in mathematics across the curriculum at the same level and their use of Welsh is underdeveloped.

Leaders, staff and pupils are continuing to develop their school curriculum to align with Curriculum for Wales and to reflect the environment and community in which they live. This includes improving teachers' understanding of how to design an effective curriculum and ensure that pupils build on their previous learning. Leaders regularly review the work of the school and there are suitable arrangements for evaluating the quality of school improvements. However, monitoring activity does not always pick up on important areas of teaching and learning that need improving, such as how effectively teachers' planning and feedback helps pupils to improve their work and make the expected progress as they move through the school.

Recommendations

- R1 Improve teachers' understanding of curriculum design and progression in learning so they can better plan to meet pupils' individual needs across the breadth of the curriculum
- R2 Focus improvement processes precisely on the aspects of teaching and learning that are most in need of improvement
- R3 Develop pupils' Welsh language skills and improve provision for numeracy across the curriculum

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 outdoor learning, for dissemination on Estyn's website.

Main evaluation

Learning

During their time at Sandycroft CP School, many pupils, including those with additional learning needs, make strong progress in their learning from their starting points. Vulnerable pupils who attend the school's PreSchool childcare provision often make accelerated progress, as they move through the school.

When pupils first join the nursery class, many have communication and social skills that are below those expected for their age. These pupils benefit from high-quality individualised support, which helps them to make rapid progress in their spoken language skills. They settle into school life quickly and respond well to routines. Many become confident in making themselves understood by the time they enter the reception class. They use appropriate language, for example, when taking on the roles of family members at tea time in the home corner.

By Year 3, most pupils speak clearly when sharing their ideas or asking questions, for example when discussing accessibility issues for wheelchair users. However, older pupils do not always build well enough on these skills to respond to others' points of view in group discussions or to vary their talk for different audiences.

Most pupils have a positive attitude to developing their Welsh language skills. The youngest pupils enjoy singing songs and use simple greetings. With support, older pupils use familiar words and language patterns to share basic information about themselves. They attempt to read simple texts but often struggle with pronunciation. Overall, their Welsh is at a very early stage of development.

Nursery and reception pupils enjoy spending time in the reading corner. They handle books as readers, turning the pages as they retell a story they have heard. By Year 2, most pupils recognise common words and apply their knowledge and skills to read age-appropriate texts confidently and independently. Pupils' reading development has been hampered by the pandemic. This means that for a minority of pupils in Years 2 and 3, their decoding skills are not yet secure enough.

By Year 4, many pupils skim and scan for information successfully. More able pupils extract relevant details to support their report writing. By the time they leave the primary school, many pupils become confident and fluent readers. They enjoy choosing books from the school library's stimulating collection of texts. More able older pupils are often avid readers who enjoy a wide range of contemporary authors and reflect thoughtfully on challenging themes, such as war and conflict, in the texts they have read.

Nursery and reception pupils enjoy experimenting with mark-making creatively. They use natural materials such as sticks to create paintings. By Year 2, many pupils use their knowledge of sounds to spell phonetically plausible words in simple sentences. Older pupils write for a range of purposes and audiences, organising their ideas into a logical sequence, such as when presenting a balanced argument about whether children should be banned from eating junk food. More able pupils write imaginatively in response to their reading, using interesting vocabulary and stylistic techniques, such as varying sentence lengths, to engage the audience effectively. However, pupils in Years 3 to 6 often make punctuation and grammatical errors, particularly

when using digital devices to record their writing. They do not always review their work carefully enough.

Most pupils develop strong mathematical skills as they move through the school. The youngest pupils develop their knowledge of number in the outdoor environment. They collect and count natural objects in the school grounds and use the objects to make repeating patterns. By Year 2, pupils confidently measure planks of wood in standard units and problem-solve how to fill a gap with a suitable length of wood, when building a bridge. Older pupils progress to trialling their own methods of calculating answers to number problems. In Years 5 and 6, they describe their thinking and reasoning effectively, using well-developed mathematical vocabulary, for instance when extracting and interpreting information from a departure timetable to work out the duration of flights. Despite pupils' well-developed mathematical skills, they do not always apply these at the same level in their numeracy work across the curriculum.

From an early age, pupils are confident in using digital devices to record their learning experiences. As they move through the school, most pupils use their digital skills well to support independent research and present their findings, for instance through multimedia presentations. By Year 6, pupils use coding successfully to create their own 'flappy bird' game, but their data handling and modelling skills are less well developed.

