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

A report on

Sychdyn C.P. School

Vownog Road
Sychdyn
Mold
Flintshire
CH7 6ED

Date of inspection: November 2022

by

Estyn, His Majesty's Inspectorate for Education

and Training in Wales

About Sychdyn C.P. School

Name of provider	Sychdyn C.P. School
Local authority	Flintshire County Council
Language of the provider	English
Type of school	Primary
Religious character	*
Number of pupils on roll	166
Pupils of statutory school age	127
Number in nursery classes	22
Percentage of pupils eligible for free school meals over a three-year average (The national percentage of pupils eligible for free school meals over a three-year average in Primary is 23.0%)	*
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 16.1%)	6.3%
Percentage of pupils who speak Welsh at home	*
Percentage of pupils with English as an additional language	0.0%
Date of headteacher appointment	03/09/2012
Date of previous Estyn inspection (if applicable)	27/11/2012
Start date of inspection	28/11/2022

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 make good progress from their starting points and develop worthwhile skills during their time at the school. Teachers and staff encourage pupils to think for themselves, and from an early age provide them with the time and opportunities to improve their own work. As a result, pupils have positive attitudes towards learning and take pride in their work and achievements.

Staff provide effective care, support and guidance for pupils, which focus well on improving pupils' well-being and on ensuring that they receive the support and help that they need. However, pupils generally lack opportunities to take on leadership responsibilities that have an influence on the life of the school.

Good teaching and interesting learning activities engage pupils in their learning. Lessons build strongly on pupils' prior knowledge, and timely feedback from teachers and support staff ensures that pupils continue to improve and consolidate their skills.

Leaders know the school well. They set appropriate priorities for improving the provision and pupils' learning and well-being, although processes to measure progress against these need refining. The headteacher provides strong leadership, encourages a team ethos, and places a high value on providing worthwhile professional learning for staff. As a result, there is a positive culture of collaboration and support amongst staff. Leaders, including the governors, set high expectations for staff, pupils and themselves.

Recommendations

R1 Increase opportunities for pupils to take on leadership responsibilities that have an influence on the life of the school

R2 Strengthen processes to evaluate the impact of the school's priorities, to ensure that they have the desired impact on improving provision and standards

R3 Address the health and safety issues raised during the inspection

What happens next

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

Main evaluation

Learning

Pupils start school with skills and understanding at a stage of development around that expected for their age. As they move through the school, most pupils, including those with additional learning needs and those eligible for free school meals, make good progress from their starting points.

Standards of pupils' oracy skills across the school are high. Most pupils are confident, articulate speakers who listen well to each other and staff. They listen purposefully and explain their reasoning and thoughts clearly. They respond well to questions about their work and talk enthusiastically about topics that interest them.

Pupils develop their reading skills well across the school. Younger pupils use their knowledge of letters and sounds to decode unknown words. As they move through the school, they build successfully on these early skills and by Year 6 most pupils read fluently and with expression. Most pupils develop a love of reading during their time at the school and enjoy reading books by their favourite authors and on topics that interest them.

Most pupils' writing is developing well across the school. Pupils build from strong starting points and make good progress as they move through the school. Younger pupils develop good fine motor skills which enable them to develop strong writing skills. Nursery pupils enjoy experimenting with mark-making in a variety of ways. As these skills grow, they begin to form letters correctly and use their knowledge of phonics to write simple words and sentences. By the end of Year 2, pupils use these skills well to write clear and imaginative sentences for a range of purposes, such as stories and non-chronological reports. Older pupils write confidently and competently over a range of genres. For example, Year 4 pupils write poems based on a book about lost words and Year 6 pupils write diary entries from the perspective of the main character in the class novel. They use a wide range of effective language choices that engage the reader. They edit and refine their work to make improvements to their writing and to extend their vocabulary choices.

Most pupils have a positive attitude to learning Welsh and develop their Welsh language skills suitably. Younger pupils enjoy using simple greetings and they are beginning to use and recognise simple questions about the weather and their feelings. With support, older pupils answer simple questions about themselves and their interests.

Pupils across the school are make good progress in developing their mathematical skills. The youngest learners enjoy counting, recite number rhymes enthusiastically and are beginning to gain an understanding of number values. By Year 2, many pupils have a sound grasp of important elements of number. For example, they recognise tens and units, partition numbers to 100 and compare and order 2-digit numbers correctly. Older pupils have a sound understanding of the four rules of number. They add and subtract two-digit numbers confidently and order numbers correctly. They develop these skills further by using written methods for addition, for example adding four-digit numbers together. Pupils apply their mathematical skills

well across the curriculum. For example, younger pupils and measure the height of a home-made wooden block to build a home that suits the requirements of an owl. Older pupils consider the girth of trees and calculate their approximate age using a basic formula.

Many pupils are developing a suitable range of digital skills. Younger pupils use graphic programs and a range of tools to create pictures of a favourite character from a book. They save and retrieve their work and use digital programs to support their reading and mathematical skills. Older pupils use applications to communicate their research on a range of themes through informative presentations. For example, they create engaging short films about different trees in the locality.

