



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

A report on

Ysgol Pen Coch Special School

**Prince of Wales Avenue
Flintshire
CH6 5DL**

Date of inspection: November 2024

by

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

About Ysgol Pen Coch Special School

Name of provider	Ysgol Pen Coch Special School
Local authority	Flintshire County Council
Language of the provider	English
School category according to Welsh-medium provision	Not applicable.
Type of school	Maintained Special
Religious character	Not applicable.
Number of pupils on roll	100
Pupils of statutory school age	97
Number in nursery classes	3
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 Maintained Special is 46.6%)	31.7%
Percentage of pupils identified as having additional learning needs (a) (The national percentage of pupils identified as having an additional learning need in Maintained Special is 100.0%)	100.0%
Percentage of pupils who speak Welsh at home	None
Percentage of pupils with English as an additional language	15%
Date of headteacher appointment	01/01/2020
Date of previous Estyn inspection (if applicable)	02/05/2017
Start date of inspection	12/11/2024
<p>Further information</p> <p>Ysgol Pen Coch is a day special school situated in Flint and maintained by Flintshire County Council. The school provides education for pupils aged from 3 to 11 years with a wide range of additional learning needs including severe, profound</p>	

and multiple learning difficulties, and autistic spectrum condition. A few pupils have additional physical and sensory impairments.

All pupils have a statement of special educational needs or an IDP.

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.

Summary

The culture at Ysgol Pen Coch is securely rooted in the value of “every child, every chance, every day”. The culture permeates every aspect of the school’s life and work.

The headteacher demonstrates calm and purposeful leadership, ably supported by both senior and middle leaders. Together, they collaborate effectively to maintain a school environment where pupils are happy, eager to attend, and make significant progress in their learning.

Ysgol Pen Coch offers a stimulating and nurturing learning environment for pupils. Strong, positive relationships between the dedicated staff and their pupils, built on respect and trust, foster a happy and supportive community where pupils feel valued and safe. The staff work tirelessly to help pupils reach their full potential, celebrating their achievements with enthusiasm. As a result, most pupils make strong progress across all areas of learning and demonstrate very positive attitudes towards their learning.

All pupils at the school have additional learning needs and have a statement of educational needs or an individual development plan (IDP). Leaders and staff have secured an extensive range of high-quality specialist provision, which meets the needs of all pupils successfully. Teaching staff know the pupils well, have a clear understanding of pupils’ additional learning needs and flexibly approach and adapt learning experiences in response to these needs and the well-being of pupils. Further, teaching staff have a beneficial focus on developing pupils’ skills in important areas of learning which relate well to the individual needs of the pupils.

Staff consistently and effectively use a range of communication strategies to meet the wide range of pupils’ needs. As a result nearly all pupils develop their communication skills well during their time at the school. Further, across the school there are thoughtfully planned and consistent approaches to meet pupils’ sensory needs. Staff have developed stimulating learning environments with a range of appealing resources, which enable pupils to explore and learn safely.

The school maintains a strong focus on delivering an exciting and engaging curriculum that effectively meets the needs of every pupil well. This includes valuable opportunities for pupils to develop healthy lifestyles and build positive relationships.

The school collaborates effectively with a range of professionals to support pupils to overcome individual challenges. Staff have developed a range of high-quality therapeutic approaches, which supports pupils’ well-being and progress successfully.

The school has a positive approach to supporting pupil behaviour. Leaders carefully track and analyse behavioural trends and use this information to make meaningful changes. For example, skilfully identifying the root causes of behaviours and teaching pupils the skills or strategies needed to support their communication needs and manage their emotions.

The school has established highly effective arrangements to support pupils to transition to their next school. In the very few cases where pupils need additional support to visit their new school, staff make innovative use of the virtual reality room to familiarise them with the sights and sounds of their new school.

Leaders have conducted a suitable range of quality assurance activities. There is an appropriate range of first-hand gathering exercises that take place over the year. However, it is unclear how the identified strengths are shared more widely in the school, or whether these are evaluated and shared with the governing body.

Recommendations

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

R1. Strengthen self-evaluation processes to inform the strategic direction of the school

What happens next

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

Main evaluation

The culture at Ysgol Pen Coch is securely rooted in the value of “every child, every chance, every day”. The culture permeates every aspect of the school’s life and work.

Ysgol Pen Coch provides a stimulating and nurturing learning environment for all pupils. There are strong working relationships between the passionate and dedicated staff and their pupils, based on respect and trust. This creates a happy community where pupils feel valued and safe. Staff at the school support pupils to fulfil their individual potential and celebrate their achievements with great joy together. Most pupils make strong progress in all aspects of their learning over time.

