



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

**A report on**

**Pencoed Comprehensive School**

**Coychurch Road  
Pencoed  
CF35 5LZ**

**Date of inspection: September 2024**

**by**

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

## About Pencoed Comprehensive School

Name of provider	Pencoed Comprehensive School
Local authority	Bridgend County Borough Council
Language of the provider	English
School category according to Welsh-medium provision	
Type of school	Secondary
Religious character	
Number of pupils on roll	895
Pupils of statutory school age	773
Number in sixth form	120
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 21.1%)	21.9%
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 11.2%)	10.0%
Percentage of pupils who speak Welsh at home	2.1%
Percentage of pupils with English as an additional language	1.2%
Date of headteacher appointment	01/09/2017
Date of previous Estyn inspection (if applicable)	14/11/2016
Start date of inspection	30/09/2024

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.

## Summary

Pencoed Comprehensive School is a caring, inclusive school where the well-being of individuals is prioritised, and diversity celebrated. A strong sense of community and belonging forms a secure foundation for pupils to learn, grow, thrive and flourish.

A strength of the school is the way that leadership responsibilities are shared across the school. This enables leaders to prioritise their work effectively and provides opportunities for staff to develop their skills in line with their ambitions. This work to distribute leadership extends to empowering pupils who benefit from a wide variety of opportunities to make a difference to the school through a range of pupil leadership groups. There is a valuable emphasis on developing teachers' practice which has resulted in a culture of professional learning and commitment to improvement. The development and refinement of the use of data has contributed positively to improvement processes.

The strong focus on pupil well-being creates a positive environment for learning. Overall, many teachers support pupils well and as a result, many pupils engage with their learning and make secure progress. However, the evaluation of teaching does not always pay enough attention to considering the impact of teachers' approaches on pupils' learning, progress and skills. As a result, although there are many strengths in teaching, there are fewer examples of excellent practice and strong pupil progress.

The school has developed a wide range of beneficial strategies to improving attendance, but despite the school's work to improve this aspect, rates of attendance remain below pre-pandemic levels.

The school hosts a local authority learning resource centre, Tŷ Ewenni, for pupils who have a recognised moderate learning difficulty (MLD). Pupils in the resource centre are well-supported to develop a wide range of learning and life skills. They make good progress from their individual starting points.

## Recommendations

We have made two recommendations to help the school continue to improve:

R1 Improve attendance

R2 Sharpen self-evaluation to focus more precisely on the impact of provision on pupils' learning and skills

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

## Main findings

### Teaching and learning

Nearly all teachers at Pencoed Comprehensive School foster strong working relationships with pupils and know them well. Most teachers create positive environments in their classrooms which enable many pupils to engage well with their learning. They have clear expectations and routines, which ensure good behaviour by many pupils. In these classes, pupils follow their teachers' instructions promptly and maintain their concentration throughout the lesson. Many discuss ideas sensibly in pairs and groups when given the opportunity to do so. They are eager learners, participating enthusiastically in activities. A few pupils are passive and lack motivation in lessons. These pupils lack sufficient pride in their work, often presenting it poorly and not consistently completing tasks.

Most teachers have strong subject knowledge. Many teachers plan lessons with suitable learning intentions, although these are not always precise enough. Their lessons are structured purposefully and include an appropriate variety of tasks. They manage the pace of lessons well and regularly check pupils' understanding using a variety of questions and techniques which promote discussions. Their learning resources are well structured to meet the needs of pupils and tasks increase in challenge appropriately. Many teachers provide clear explanations and exemplification. As a result, many pupils, including those with Additional Learning Needs (ALN), make at least the expected progress, demonstrating persistence and furthering their knowledge and understanding. They recall prior learning suitably and apply it appropriately to different contexts.

In a few cases, pupils make exceptional progress often as a result of particularly effective teaching. In these strongest lessons, teachers are highly enthusiastic and expert in their subject. They plan lessons which focus clearly on developing pupils' skills, knowledge and conceptual understanding. They produce imaginative and stimulating learning resources which inspire pupils to enjoy learning. These teachers model expectations proficiently and design tasks that challenge pupils to think deeply and solve problems independently. They craft rich learning opportunities from pupils' misconceptions and adapt their teaching accordingly.

A few pupils make only limited progress, either because of shortcomings in teaching or because they do not engage well enough with learning in lessons. In the few cases where teaching is less effective, teachers' expectations of what pupils can achieve are too low. Too often these lessons lack opportunities for pupils to think and work independently. Tasks do not always have a clear enough purpose, and teachers do not ask enough probing questions. These teachers tend to over direct the learning, at times intervening and supporting too often.

