



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

A report on

Ysgol Brynhyfryd

**Mold Road
Ruthin
LL15 1EG**

Date of inspection: October 2023

by

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

This report is also available in Welsh

About Ysgol Brynhyfryd

Name of provider	Ysgol Brynhyfryd
Local authority	Denbighshire County Council
Language of the provider	Bilingual
Type of school	Secondary
Religious character	
Number of pupils on roll	1053
Pupils of statutory school age	864
Number in sixth form	189
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 Secondary is 20.2%)	7.2%
Percentage of pupils identified as having additional learning needs (a) (The national percentage of pupils identified as having an additional learning need in Secondary is 17.8%)	11.7%
Percentage of pupils who speak Welsh at home	43.5%
Percentage of pupils with English as an additional language	0.7%
Date of headteacher appointment	03/04/2023
Date of previous Estyn inspection (if applicable)	12/05/2015
Start date of inspection	09/10/2023

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

Ysgol Brynhyfryd is a caring school that places a priority on pupils' well-being and academic progress. Senior leaders create a safe learning environment in which pupils and staff thrive. As a result, most pupils have a strong sense of pride and belonging to the school community.

The headteacher has an open-door policy and has succeeded in creating a culture of honesty and collaboration among staff. Leaders at all levels have a good understanding of the main strengths and areas for improvement within their areas of responsibility. This is based on new self-evaluation and improvement planning arrangements which evaluate provision according to its effect, for example the effect of teaching on pupils' standards. With the support of senior leaders, the headteacher has developed shared whole-school values in partnership with stakeholders.

Through their good understanding of pupils and their needs, staff provide careful pastoral support. The comprehensive systems for tracking academic progress and well-being ensure that staff identify any difficulties that individual pupils have quickly and provide timely support. Although pupils' attendance has been consistent over the past two years, it remains too low compared to pre-pandemic levels. The team that supports pupils with additional learning needs (ALN) does this successfully by providing suitable interventions and clear guidance for staff.

The school provides a balanced and inclusive curriculum that meets the needs of most pupils. This is reinforced by wide ranging and varied offer of courses that align with the aspirations of the school's older pupils. On the whole, many teachers plan suitable activities to ensure that pupils develop their literacy, numeracy and digital skills. However, there is no developed whole-school strategy to ensure pupils' progressive development in these skills.

In most cases, teachers foster positive working relationships with their pupils. They create a positive working environment and, as a result, most pupils have healthy attitudes towards their work and make sound progress over time. These teachers support pupils well, by providing valuable verbal feedback while circulating the classroom. However, teachers' written feedback on pupils' work does not always provide them with clear enough guidance on how to improve their work.

Recommendations

- R1 Improve attendance
- R2 Strengthen the quality of feedback that is given to pupils on how to improve their work
- R3 Strengthen the strategic co-ordination for pupils' progressive development in their literacy, numeracy and digital skills

What happens next

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

Main findings

Learning

Many pupils at Ysgol Brynhyfryd, including those with additional learning needs (ALN), make sound progress over time. They recall prior knowledge well and apply it to new contexts beneficially. In the few cases where teaching is highly effective, pupils make progress above what is expected. However, a few pupils do not progress as well as expected. This is linked to teachers' low expectations or a lack of challenge in their planning. Overall, sixth-form pupils make strong progress in their subject knowledge and understanding.

Many pupils listen attentively to their teachers and each other. They respond to questions purposefully and contribute confidently verbally, for example when discussing Gwen, the daughter of Ellis, a local witch in Bettws during the sixteenth century. Many pupils discuss maturely with teachers and other adults in Welsh and English. A majority of pupils contribute fluently and very confidently verbally and use sophisticated language, often. They extend their responses further and demonstrate a deeper understanding of the text. In first language Welsh lessons, many pupils use rich vocabulary and idioms naturally. However, a few pupils are quiet and their verbal contributions are either short or limited. At times, this is due to the narrow or limited nature of the teacher's questioning. In a few cases, pupils' responses are strewn with English words when they speak Welsh.