Pupils enjoy using their creative and artistic skills, for example they create three-dimensional observational pictures using natural materials and fruit that they collect from the school's orchard. The development of pupils' physical skills is excellent. They develop balance, co-ordination and strength very well when using the extensive outdoor provision, such as the climbing wall, castle structure and forest school. The way pupils develop their gross and fine motor skills in the outdoor 'scrapyard', is particularly impressive. They use a wide range of tools, such as socket sets, spanners and screwdrivers safely to dismantle household objects and machinery. This also helps them to begin to explore the mechanics of how these items work.

Well-being and attitudes to learning

Pupils at Sandycroft CP School are proud to belong to the Sandycroft family. They quickly develop secure friendships and trusted relationships with all staff. As a result they feel safe, happy and cared for.

The positive attitudes to school that nearly all pupils display contributes to a calm atmosphere in which there are very few behaviour issues. Pupils are respectful of each other and of staff and have a clear understanding of right and wrong. Nearly all understand the school rules and aim to follow them closely. As a result, there are very few instances of any forms of bullying or harassment and when they do occur staff deal with these swiftly and successfully.

This positivity continues into pupils' attitudes to learning. Most are confident when engaging with their learning. Younger pupils take part in teacher-led activities enthusiastically. They are especially keen to explore learning in the vibrant outdoor environment. Older pupils show resilience when problem-solving, both in the classroom and at break times, often through interesting and authentic experiences in the workshop and the 'odd job club'. They persevere with tasks and attempt alternative ways of working. Younger pupils, for example, find ways to balance a drainpipe construction to stop it falling over and older pupils think of ways to make

the school a more accessible place for wheelchair users. This thoughtful programme of alternative activities encourages good attendance by pupils.

Nearly all pupils in need of support, for example those struggling with their emotional well-being, benefit greatly from targeted support which improves their attendance. Pupils also use their problem-solving skills to address sustainability and environmental issues, for example by planting trees in the school woodland area to reduce their carbon footprint. They use digital technologies well to communicate and present work and most pupils develop a sound understanding of how to keep themselves safe online. Younger pupils know they should keep their personal information safe and older pupils understand the consequences of sharing passwords.

Many value the time to reflect on their learning and in the best examples, identify what they need to do to improve their work. When given the opportunity, many pupils respond well to verbal feedback during lessons, for example to improve the quality of their writing. Older pupils use success criteria to support their understanding of how they can improve their work. Generally, however, pupils do not receive feedback focussed on important, specific next steps in learning and, as a result, have a limited knowledge of how to improve their work over time.

Most pupils enjoy their many opportunities to be active. They enjoy physical education sessions and make the most of the outdoor environment through play, exploration and sports, all of which impact positively on pupil well-being. Many pupils take part in the wealth of school clubs on offer, including forest school, hockey and dance. Many pupils make healthy choices and understand the importance of eating a balanced diet and getting enough sleep. These are strong features of the school.

Nearly all pupils feel that their views about improving the school are valued and that staff help bring their ideas to life. Pupil voice groups actively make the school a better place. The Eco Committee worked with senior leaders to create innovative additions to the school's recycling schemes and the Senedd Y Plant made amendments to the school behaviour policy. Pupils, including those with additional needs, enjoy taking on meaningful leadership roles which help develop play, learning and well-being at playtimes. During collective worship most pupils develop a deeper sense of the values they reflect on. Pupils in Years 3 and 4, for example, celebrate the acts of kindness of others and think about how it makes them feel.

Teaching and learning experiences

The whole school community is beginning to develop a vision that aims to support pupils to become independent and creative learners. Leaders, teachers and teaching assistants provide a nurturing environment, where pupils and their families feel valued. Nearly all staff know their pupils and families extremely well and offer exceptional support to meet their needs. Teachers make the most of the school's stimulating outdoor areas and plan a range of learning experiences for pupils to investigate their surroundings and develop their imaginations. For instance, the youngest pupils plant seeds to develop their school garden areas, use diggers to build sandcastles when creating imaginary towns and sing and dance on the outdoor stage. Older pupils develop many useful life skills, for example when caring for the school's freely roaming chickens, and when working as teams to problem-solve in the forest school.

The school is taking appropriate steps to redesign its curriculum to align with the principles of the Curriculum for Wales. Teachers focus learning around the cross-curricular skills and are beginning to consider the ways in which areas of learning and experience will contribute to the development of pupils' knowledge and skills. They are beginning to explore and plan for progression across all areas of learning. The approach to learning in mathematics, for example, enables pupils to talk about their understanding of mathematical concepts in more depth. Provision for pupils to apply their numeracy skills in contexts across the curriculum is less well developed and overall planning for the development of pupils' numeracy skills does not always build sufficiently well on their previous learning.