Many teachers provide valuable verbal feedback in lessons to support pupils to improve. They circulate the classroom to assess pupils' progress, regularly offering worthwhile individual guidance. In the majority of cases, teachers plan useful assessment opportunities and provide written formative feedback to help pupils identify aspects of their work that require improving. They check work for technical accuracy to improve pupils' literacy. Many pupils make the effort to refine their work

suitably following verbal or written feedback from their teachers. However, in a minority of cases, teachers' feedback isn't always clear or precise enough to enable pupils to make purposeful improvements in their work.

The school is taking a measured and sensible approach to developing pupils' skills over time. For example, it has prioritised literacy skills and developed a worthwhile, consistent approach to developing pupils' oracy and vocabulary. Last year, leaders focused attention on extended writing; while this continues, they have placed an additional focus on developing pupils' reading skills this year. Leaders and skills co-ordinators work effectively with departments to identify appropriate opportunities to plan and develop pupils' literacy and numeracy skills. While leaders have identified opportunities for the development of pupils' digital skills across the curriculum, the coordination of this provision is at an early stage.

Many pupils develop their oracy skills appropriately as a result of positive reinforcement and effective modelling of language by staff. Many pupils listen carefully to their teachers and peers. They make suitable responses to teachers' questions, although the majority of pupils provide only brief answers, and this is not always sufficiently challenged by teachers. Many pupils discuss their work appropriately with each other. A few pupils are particularly articulate, expressing their ideas in detail using relevant subject-specific terminology and a wide range of vocabulary.

Following a recent whole-school focus on professional learning to improve pupils' reading, many teachers are developing helpful approaches to support pupils' skills. Most pupils locate basic information in texts confidently and many use a range of appropriate reading strategies in their learning across the curriculum. When given opportunities to do so, many pupils demonstrate inference and deduction skills at an appropriate level. A minority of pupils show a good understanding of complex vocabulary and subject-specific terminology. A few pupils analyse texts in a sophisticated way, showing appreciation of an author's intentions and style, for example when studying extracts from 'The Handmaid's Tale' in English. However, a minority of pupils do not use a wide enough range of reading strategies well enough across the curriculum to support their learning.

As a result of teaching strategies to extend pupils' vocabulary, many pupils use a suitably broad range of words in their writing. The majority have a sound grasp of writing conventions. A few demonstrate particular flair in their writing, using rhetorical devices and sophisticated vocabulary to engage the reader. For example, they analyse the way women are presented in the media perceptively and ensure they write appropriately for the target audience. However, in general, pupils do not extend their writing well enough and are not given sufficient opportunities to do so across the curriculum. A minority of pupils make regular errors with punctuation, spelling and grammar, including the inconsistent use of tenses.

In Welsh lessons, pupils display many of the same strengths and weaknesses in their speaking, reading and writing as they do in English. For example, a few pupils are particularly articulate in Welsh, using a broad range of vocabulary when expressing themselves verbally or in writing. Many pupils pronounce Welsh words well. Most pupils locate basic information confidently when reading Welsh and many summarise key points suitably. The school provides valuable opportunities for pupils to develop

their knowledge of the Welsh language and culture in addition to their Welsh lessons. For example, through participation in the school eisteddfod and visits to Llangrannog and Glanllyn.

Many pupils demonstrate an understanding of basic number skills, and the majority apply these effectively in increasingly complex contexts as they progress through the school. Many pupils draw suitable bar charts and graphs. However, a minority of pupils do not construct graphs well independently. Many pupils interpret data suitably from multiple sources, for example when studying climate in geography. They apply formulae and use substitution accurately in design technology to calculate voltage when studying electrical circuits. Pupils with weaker numeracy skills use beneficial strategies to help them recall their times tables and apply this information to make simple calculations. Nearly all pupils in numeracy interventions make good progress through opportunities to solve problems and apply their numerical thinking to real life situations.

Many pupils develop their digital skills suitably across the curriculum. For example, in health and social care lessons, pupils research and investigate relevant job roles using the internet. They analyse sources and gather information, checking its validity, before using it to communicate through text and images. A few pupils demonstrate particular expertise, for example when manipulating digital images in photography to produce original work inspired by artists such as Maria Testino. In general, pupils show a good awareness of online safety, including those in Tŷ Ewenni. Pupils have opportunities to collaborate digitally using a variety of software and platforms, such as when designing and editing a newspaper article online.