When appropriate and when they are given an opportunity to do so, most pupils read aloud skilfully and vary their tone of voice to appeal to listeners. In their English lessons, many pupils summarise information from challenging texts successfully. In other subjects, a majority read a variety of texts beneficially to gather information and form valid explanations. For example, in their geography lessons, pupils analyse information about the world's continents skilfully. However, a minority of pupils rely too much on receiving information from their teachers rather than finding it independently.

Many pupils structure their written work appropriately by using sentences, paragraphs and syntax correctly in both languages. On the whole, they organise information logically and write independently appropriately. A majority of pupils use subject terminology correctly and use a wide range of vocabulary to vary their work. The most able pupils use sophisticated and mature vocabulary when responding to questions and tasks. As a result of specific language refresher sessions, many pupils write at length in an accomplished manner in their Welsh language, for example when writing the diary of March ap Meirion as part of their work on the legend of 'Clustiau March'. A few pupils' handwriting and overall presentation is untidy and they make basic spelling errors in both languages.

In Welsh-medium lessons, most pupils converse naturally in Welsh and usually use rich vocabulary. A very few use correct syntax and extremely advanced language. In their second language Welsh lessons, a minority of pupils speak Welsh appropriately. However, outside their Welsh lessons, pupils in the English stream do not use the Welsh language often.

Many pupils have suitable numeracy skills and apply them appropriately in their mathematics lessons. They add and subtract negative numbers successfully and calculate with percentages independently without a calculator. These pupils change between fractions, decimals and percentages proficiently in simple calculations. Overall, pupils deal with angles and simple shape work soundly. However, in the other relevant subjects outside mathematics, the development of pupils' numeracy skills is inconsistent. In these subjects, a minority of pupils do not draw graphs correctly. A majority of pupils read simple scales correctly on a variety of measuring equipment. More able pupils interpret information from line graphs correctly and come to appropriate conclusions.

When they are given an opportunity to do so, a majority of pupils develop their digital skills appropriately. They use subject-specific digital software beneficially, for example when creating animations in their digital technology lessons. Many pupils develop valuable creative skills, for example in their art lessons when drawing symbolic images in the Vanitas style of the sixteenth century. In their physical education lessons, a majority of pupils develop their physical skills strongly and demonstrate appropriate levels of cardiovascular fitness. A very few pupils create a water aerobics sequence wholly independently and perform it successfully. In the few most effective lessons, pupils make sound progress in their independent thinking skills. For example, they consider different views and use them to structure arguments when studying a statue of Edward Colston and the life of H. M. Stanley.

Well-being and attitudes to learning

Most pupils have positive attitudes towards school life and develop strong social skills by interacting with staff, visitors and peers. They feel safe at school, say that they are free from bullying and know whom to approach when they have concerns. Overall, many pupils have a strong sense of pride and belonging to the school community. Most pupils who receive support in the support centres benefit from the care they receive and make strong progress in their social skills.

Pupils share their views regularly on attitudes towards school life, for example through year forums and by being year representatives on the 'School Council'. This has a positive influence on some aspects of school life, which leads to changes for the better, such as a new shelter on the Year 11 yard, increasing the number of litter bins around the site and further opportunities to recycle. Recently, nearly all pupils have contributed beneficially towards developing the school's new values.

Sixth-form pupils are excellent ambassadors for the school. They have very positive attitudes towards their learning and are developing into confident, mature and responsible young people. They make a valuable contribution to school life and develop beneficial leadership skills, for example by supporting younger pupils in lessons. Many sixth-form pupils contribute purposefully to various extra-curricular activities which include numerous sports activities, choirs and orchestras. They also

enjoy going on residential trips that promote their learning, for example a residential trip to Glan-llyn with the Welsh department.

The sense of respect between staff and pupils is strong within the school and most pupils have positive working relationships with their teachers. They listen attentively to the teacher and their peers and are enthusiastic when undertaking tasks in the classroom. Many pupils have high expectations of themselves in terms of behaviour and achievement. Most pupils arrive at their lessons punctually, engage well and persevere throughout the lesson. They contribute fully to their physical education lessons. Many work well together in pairs and small groups when given an opportunity to do so. For example, in their music lessons, Year 7 pupils perform various rhythms in small groups.