Pupils’ experiences at Ysgol Pen Coch prepare them well for their next steps as they move through the school and, when transitioning into secondary education.

Effective teaching

Teaching staff know the pupils well and have a clear understanding of pupils’ additional learning needs. Teaching staff have a flexible approach and plan and adapt learning experiences well in response to the needs and well-being of pupils. Nearly all teachers and teaching assistants use a wide range of strategies and resources skilfully to engage and support pupils to achieve. As a result nearly all

pupils engage enthusiastically in their learning and demonstrate very positive attitudes.

Routines are well established across the school. Transitions are very well managed and provide valuable stability in many classes. As a result, most pupils understand and follow routines and expectations readily. This supports pupils to participate fully in their learning.

In many classes, teachers demonstrate high expectations of pupils. For example, teaching staff challenge pupils to generate and write adjectives to describe a lost object or by plotting co-ordinates on a map of a zoo.

Teaching assistants are delegated well within classes. They make an important contribution in maintaining pupils' engagement in learning. For example, they use a range of tailored strategies skilfully to support pupils to make progress.

Staff make effective use of a range of beneficial resources. These are tailored exceptionally well to meet pupils' individual needs, including, for example, the hydrotherapy pool, sensory therapy room and virtual reality room. As a result of well-considered and skilfully delivered provision, most pupils engage in their learning and make strong progress.

Skill development

Teaching staff have a clear focus on developing pupils' skills in important areas related well to their individual needs.

Staff consistently and effectively use a range of communication strategies to meet the wide range of pupils' needs. As a result, nearly all pupils develop their communication skills well during their time at the school. Most pupils communicate with adults and their peers using their preferred methods confidently, conveying their feelings, opinions and needs successfully. Pupils who communicate verbally make strong progress in developing their oracy. A few pupils engage in detailed conversation with enthusiasm and fluency. Nearly all pupils using non-verbal communication, including symbols, signing and assistive technologies, make strong progress in developing these skills as they move through the school.

Spotlight: Provision for sensory learning

The school has developed highly effective provision for sensory learning, which is a notable feature of the school's work. Across the school, there are thoughtfully planned and consistent approaches to meet pupils' sensory needs. Staff have developed stimulating learning environments with a range of appealing resources, which enable pupils to explore and learn safely. Through timetabled targeted sessions, pupils experience textures such as straw, foam and dripping water using their sense of touch and listen to soundscapes and musical instruments. They track shiny fabrics and objects that light up and benefit from personalised and regular one-to-one sessions in the hydrotherapy pool.

Staff at the school demonstrate a deep understanding of their work in this area and how it impacts positively on pupils' development. For example, they describe the benefits of sensory play in developing pupils fine motor skills, language development,

creativity and emotional regulation. Many pupils have beneficial sensory profile plans which support all staff in targeting activities to meet their individual needs and contribute successfully to pupils' progress in this area. As a result, these carefully planned programmes of personalised tactile, visual, and auditory experiences develop pupils' senses and make a significant contribution to improving their overall development and well-being.

With skilful staff support, most pupils make strong progress in developing their individual physical and movement skills, for example tracking a light up ball in hydrotherapy, picking up spiders from spaghetti, placing glitter on the top of a foam snow mountain. Many pupils with complex needs become increasingly independent with regard to mobility.

Across the school, staff provide rich opportunities to develop pupils' creative skills. For example, working in partnership with musicians and artists, pupils benefit from opportunities to create natural sculptures, learn about Sir Kyffin Williams and enjoy Samba band sessions. These opportunities develop pupils' skills well in line with their needs and interests.

Teaching staff successfully support pupils' independence through familiar routines. For example, at play time, pupils are successfully supported by staff to put their coats and shoes on. Support is offered sensitively and based on pupils' differing levels of need to encourage independence.

Curriculum arrangements

The school provides rich, relevant and joyful learning experiences for pupils.

There is a strong whole-school focus on creating an exciting and engaging curriculum, which meets the needs of every pupil well. The school has developed beneficial relationships with artists and musicians and uses these well to enrich pupils' opportunities in the expressive arts. For example, pupils take part in activities such as the sing and sign choir with enthusiasm and pride. In addition, pupils and staff enjoy working with an environmental artist. As a result, pupils are highly engaged in creating celebrations of natural art by using stones, pebbles, leaves and branches that are readily available in the school grounds.

The school provides a curriculum that promotes pupils' health and well-being highly effectively. There is a broad range of opportunities for pupils to practise making healthy choices, for example at snack time and through therapeutic sessions to support pupils' well-being.