Overall, pupils develop their creative and thinking skills well across the curriculum. In art lessons, many pupils experiment with ideas and are motivated by tasks that do not have a pre-determined outcome. For example, when constructing a model of a 3D insect, they adjust their approach to address the challenges they face and are at ease with the uncertainty of the end result.

Nearly all pupils in the sixth form show positive attitudes to learning and interact well with their teachers. They focus quickly in lessons, engage well with their work and demonstrate resilience when faced with challenges. Many recall prior learning competently and apply it well to new contexts. Most sixth formers collaborate successfully and work well independently.

Staff in Tŷ Ewenni know their pupils' strengths and needs well. As a result, many pupils make good progress in their learning from their starting points. Teaching assistants provide beneficial support to pupils. Teachers use the facilities in Tŷ Gwyn effectively to create real-life situations to develop the life skills of pupils in Years 9, 10 and 11. The curriculum at Tŷ Ewenni reflects the mainstream curriculum and is adapted to suit the pupils. Staff tailor interventions suitably to meet pupils' individual targets.

The school provides a broad and balanced curriculum which meets the needs of nearly all pupils. It includes general and vocational options to support pupils' aspirations and career paths. For example, in Year 9, pupils can opt to specialise in two areas of the expressive arts, and this supports them to create a pathway to best meet their ambitions. The school has well-established links with other local providers

which enhance the curriculum offer for older pupils and those in the sixth form. In a few subjects at A level such as Welsh and media studies, pupils benefit from opportunities offered through collaboration with other providers.

Leaders have a clear vision for developing Curriculum for Wales, supported by valuable collaboration with local primary schools, prioritising good teaching and the development of skills. The school continues to make strong progress in designing a range of authentic learning experiences that make appropriate use of the local area, for example, when pupils are learning about their 'cynefin' in geography. As a result of effective planning, the school ensures that pupils develop a broad range of skills that equip them well for learning and life.

Health and well-being lessons and well-planned pastoral sessions provide valuable learning experiences for pupils. Staff make effective use of well-being data and pupil surveys to plan a programme of activities, tailored to pupils' needs that supports the development of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and emotional skills well. Pupils develop their understanding of the history and the experiences of Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic communities and LGBTQ+ people across the curriculum. For example, in history, pupils study the impact of Alexander Hamilton and in English lessons the work of Benjamin Zephaniah.

Pupils benefit from a range of lunchtime and after-school activities with worthwhile opportunities to develop their physical and creative skills, such as Friday Fitness and School of Rock. The school provides a suitable range of educational trips, such as to the Hay festival and Welsh universities. The school also provides beneficial transition arrangements for pupils joining and leaving at the start of or during the academic year.

### **Well-being, care, support and guidance**

Leaders and staff across the Pencoed Comprehensive School community have successfully established a warm, calm, and nurturing learning environment for all pupils, including those in Tŷ Ewenni. Staff prioritise the well-being of all pupils, especially the most vulnerable.

The school community fosters a profound and tangible sense of belonging, ensuring that both pupils and staff feel valued and treated equitably. Pupils are polite and demonstrate respect towards adults, visitors, and their peers. Pupils throughout the school hold the 'Flourish' system in high esteem and diligently strive to earn rewards, or 'flourish points', for their positive participation in school activities.

Staff have a good understanding of the needs of their pupils, which is enhanced by the school's highly effective data systems. Information such as attendance patterns, progress summaries and flourish points are readily available to all staff. Secure digital systems enable pastoral staff to access pertinent and important information and to keep helpful records of the work they do to support pupils. Pastoral and well-being leaders at all levels use this information sensitively to intervene early when necessary, and to celebrate the progress of individual pupils, across all aspects of their learning and development. Leaders and the teams of well-being coaches provide timely and responsive care, support and guidance to pupils and communicate effectively with their families.

The work of the welcoming and proactive team in the Well-being Hub is well led. The staff team offer a wide and valuable range of beneficial support to pupils which encourages healthy, positive relationships and mutual respect. For example, pupils from service families and young carers benefit from specific and helpful support groups. Individual pupils who need support to navigate the school day due to their emotional or physical health or to regulate their behaviour, receive beneficial, one-to-one intervention. Staff skilfully teach pupils how to use individual coping strategies. This strengthens their resilience and supports them to manage their specific needs with increasing independence over time.