Overall, most pupils behave well in their lessons and around the school. They have a sound awareness of fairness, equality, sustainability and children's rights. A very few pupils cause disruption on the corridors and do not always appreciate the facilities that are available to them. On the whole, pupils feel that staff intervene and deal effectively with any instances of misbehaviour. Most pupils value the reward system and enjoy receiving postcards praising their efforts.

Whole-school attendance levels have been consistent over the past two years but remain lower than the pre-pandemic levels. The attendance of pupils who are eligible for free school meals is significantly lower than that of their peers.

Teaching and learning experiences

Most teachers have sound subject knowledge. They foster positive and supporting working relationships with pupils. Many teachers set clear expectations for pupils, question them regularly to check their understanding and prior learning and provide constructive verbal feedback throughout the lesson. These teachers use effective classroom management strategies to address any minor disruption. When learning support assistants work with teachers in specific lessons, they provide valuable support to individual pupils or groups who need further support. However, in a few cases, they give these pupils too much support which means that they do not work independently enough.

A few teachers have high expectations of what pupils are able to achieve. These teachers are very enthusiastic in their presentations, are passionate about their subject and develop excellent working relationships with pupils. They plan tasks very carefully to build the level of challenge effectively and ensure that the work corresponds well to the requirements of individual pupils. They question pupils skilfully to probe their understanding and encourage them to justify or extend their responses.

A majority of teachers plan tasks purposefully to build pupils' understanding effectively. They provide resources that engage pupils' interest and support learning. These teachers lead lessons with a suitable tempo that matches the pupils' pace of learning. They explain clearly to ensure that pupils understand the requirements of tasks. A minority of teachers model work effectively so that pupils understand the standard of work expected.

In a minority of cases, the quality of teaching means that pupils do not make as much progress as they could. This is because teachers plan activities that are not challenging enough or their expectations are too low. In these cases, teachers over-manage learning, give presentations that are too lengthy or mistime tasks. As a result, there is a lack of opportunities for pupils to participate actively in the lesson. In a few cases, teachers focus too much on what they want pupils to do, rather than considering what they want pupils to learn. These teachers do not use classroom management strategies effectively enough.

In a few subjects, teachers provide relevant and useful written feedback on pupils' work. They identify areas for improvement and provide appropriate comments or suitable follow-up questions to encourage pupils to think more broadly. When they are given an opportunity to do so, pupils respond appropriately to the feedback by re-drafting or improving their work. However, across many subjects, teachers' comments are not clear enough to guide pupils to improve their work.

The school provides a balanced and inclusive curriculum that meets the requirements of most pupils. A wide range of courses are provided in the sixth form and in key stage 4, which respond well to pupils' aspirations and wishes. The courses are available in Welsh or English in nearly all cases. The school works appropriately with external partners to extend and enrich provision. Careful advice and guidance is given to pupils by the school and external partners as they move to the next stages in their education, training or employment. Overall, the curriculum gives good consideration to promoting pupils' well-being and resilience, in addition to their independent learning skills. Sixth-form pupils contribute well to the school's extra-curricular provision, in addition to supporting younger pupils in their roles as learning 'buddies'.

The school has a robust vision for implementing the Curriculum for Wales. Leaders ensure a stimulating and relevant offer that ignites pupils' curiosity and interest. They are continuing to work with the cluster's primary schools to develop and refine plans and ensure appropriate progression across both sectors.

The literacy, numeracy and digital skills co-ordinators have developed methodical and beneficial plans and guidance for departments across the school. They are developing increasingly effectively in their roles and are strong and dynamic advocates for their areas of responsibility. However, provision to develop pupils' progressive skills has not been planned strategically across the curriculum. Arrangements for monitoring provision across the relevant subjects are in their early days.

The curriculum includes valuable experiences for pupils to learn about the nature of the culture of their area, as well as Wales and the wider world. Beneficial learning activities about the history and experiences of Black, Asian and minority ethnic people, diversity and inclusion are evident within subjects and morning periods.

The personal and social education programme is suitable for developing pupils' understanding of healthy living and forging positive relationships. There is a comprehensive programme in place, which includes a variety of subjects and input from various visitors, which supports the curriculum suitably.