The school has suitable arrangements for developing pupils' reading and writing skills and teachers nurture pupils' enjoyment of reading successfully. They plan suitably for pupils to apply their writing skills across the curriculum through real life learning opportunities that are engaging and purposeful. For example, teachers work with pupils to explore the features of a range of printed advertisements. This supports them to create promotional material for the new school-based community shop.

Teachers provide useful opportunities for pupils to develop their confidence in applying their digital skills across the curriculum. Where practice is most effective, they plan a range of purposes including creating presentations, designing posters and coding to create digital games. However, the quality of provision for the development of digital skills varies across the school and, as a result, pupils do not always develop a broad enough range of skills.

Teachers plan a range of activities to promote the Welsh language as well as the heritage and culture of Wales. For example, pupils produce cards to celebrate 'Dydd Santes Dwynwen', hold celebrations on St David's Day and listen to visitors using Welsh in everyday activities. Throughout the day teachers use Welsh in lessons and in informal situations. They encourage pupils to respond to simple questions and older pupils are beginning to extend their answers. However, the school recognises that, following the pandemic, provision for the development of pupils' Welsh language skills is an area in need of improvement.

Teachers and teaching assistants build positive and nurturing relationships with pupils to prepare them suitably for learning. Where teaching is most effective, learning objectives are clear, teachers share worthwhile success criteria and make valuable links to prior learning. During these lessons, teachers and teaching assistants use questioning well to challenge and extend pupils' understanding and encourage them to communicate their learning in a variety of ways. For example, they enable younger pupils to identify and discuss patterns in number as they begin to record their findings using objects, pictures and diagrams. Teaching assistants in these lessons, provide valuable support to pupils, particularly those with additional learning needs. However, a minority of teachers do not always plan an effective range of learning experiences or utilise additional adults efficiently enough to meet the needs of all pupils.

Many teachers provide useful verbal feedback during lessons to support pupils to move forward appropriately in their learning. Where this feedback is effective, teachers engage in dialogue with pupils to help them think about their learning, what they are doing well and what they need to improve. Older pupils are beginning to use success criteria appropriately to assess their own and others' work and to set

themselves targets for improvement. However, although pupils have time to reflect on their own work, in a few classes, they do not discuss their progress regularly enough to fully understand the purpose of their learning, or their next steps.

Across the school, teachers provide engaging and informative information to parents and carers in school reports. They recognise pupils' achievements and aspirations and provide helpful targets for pupils to work on at home.

Care, support and guidance

Everyone at Sandycroft CP School is committed to creating and maintaining a warm and caring environment where pupil welfare is a priority. Close relationships with parents and carers ensure that families receive timely support for their needs and this contributes to raising pupils' self-esteem. A whole school focus on outdoor learning encourages and enthuses pupils to attend regularly and is used exceptionally well to enhance pupils' physical and mental health. The school's caring approach is particularly beneficial to pupils who arrive at the school from other countries having been displaced. These pupils and their families are sensitively supported to settle into school life well.

The school provides effective support for pupils with additional learning needs. This is a strength of the school. The Additional Learning Needs Coordinator (ALNCo), for example, has a clear understanding of the needs of all pupils in the school and is supported effectively by the additional needs team to ensure that staff understand their responsibility in supporting these pupils. The procedures in place to identify needs, provide support and intervention, and review progress, results in most pupils with additional needs making at least expected progress as they move through the school. The school works successfully with its partner agencies to provide the support each pupil needs, including those new to English. As a result, many make accelerated progress from their individual starting points. Teaching assistants often work alongside teachers to support pupils as they work and to provide individual intervention, for example, with reading. On occasion, teachers do not deploy additional staff effectively enough to support the progress of all pupils during lessons.

All pupils, including those affected by social disadvantage take on leadership roles and responsibilities which make them feel appreciated and talented. They especially enjoy working alongside the school caretaker to develop skills as they help with jobs and repairs, such as disassembling and sorting the parts from unwanted tumble driers and lawnmowers.

Pupil voice groups support the school's work effectively. Staff ensure they are involved in decision making about important aspects of school life, for example, developing the outdoors by adding exciting resources for imaginative play and a wide range of sports equipment as part of their work on children's rights. The Senedd Y Plant developed the school's vision for curriculum, canvassing throughout the school to discover what was important to the pupils. They make significant contributions to fund raising events which promote the importance of supporting others such as Diabetes Day and Flintshire foodbanks. Leaders and teachers promote the attributes which result in positive behaviour and use praise successfully to encourage values such as kindness and empathy.

Teachers listen to pupils' suggestions about what they would like to learn at the start of topics and include these appropriately in the planned learning experiences. However, pupils have less influence on the ways in which they learn.