The 'Hub' team ensures their work aligns closely with the needs of the pupils and families they support. For instance, they recently invited a group of parents to review the transgender policy and promptly addressed the valuable feedback received. Additionally, pupils and staff have established 'Pencoed Pre Loved' to promote sustainability and equity by reusing and recycling a variety of clothes, including uniform, that are accessible to all families.

Leaders in the Hub review carefully the impact of the interventions they carry out to improve attendance and behaviour, or to support emotional health and well-being. They use this detailed evidence to decide the most appropriate next steps for each pupil, including making links with external providers, and to consider which interventions to retain, adapt or to replace over time. Leaders are able to triangulate effective well-being support with improvements in attainment and progress.

Over the last two years senior pastoral leaders have reviewed their approaches to promoting good attendance and behaviour beneficially, taking into account views from across the school community. They have refined their policies for these important areas of focus thoughtfully and have adopted a clear and well-communicated graduated response model for tackling attendance and behaviour. The school promotes and celebrates good and improving attendance and works well with a range of partners to address absence. Despite this, rates of attendance remain below pre-pandemic levels. The attendance of pupils eligible for free school meals improved last year more strongly than that seen nationally but the gap between this group of pupils and their peers remains larger than before the pandemic. Although fewer pupils eligible for free school meals are persistently absent than is the case nationally, tackling persistent absence remains a priority for the school.

Most pupils say they are not bullied in school and have a clear understanding of where to seek support if issues arise. There is an effective 'Pass it on' mail system to alert staff to their own or others' concerns if they arise. Any incidents of alleged bullying and harassment are logged and dealt with appropriately. The school draws on the expertise of school staff, external partners, and employs restorative approaches well to support those involved and ensure pupils are free from physical, emotional, and verbal abuse. The school has strengthened its arrangements to tackle the underlying causes of poor behaviour. There are helpful, well understood processes for promoting good behaviour and for dealing with any incidents of poor behaviour in lessons or around the school. As a result, many pupils behave well.

Leaders, the governing body and staff promote the safeguarding culture of the school well. Processes are clear, robust and well communicated. Staff have regular training and understand well the part they play in keeping pupils safe. The school responds to



safeguarding concerns promptly and thoroughly. There are secure procedures to ensure the suitability of staff and others who are in contact with pupils. Staff work well with a wide variety of external partners such as the school nurse and the police to implement a range of strategies to help pupils keep themselves safe from exploitation, safe when online, and making safe lifestyle choices, including regular exercise and healthy eating.

The school makes effective use of the views of pupils to support its improvement processes. For example, pupils played an important part in revising the behaviour policy. The Sixth Form leadership team are strong ambassadors for the school and model good leadership in their chosen roles, as well as influencing changes to the Sixth Form Centre. Pupils, including those eligible for free school meals and Tŷ Ewenni pupils, benefit from a range of leadership opportunities such as the Undod (LGBTQ+), Parch (anti racist) and Amdani (Cymraeg) champions. Representatives from these groups form the school council, which has a strong influence on the quality of experiences for pupils. For example, the Language Ambassadors promote positive attitudes towards international languages.

Most pupils are developing a clear understanding of how to maintain their health and well-being through diet and exercise. Many have positive attitudes to physical activity and benefit from their involvement in the extensive extra-curricular offer including a range of sporting clubs and expressive arts opportunities. Overall, pupils seize the valuable learning and social opportunities on offer and make considerable progress in their personal development by the time they leave school. Most pupils are proud to be part of a community that celebrates diversity, encourages individuality and welcomes all.

The pastoral teams meet regularly with pupils from partner primary schools and their parents from Year 5 onwards to plan and support a smooth and positive transition to secondary phase learning. The 'Helping Hands' initiative enables vulnerable pupils to settle well when they join the school. There is a wide range of relevant activities and talks for pupils in Year 9 and Year 11 who are considering their next steps in education. For example, the Pencoed Pathways section of the website provides helpful video advice which helps them make well-informed choices.

The provision for pupils with additional learning needs (ALN) has a positive impact on pupils' learning and social skills. Individual Development Plans (IDP), and One Page Profiles are reviewed regularly with parents and pupils. The ALN team uses effective digital systems to identify pupils' needs and includes information about the most beneficial strategies to support individual pupils. Teachers use this information productively to develop and share their own successful approaches with colleagues. Staff work with a broad range of external agencies to provide beneficial additional support for those pupils who need it.

Pupils in Tŷ Ewenni enjoy school and build strong relationships with staff. They are supported in the development of their academic and social skills. Staff have an excellent understanding of the needs of the individual pupils and there is a strong focus on supporting individuals to succeed.