There is an appropriate Welsh and Welsh-speaking ethos within the school, which is promoted and supported by a range of valuable activities and experiences. Staff succeed in developing pupils' language, cultural and artistic skills effectively. However, a minority of pupils do not apply themselves fully in order to benefit from the experiences and develop as fully bilingual citizens.

Care, support and guidance

Ysgol Brynhyfryd is a caring and inclusive bilingual community. Pupils' emotional and social needs are supported well. The pastoral staff have a comprehensive knowledge of pupils' needs and succeed in forging close working relationships with them. The school has strong pastoral practices to support its pupils. They focus purposefully on whole-school attendance and behaviour and track the progress of key stage 4 pupils. The pastoral team meets regularly to identify any particular obstacles that pupils may face and agree on purposeful actions to ensure improvement. This is strong practice.

Staff work purposefully with external partners to ensure personal support that focuses on the needs of individual pupils. This includes working with the police, youth workers and health services to ensure that all pupils receive the necessary care and support. Staff deal with the very rare cases of bullying in a timely and effective manner.

The new additional learning needs co-ordinator (ALNCo) has a good knowledge of the pupils and their needs. They are beginning to work strategically to develop collaboration between the ALN team, pastoral staff and teachers to improve support for pupils. The school is responding to the requirements of the ALN Act and individual development plans (IDPs) including detailed information about the needs of individual pupils, along with appropriate targets. Pupils who need additional learning support or emotional and behavioural assistance are supported through the 'Research Centre', the 'Hafan', the 'Quiet Room' and the 'Pastoral Centre'. Overall, the interventions provided in these areas are developing appropriately. However, it is early days to see the full impact on pupils' well-being and attitudes to learning.

The school has appropriate systems to monitor attendance and there are clear arrangements in place to take timely action in cases of persistent absences. This includes purposeful strategies to support these pupils to return to education successfully. However, this has not had sufficient impact on whole-school attendance levels. Arrangements for supporting pupils' behaviour are suitable. This includes rewarding pupils for good work and effort and sensible graduated steps to deal with unacceptable behaviour.

The school promotes spiritual, moral, social and cultural development well. This is done through assemblies, 'pause for thought' activities and through the personal and social education programme. The programme is tailored to pupils' well-being needs, as necessary, including presentations by guest speakers, external agencies and health and well-being days. For example, an assembly and morning sessions are held on 'World Mental Health Day' to raise awareness and support pupils to understand and receive support, as necessary.

The school provides suitable opportunities for pupils to share their views and influence aspects of school life through the year forums and the school council. For

example, they have recently contributed towards changing aspects of the school uniform and the daily routine. Overall, opportunities for pupils to voice their opinions on wider aspects of school life, such as aspects of teaching and learning, are less developed.

An appropriate range of beneficial extra-curricular activities is provided, which includes sports clubs and musical opportunities which allow pupils to develop their self-confidence and their wider skills. There are suitable opportunities for pupils to go on educational visits, such as outdoor activities in the Ardèche or a local walk to Moel Gyw.

Senior leaders prioritise keeping pupils and staff safe. Safeguarding and child protection arrangements are robust and known to all. Most pupils feel safe at school and are confident that staff will respond appropriately to any cause for concern. All staff and governors have received training on safeguarding issues. The school meets the statutory requirements for safe recruitment. The school grounds are extensive and access is controlled tightly to ensure everyone's safety.

Leadership and management

The headteacher provides robust, personable and open leadership and has steered the school through gradual change to create a culture of collaboration and gain the trust of all staff. He has developed the vision 'A voice for all and an ear to listen', based on the school's new values. This vision is clear and coherent for staff, pupils and parents as it is the result of careful collaboration and consultation.

The headteacher is supported well by a leadership team which includes a deputy headteacher, two assistant headteachers and three associate headteachers. Their responsibilities are allocated sensibly and in a balanced manner. They work closely together and, on the whole, operate strategically across the school.

Most middle leaders have a good understanding of the standards and quality of teaching in their departments and faculties. The heads of faculty contribute beneficially to quality assurance activities and use this information to identify strengths and weaknesses accurately. The pastoral team evaluates their work regularly and thoroughly and identifies areas that need immediate attention. This is a strength.