Many pupils enjoy using their creative and artistic skills in the classrooms and in the outdoor environment. Younger pupils experiment with paints to make patterns and pictures and make models from clay. Older pupils develop a range of techniques that they apply to their topic-based work. For example, Year 5 pupils use colour wash and silhouettes to create pictures for Remembrance Day.

Well-being and attitudes to learning

Nearly all pupils feel safe and happy at school. Most respond politely and respectfully to one another and to staff and behave very well during lessons, at breaktimes and around the school. Nearly all greet visitors to the school in a friendly manner and show pride in their school. They show high levels of support and care for one another.

In classes and around the school, most pupils listen attentively to staff instructions and concentrate well on their work for extended periods. Most pupils engage well in their learning and show resilience and perseverance when completing their tasks. Many pupils have a range of ways to help them to persevere when they face challenge in their learning, and they use at least four different ways before asking staff for support. This helps them to work independently.

Pupils in most classes provide useful feedback to one another, which improves their work. For example, younger learners give each other advice on how they can improve their digital pictures of owls by using a wider range of digital tools and techniques. Older pupils know the value of improving their work further and of re-drafting pieces of their writing for example, often showing great pride in their finished pieces. As a result, pupils participate fully in their learning and make sound progress in their skills.

Nearly all pupils know how to keep themselves safe online. Most pupils know how to keep themselves fit and healthy by making good choices in relation to food and drink. They take regular exercise and understand the importance of being active.

Pupils who undertake leadership responsibilities, do so with confidence and enthusiasm. For example, ‘Super Ambassadors’ successfully inform others of their rights as children. However, opportunities for pupils to develop their leadership skills and to make an impact on the life of the school are limited.

Teaching and learning experiences

Teachers and staff across the school have caring and respectful working relationships with pupils and their families. They create a space where pupils are nurtured and valued. These positive relationships ensure that the level of pupils' wellbeing is high, which supports them to engage fully in their learning. Classrooms are calm and productive environments, where pupils interact positively with each other and demonstrate resilience and perseverance in their work. Support staff are used effectively across the school and in classrooms. This means that pupils receive strong support for their emotional and learning needs.

Teachers have a secure knowledge of the curriculum. They develop useful success criteria for lessons and use these to provide clear and effective explanations to pupils. As a result, in most cases, pupils have a clear understanding how to complete their tasks successfully.

Nearly all teachers ensure that lessons progress at a suitable pace and use a range of worthwhile strategies to keep pupils engaged in their learning, including good quality partner talk and small group activities. They give pupils time to think for themselves and to consider their answers. Through skilful questioning, staff challenge pupils' thinking and check their understanding or address misconceptions in their learning. They ensure that lessons build strongly on pupils' prior knowledge and remind pupils of strategies that will help them in their learning.

Teachers use a range of formative assessment approaches to check on pupils' progress, which they use well to adjust their teaching and curriculum provision. They spend considerable time with pupils to help them evaluate and improve their work. They provide timely feedback to pupils throughout their lessons, which ensures that pupils address any misconceptions and provides purposeful opportunities for them to improve their work. Teachers provide regular opportunities for pupils to evaluate their own work and the work of their peers. As a result, pupils see value in editing, re-drafting and improving their work.

The school has taken a considered approach to designing their new curriculum. They have focused on improving and developing teaching initially, as part of their curriculum reform journey. They identify areas of teaching that could be improved, and staff discuss and explore how these areas for improvement can be addressed. For example, the recent focus on improving planning for numeracy across the curriculum has resulted in a wider range of authentic contexts for pupils to apply their mathematical skills across the curriculum.

Teachers are given time to discuss and explore what the curriculum will look like for pupils at the school. They collaborate purposefully to develop their school's curriculum and as a result, the provision for well-being, literacy, numeracy and digital skills is good across the school. They share ideas and work together to develop an interesting range of learning experiences that pupils enjoy. Pupils have influence in designing activities and topics to be covered and, as a result, they are engaged and knowledgeable about their topics. Teachers' planning takes suitable account of the cross curricular skills and statements of what matters across the areas of learning in the curriculum for Wales. Opportunities for teachers to work collaboratively with local

schools with a focus on progression in knowledge and skills is at an early stage of development.

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 in real-life contexts. For example, Year 4 pupils make proposals for the school grounds to be an insect-friendly school. Teachers plan engaging activities that ensure that pupils experience a wide range of learning opportunities. For example, teachers provide useful opportunities for pupils to develop their confidence in applying their digital skills across the curriculum and learn in the outdoor environment.

The school has recognised that one of its main priorities is to continue to improve pupils' Welsh language skills, particularly after the dip in standards following the COVID-19 pandemic. The school has suitable planning in place to address this.

Care, support and guidance

The school provides effective care, support and guidance for pupils and their families. Parents welcome the emotional and personal support that the school provides for them as well as their children. Leaders and staff maintain a constant focus on inclusion and improving pupils' well-being. Staff are trained to identify and support pupils with their emotional well-being from a young age. For example, staff are trained in emotional coaching, helping younger pupils to understand their emotions and how to regulate their own behaviour. There is valuable support for developing pupils' mental health and wellbeing, such as their involvement in the 'awakening' programme, which develops pupils' self-motivation and resilience. Teachers and support staff have very good relationships with pupils and parents. They ensure that any issues that arise during the day are addressed before pupils go home. The school shares any concerns with parents promptly and ensures that issues are resolved speedily.