## **Leading and improving**

The headteacher, working closely with his senior team, has established an ethos of inclusivity, community and equity. The values of the school are embraced by all, and the ambition to learn, grow, thrive and flourish are woven through the life and work of the school.

Leaders at all levels work collegiately, with trust, respect and open communication. Roles and responsibilities are clear, equitable and aligned suitably to the priorities of the school. Lines of accountability are practical and effective. The leadership structure is designed both to make the most of the strengths of individuals and to provide opportunities for growth. Middle leaders understand their roles and responsibilities well. Curriculum leaders and Areas of Learning and Experience (AoLE) leads work together effectively and purposefully towards meeting the school's priorities.

### **Spotlight: Effective distribution of leadership**

A strength of the school is the wide distribution of leadership responsibilities. This empowers individuals, ensures ownership of important aspects of the school's work, and contributes successfully to the sense of collaboration. This focus on individual development, and support for staff well-being fosters high levels of motivation and commitment amongst staff.

National priorities underpin much of the strategic work of the school, and approaches to developing important aspects such as the Welsh language, behaviour and pupils' skills feature clearly in improvement planning. Work to mitigate the impact of poverty is a key pillar of the school's strategic work. This includes a wide variety of approaches, including a consideration of curriculum and teaching, and work with partner primary schools to ensure equity.

### **Spotlight - Improving teaching through professional learning**

The school is developing a vibrant culture of professional learning. There is a strong focus on developing teaching based on first-hand evidence of strengths and areas for improvement in practice across the school. A variety of complementary approaches, including coaching, research-informed practice, collaborative planning and reflection, teacher-led workshops and whole school events are supporting the school well in its ambition to strengthen pedagogy. The views of pupils play an important role in this work. The 'Pedagogy Pioneers', a group of pupil leaders have received training to develop a valuable set of skills to work with leaders to inform improvements in teaching and learning approaches.

Senior leaders have developed a well-thought-out calendar of self-evaluation activities to gather first-hand evidence. They use information from observations, work scrutiny and listening to learners to identify strengths and areas for improvement across the whole school. The school has recently developed a more strategic approach to using data that is based on identifying the needs of individual pupils and is accessible for all staff. As result, leaders know their school well.

Leaders take good account of feedback from a wide range of stakeholders. This has resulted in a variety of changes to school practice. For instance, leaders have reviewed the cost of educational trips and made changes to the parent's evening arrangements as a direct consequence of canvassing opinion. A notable strength is how leaders seek and respond to pupils' views about important aspects of school life. For example, they place a greater emphasis on celebrating pupils' achievements following comments in a pupil survey.

Senior leaders ensure that self-evaluation activities link closely to the school's current priorities. Leaders at all levels use a broad range of data to help them identify priorities for improvement. They use this data and consider a wider range of evidence well when tracking progress against targets and priorities. Whole departmental reviews give a valuable overview of performance against priorities and identify strengths and further areas for improvement.

Whilst leaders focus closely on the quality of teaching when evaluating the school's work, they do not always focus precisely enough on the impact of the provision on pupils' learning and skills. Consequently, planning for improvement is not always sharp enough and lacks precise success criteria.

The business manager, headteacher and governors manage the budget carefully. They monitor spending prudently and review lines of the budget for best value for money. The school makes good use of grant funding, including the pupil development grant. This enables them to provide support for vulnerable pupils and those eligible for free school meals, through mentoring, interventions and extra support. This is having a positive impact on the skills and attendance of these pupils.

Governors are knowledgeable and supportive. They are diligent in their work, committed to self-improvement, and well equipped to hold the school to account securely. They challenge school leaders effectively and support them in holding others to account.

### **Additional information**

The school's arrangements for safeguarding pupils do not give any cause for concern.

The school's arrangements for site security give cause for concern.

The school has appropriate arrangements for promoting healthy eating and drinking.

Leaders and governors manage the school's finances appropriately, including the use of the pupil development grant.

## 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

## Appendix 1: Numbers – quantities and proportions

The report makes references to different quantities and proportions e.g. '*most pupils...*' or '*very few pupils...*'. We use these terms to describe quantities and proportions as outlined in the table below:

nearly all =	with very few exceptions
most =	90% or more
many =	70% or more
a majority =	over 60%
half =	50%
around half =	close to 50%
a minority =	below 40%
few =	below 20%
very few =	less than 10%

## 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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