Line management arrangements are robust and senior leaders provide middle leaders with appropriate challenge. The regular meetings include an agreed agenda and decisions are acted upon in a timely manner. Through this, leaders provide valuable support and ensure accountability. Leaders manage teachers' performance through robust arrangements and set suitable targets and purposeful monitoring opportunities. These arrangements are supported by professional learning opportunities, where relevant. The school does not implement a corresponding procedure for staff who are not teachers.

The school responds appropriately to national priorities. Leaders plan purposefully for the challenge of mitigating the impact of poverty on the attainment and well-being of pupils who are eligible for free school meals, by tracking the progress of these pupils systematically. Leaders are developing the Curriculum for Wales gradually by

adapting learning programmes to include more appealing and interesting experiences.

The school communicates appropriately with parents through various methods. Comprehensive information evenings are held, handbooks are shared and messages are sent by text message and on social media sites. The 'Parents' Forum' is a valuable platform for leaders to seek the views of parents, in addition to sharing information about the school's plans.

The governors are knowledgeable and supportive of the school and its leaders. Regular meetings of the full governing body and relevant sub-committee are held and the governors are clear about their role. They challenge leaders, when appropriate, to ensure accountability. Members of the governing body are allocated as links to specific departments and years. They play an active part in regular pastoral reviews and contribute beneficially to the work of the departments. They ensure that they adhere to their statutory responsibilities, such as maintaining a culture of safeguarding and promoting healthy eating and drinking.

Governors, the headteacher and the finance officer manage the school's budget carefully. Over time, they have succeeded in reversing a significant deficit in the budget into a reasonable surplus. Grants are used appropriately, including the pupil development grant, to ensure provision for pupils who are eligible for free school meals and those from low-income households. However, the use of the pupil development grant is not evaluated fully according to its effect on the outcomes of those pupils.

The headteacher has begun to revise the self-evaluation procedure to create a culture that includes middle leaders as an integral part of the process. There is a suitable calendar of activities to evaluate the school's work. Activities include lesson observations, scrutiny of books and learning walks to ensure comprehensive evidence. The findings are summarised in a useful form to share with staff. Findings consider the effect of provision on pupils' standards well.

Leaders seek the views of stakeholders through consultations and questionnaires. They also work purposefully with external partners to validate their work. This provides leaders with assurance that they have identified the main strengths and areas for improvement highly effectively.

Priorities in the school improvement plan derive directly from self-evaluation processes and local and national priorities, for example the priority to improve the quality of feedback and assessment. The plan is detailed and identifies actions to achieve the priorities. Faculty plans align with what is in the school improvement plan, in addition to including priorities that are tailored to the faculty. There are a few examples where pupils' outcomes have improved following detailed evaluation and adapting provision. However, not all plans identify monitoring arrangements or milestones in sufficient detail.

The professional learning strategic plan outlines an appropriate range of training and professional learning opportunities that are available to staff. Individuals can take advantage of valuable opportunities outside school, while internal training is interwoven purposefully with the school's priorities and national priorities. The effect

of professional learning is evident in a few aspects of school life. It is too early to see the full effect of whole-school training in the classroom, for example on feedback and assessment and developing pupils' skills across the curriculum. Staff value the professional learning opportunities and have taken advantage of external training and collaboration with external agencies and partners to improve aspects of their practice. For example, a few teachers are following a masters course with the support of the school and a few have completed an external leadership course.

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/members of the management committee 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, middle leaders, 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
- visit a broad sample of lessons, including learning support groups and the specialist resource base (where appropriate), and undertake a variety of learning walks to observe pupils learning and to see staff teaching in a range of settings, including classrooms, support groups (where appropriate) and in outdoor areas
- visit the specialist resource base within the school to see pupils' learning (where appropriate)
- observe and speak to pupils at lunch and break times and at a sample of after-school clubs
- attend assemblies and daily acts of collective worship
- look closely at the school's self-evaluation processes
- consider the school's improvement plan and look at evidence to show how well the school has taken forward planned improvements
- scrutinise a range of school documents, including information on pupil assessment and progress, records of meetings of staff and the governing body, information on pupils' well-being, including the safeguarding of pupils, and records of staff training and professional development

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

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

Copies of the report

Copies of this report are available from the school and from the Estyn website (<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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