The school ensures that pupils learn about diversity through the curriculum. They provide opportunities for pupils to share their own cultural experiences about the different countries they come from. They celebrate Dydd Gwyl Dewi, taste Welsh produce and dress in traditional costume when learning about the culture and heritage of Wales. The school encourages pupils to take the lead in developing respect for their diverse community, for example by setting up a club to teach and develop sign language to other pupils in the school.

The school places importance on providing a rich and varied range of visits to engage pupils in their learning. They visit the theatre, the local zoo and spend the day at the beach as part of their work on the coastline. The school ensures that all pupils from Year 3 to Year 6 participate in residential trips and events which allow them to gain and build on a range of skills as they move through the school. Many of these experiences support pupils to become more adventurous, creative and resilient.

The school promotes healthy lifestyles appropriately. For example, pupils learn about how their actions affect others negatively and which foods are best as part of a balanced diet. The many opportunities to be active, during lessons, at playtimes and after school are very popular. Pupils across the school love being outdoors, whether in the vegetable patches growing tomatoes, in the forest creating art or in a castle pretending to be knights and kings. They use their imagination well in their play. However, opportunities to be creative through music or dance, are limited.

The school monitors pupils' attendance closely and works with parents to plan ways to encourage vulnerable learners to attend every day. This includes phased returns, alternative provision and initiatives such as the 'odd job club'. Pupils have opportunities to learn about how to keep themselves safe, for example through the school's approach to relationships education and lessons about internet safety. The school's arrangements to safeguard pupils meet requirements and give no cause for concern.

Leadership and management

Leaders at Sandycroft CP School have created a caring and inclusive environment where pupils and staff feel a strong sense of belonging. They have established a vision for the school focused on addressing the needs of pupils and their families. Together with staff and governors they encourage pupils to be responsible and respectful and, as a result, behaviour is exemplary and pupils feel safe at all times.

The school is committed to supporting vulnerable pupils and their families. Leaders and teachers provide guidance, make purposeful links with the community and explore new ways to engage pupils in experiences that improve their well-being and better prepare them for learning. This is a strength of the school. The school secures well-being for all using a range of thoughtful and beneficial measures, many of which address the impact of social disadvantage. Leaders work well with outside agencies to secure improvement for vulnerable children, for example those who have recently arrived at the school from Ukraine. They drive additional learning needs reform successfully, ensuring that they meet pupils' needs appropriately across the school.

Leaders make appropriate arrangements to evaluate the school's work. They regularly monitor the impact of improvement work and share findings with staff. Following closures during the pandemic, the school has focused on improving teaching and learning, establishing robust procedures for monitoring the progress of pupils with additional learning needs, and developing pupils' Welsh language skills. The school's curriculum transition to Curriculum for Wales is in its early stages. Leaders and staff are exploring approaches to monitoring pupil progress and developing their understanding of the Areas of Learning and Experience in more detail through reflection and review. For example, when trialling aspects of the school's curriculum design, they improve approaches to mathematical development across the school. These changes improve pupils' understanding and discussion of mathematical concepts.

There is a culture of shared leadership across the leadership team and throughout the school. Performance management procedures focus suitably on the school improvement priorities identified. However, teachers and leaders do not always work closely enough to develop a shared understanding of the areas most in need of improvement or how to secure improvement in those areas. For example, the need to focus on improving the quality of feedback to pupils and use this to move their learning forward.

Prior to the pandemic, teachers observed teaching and learning within the school, and visited local schools to share practice. A positive feature of this process is that staff develop skills that improve outcomes for many pupils, for example in reading and mathematics. Leaders ensure that all staff have access to opportunities to support their professional development. However, in general, whole school planned professional learning does not always focus on the areas that are most in need of improvement, for example, the need to improve teachers' understanding of progression and curriculum design.

The governing body supports the school appropriately. Governors are regularly involved in self-evaluation processes, undertaking monitoring activities in partnership with leaders. Most have a good understanding of the school's priorities for improvement and are beginning to challenge leaders as a critical friend. They evaluate policies and suggest changes to better support the needs of learners, for example through strategies to improve attendance.

Leaders and governors monitor spending plans and their impact efficiently. The school allocates its grant funding effectively to ensure equity of experience for all pupils. For example, leaders use the pupil development grant to put in place a range of measures to address the impact of poverty such as the use of additional adults to support learning through intervention groups and subsidising outdoor adventure visits.

The school has appropriate arrangements to promote healthy eating and drinking. Overall, leaders and governors maintain a strong safeguarding culture at Sandycroft CP School.

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 publication. Any enquiries or comments regarding this document/publication should be addressed to:

Publications Section

Estyn

Anchor Court, Keen Road

Cardiff

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

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