Provision for pupils who have additional learning needs is thorough, and as a result, they make good progress from their starting points. Parents are involved in evaluating the progress that their children make, and the school provides effective support for parents to support their children at home. A number of well-trained and knowledgeable support staff provide effective interventions to develop pupils' learning and emotional needs. For example, small groups of pupils develop their social and friendship skills through games and play-based tasks. A local counsellor and their therapy dog support the well-being of individual pupils. Pupils speak positively about the support that this provides. The school engages purposefully with a wide range of external agencies to enrich its support for pupils with additional learning needs. For example, there are strong links with the local specialist for autism, who attends the school to provide advice to parents and training for staff.

The school provides appropriate opportunities for pupils to develop their spiritual and moral development. For example, pupils learn about world religions, including Christianity, Judaism and Buddhism. Pupils have many well-planned and relevant opportunities to develop their social skills, such a range of collaborative tasks. As a result, they interact well with each other. As part of their focus on their school values, older pupils reflect on how well they interact respectfully with their peers, and this

contributes well to the caring and respectful ethos of the school and pupils' behaviour. Most pupils are proud to be Welsh and value the language and culture of Wales. They learn about other cultures through interesting and engaging activities, such as following the Amal Walk project, which explores the plight of refugees from Syria to the UK.

There are engaging contexts for learning that stimulate pupils' creativity and provide them with opportunities to perform. For example, as part of their learning about the First World War, older pupils have opportunities to work alongside members of Theatr Clwyd to create and perform a dance, which reflects their ideas about conflict and peace as part of learning. Well planned visits stimulate interest and deepen learning. For example, older pupils visit the Imperial War Museum to support their learning further.

'Class councils' provide opportunities for pupils to air their suggestions and ideas and include every member of the class. However, pupils' contributions to the life of the school and how to improve it, or to take on responsibility and opportunities to represent one another, are limited.

Leaders promote a strong culture of safeguarding, with governors and all who work at the school supporting this well. Teachers ensure that learning experiences help pupils develop their understanding of how to keep themselves safe, for example when using the internet. The school makes worthwhile use of the outdoor learning area to develop pupils' well-being and their learning. However, issues related to site safety were brought to the attention of the school during the inspection.

The school has appropriate arrangements for monitoring pupil attendance and punctuality.

Leadership and management

Leaders promote a calm and nurturing learning environment for pupils. The headteacher provides a strong sense of leadership and encourages a team ethos with a clear focus on pupils' well-being and learning. She is very visible around the school and is well-supported by an enthusiastic team of teachers and support staff. She has established a positive and beneficial working relationship with parents and the community. For example, leaders have successfully kept in close touch with the wider school community throughout the restrictions imposed by the pandemic. Most parents know that they can approach leaders and staff with any concerns or suggestions and that staff will listen to them, and act upon the discussions promptly.

Leaders have established a positive culture of collaboration and support and set high expectations for staff, pupils and themselves. For example, when leaders and staff agree to implement new initiatives, such as to develop more accurate spelling by pupils, they follow-up their implementation to see if they have been effective. Leaders ensure that all staff have access to relevant professional learning opportunities linked to school improvement priorities. There is a considerate approach to the performance management of staff, which includes a coaching element so that staff feel supported to achieve their specific professional targets. This approach enables staff to reflect on how they contribute to making wider improvements at the school.

School self-evaluation arrangements are effective. As a result, leaders have a strong understanding of the school's strengths and areas for development. They use first-hand evidence together with staff contributions to evaluate the school's performance. Leaders consider parents' views appropriately and this has a direct influence on specific aspects of provision, such as the content of pupil progress reports to parents.

Information from monitoring activities is used appropriately to set clear priorities for improvement. For example, leaders have recognised the need to develop pupils' numeracy and literacy skills and strengthen their Welsh skills. In addition, leaders tackle local and national priorities effectively, for example when introducing changes to the provision to support pupils with additional learning needs and to develop the curriculum. Overall, the school's priorities focus firmly on supporting pupils to develop their skills. However, leaders' processes to measure the school's progress against these priorities lack rigour. This means that leaders do not always know how successfully improvement priorities have been addressed and the impact that they have on pupil outcomes.

Governors are involved in the life of the school and fulfil the role of critical friend well. Their visits to school to gather first-hand evidence, detailed headteacher reports and presentations from staff keep them well-informed about the key strengths and areas for development. Governing body meetings focus appropriately on provision and on standards pupils achieve. For example, there are supportive links between staff and governors with specific responsibilities, such as additional learning needs. In addition, committees fulfil their roles well and provide appropriate challenge and support. They also ensure that the school uses its grant funding appropriately to support the school's priorities. Governors fulfil their statutory responsibilities conscientiously and promote a sound culture of safeguarding. They ensure that the school has appropriate arrangements for promoting healthy eating and drinking.

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:

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