There are secure arrangements for relationships and sexuality education to be incorporated into cross curricular themes as well as standalone sessions as required. As part of a beneficial research project, the school has identified appropriate resources to support pupils' understanding of changes to their bodies. Pupils learn about their feelings and how to regulate their emotions. Planning to develop pupils' understanding of the wider world, different communities and diversity of relationships is at an early stage of development.

Pupil voice

Staff at the school place pupils at the heart of everything they do, working tirelessly to help pupils to 'find their voice' and to be heard. For example, the school council provides worthwhile opportunities for pupils to share ideas, listen to other pupils' views, and make suggestions for improvement. The Criw Cymraeg promote the use of Welsh across the school successfully and have achieved the Cymraeg Campus bronze award. Recently, school council representatives visited the Mayor's Chambers in Flint and made poppies that are displayed with pride in the school hall. As a result, pupils are developing into ethical and informed citizens.

Supporting pupils' additional learning needs

All pupils at the school have additional learning needs and have a statement of educational needs or an individual development plan (IDP). The school has developed a clear rationale for the delivery of its provision to meet the needs of individual pupils at the school very well. One-page profiles make an important contribution to ensuring that all members of staff have a strong understanding of the needs and interests of pupils. Leaders and staff have secured an extensive range of high-quality specialist provision, which meets the needs of all pupils successfully. This includes beneficial programmes to support pupils with autism and a range of successful strategies to support pupils' sensory needs.

The school collaborates effectively with a range of professionals to support pupils to overcome individual challenges. Leaders work proactively with healthcare professionals to ensure that these needs are met well and that pupils are able to access education, for example using input from occupational therapy to meet sensory needs throughout the school day. Staff have developed a range of high-quality therapeutic approaches that support pupils' well-being and progress successfully. For example, teachers collaborate with the speech and language team (SALT) and physiotherapists to support pupils to develop their communication and physical skills. As a result, most pupils make strong progress towards achieving their individual learning targets.

The school has a positive approach to supporting pupil behaviour. Leaders carefully track and analyse behavioural trends and use this information to make meaningful changes, for example skilfully identifying the root causes of behaviours and teaching pupils the skills or strategies needed to support their communication needs and manage their emotions. As a result, in line with pupils' needs, behaviour around the school is consistently good, including at break times and transition periods. There have been no fixed term or permanent exclusions at the school in recent years. The school's work in this area is a notable strength.

Spotlight: Effective transition arrangements

The school has established highly effective arrangements to support pupils to transition to their next school. Where pupils need additional support to visit their new school, staff make innovative use of the virtual reality room to familiarise them with the sights and sounds of their new school. This prepares them extremely well for this important transition and for the next steps in their learning journey

Leadership

The headteacher provides calm and purposeful leadership and is very ably supported by both senior and middle leaders. Together, they work effectively and cohesively to sustain a school where pupils are happy, enjoy attending and most make strong progress in their learning including their social and independence skills.

The school benefits from a small yet effective governing body. Governors are passionate about the work of the school and have a secure understanding of the school's strengths and areas for improvement. The professional skills of governors are well matched to different aspects of the work of the school. These skills are used very effectively in supporting the headteacher and wider leadership team. The governing body provide an appropriate level of support and challenge to the school.

The headteacher provides very useful reports to the governing body. These include valuable insights into, for example, the development of the curriculum, staffing related matters and, school finances. The governing body use the information well in making generally informed decisions. However, reporting on the progress that pupils make during their time at school is under-developed. As a result, the governing body cannot always be as assured as it needs to be on the impact of provision.

Leaders have conducted an appropriate range of first-hand quality assurance activities that take place over the year. During the autumn term, for example, leaders quality assured and sampled the planning for around a quarter of the pupils at the school. This highlighted both where there were strengths and where planning needed to be strengthened. However, it is unclear how the strengths and areas for development in provision are shared more widely in the school, or whether these are evaluated and shared with the governing body.

The school improvement plan has been co-constructed with staff and includes a broad and appropriate range of priorities, including the need to further develop systems and process for tracking pupil progress. There are appropriate actions for monitoring the progress in implementing the priorities. Information on the costings associated with implementing priorities is less clear and undermines the ability of the school to deliver on the priorities.

Staff benefit from a broad range of professional learning opportunities. There are appropriate systems for staff to express an interest in further learning opportunities. The strategic planning and evaluation of professional learning in teaching, and the impact it has on pupils' progress, is in the early stages of development.

One of the school's priorities relates to increasing the size of the school by taking over a provision, at a different site, currently managed by the authority's pupil referral unit. Whilst the governing body and school clearly see the rationale for this development, they have sought clarification on taking on the provision, in relation to the budget, staffing and structure. This lack of information limits the school ability to plan for this development.

Additional information

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

The school's arrangements for site management do not give any 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/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

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 (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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