

A report on

Lewis School Pengam

**Gilfach
Bargoed
CF81 8LJ**

Date of inspection: February 2025

by

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

This report is also available in Welsh

About Lewis School Pengam

Name of provider	Lewis School Pengam
Local authority	Caerphilly 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	638
Pupils of statutory school age	584
Number in sixth form	54
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%)	24.8%
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%)	18.5%
Percentage of pupils who speak Welsh at home	*
Percentage of pupils with English as an additional language	*
Date of headteacher appointment	01/02/2013
Date of previous Estyn inspection (if applicable)	01/01/2018
Start date of inspection	17/02/2025

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

Lewis School Pengam is a caring and inclusive community. Most pupils are welcoming and friendly. They feel safe and supported and many demonstrate positive attitudes to learning.

The headteacher, and his senior leadership team are leading the school well through a period of change as they prepare for a new chapter in September 2025. The school has continued to place the well-being of pupils and staff at the heart of its work. They build their priorities around how best to enable all pupils to participate and succeed, whatever their background and social context. They have developed a range of worthwhile strategies to support pupils and families affected by poverty. This is having a positive impact on the attendance and achievement of these pupils. Overall, the work on improving attendance across the school is a notable strength.

Teachers and support staff foster positive working relationships with pupils and in many lessons, pupils engage with their learning and make secure progress. However, in a minority of lessons, pupils do not make as much progress as they could due to shortcomings in teaching. Poor behaviour of a few pupils also hinders lessons, and in these instances, the school behaviour policy does not support staff or pupils well enough. There is a well-coordinated approach to improving pupils' skills across the curriculum. However, pupils do not develop their Welsh speaking skills well-enough.

Leadership responsibilities are shared reasonably across the school, and this has enabled leaders to prioritise their work effectively. Alongside middle leaders, they carry out a range of activities to evaluate the school's work. However, these processes do not always focus sharply enough on the impact of provision on pupil progress. Although the governing body is very supportive of the school, the structures of the sub-committees are not clear or effective enough.

The school provides a range of opportunities for pupils to take part in extra-curricular activities, which enrich their education. These include the popular rock band events and sporting activities. The school tailors its care, support and guidance effectively and provides a wide range of courses and pathways that meet the needs of nearly all pupils.

Recommendations

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

- R1. Improve teaching and provide strategic support for teachers around behaviour
- R2. Refine self-evaluation activities so that they focus precisely on pupils' learning and skills
- R3. Improve the provision to develop pupils' Welsh language skills
- R4. Strengthen the structures and effectiveness of governance

What happens next

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

Main findings

Teaching and learning

Most teachers at Lewis School Pengam foster strong working relationships with their pupils and know them well. Many create a positive environment in their classrooms, demonstrate strong classroom management and establish well-understood routines, regularly reminding pupils of expectations.

Many teachers plan sequences of activities that build pupils' knowledge and skills well. These teachers provide clear explanations and exemplification, and lessons proceed at a suitable pace. As a result, many pupils, including pupils with additional learning needs (ALN) make at least the progress expected in their learning. In these classes, pupils follow their teachers' instructions promptly and maintain their concentration throughout the lesson. They are eager learners, participating enthusiastically in activities and behaving well in lessons. Many teachers question appropriately to check pupils' recall and understanding and regularly offer worthwhile individual guidance. However, only a minority use questioning skilfully to probe or deepen pupils' understanding.

In a very few lessons, teachers inspire pupils with their enthusiasm and passion for their subject. These teachers have a clear understanding of how to plan for learning effectively. They equip pupils with the skills to respond well to the high levels of challenge that they offer. They monitor learning successfully and are confident to pause the lesson when needed to address misconceptions. As a result, pupils in these lessons make strong progress.

Despite these strengths, a minority of pupils make only limited progress in developing their knowledge, understanding and skills either because of shortcomings in teaching or because they do not engage well enough with learning in lessons. In a minority of cases, teachers:

- do not have high enough expectations of pupils' progress
- do not establish an appropriate balance between supporting pupils' work and developing their independence
- do not maximise the use of lesson time well enough leading to lessons that either start slowly, finish early, or lack clear structure

A minority of pupils exhibit passive behaviour and are not engaged fully. A few pupils display negative attitudes towards learning, occasionally talking over the teacher and failing to listen respectfully. The school behaviour policy does not support staff or pupils well enough in these instances.

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. The impact of written feedback is too variable. In the best cases, pupils use their teachers' advice to improve their work well. However, too often feedback is not helpful enough to enable pupils to make purposeful improvements to their work.

Literacy and wider skills

The school has adopted a suitable approach to developing pupils' literacy skills. Leaders collaborate suitably to identify appropriate opportunities for embedding literacy skills within subject areas. However, pupils do not have enough opportunities to apply and develop their advanced reading skills across the curriculum.

Many pupils listen attentively and respond appropriately to their peers. They often provide sensible answers to questions and, when encouraged, a majority offer extended explanations that reflect their understanding. Pupils frequently use subject-specific terminology accurately in their responses, contributing positively to classroom discussions. However, a minority of pupils present underdeveloped answers, often due to limited questioning techniques that restrict their opportunities to expand on their ideas. Additionally, a few pupils struggle to listen attentively, which hinders their engagement and understanding.

The development of pupils' reading skills is an important area of focus within the school. Many pupils demonstrate a sound ability to identify basic implied meanings in texts and locate relevant information competently. When provided with opportunities, many pupils demonstrate appropriate reading skills. For example, in English lessons, they use quotations effectively to support their arguments and the majority develop their empathy skills well when discussing fictional characters, such as August in the novel 'Wonder'. In history, many pupils successfully evaluate the reliability of sources and display a strong understanding of bias for example when discussing the Montgomery Bus Boycott. In French lessons, pupils frequently employ helpful strategies to read and pronounce unfamiliar words. Pupils in Key Stage 3, do not develop their advanced reading skills well enough due to a lack of opportunities across the curriculum.

The school has recognised the importance of improving pupils' writing skills and made it a whole-school priority. The majority of pupils write at length appropriately, such as when discussing European geopolitics in geography. These pupils write with suitable accuracy, structure, and vocabulary. More able pupils produce detailed and well-organised work, using relevant subject specific terminology. However, a minority of pupils frequently make spelling, punctuation, and grammar errors. They produce brief, underdeveloped pieces with limited vocabulary, and a few struggle to apply writing conventions correctly, such as addressing letters. Generally, pupils show an over-reliance on model answers or heavily scaffolded tasks, which limits their ability to develop independent writing skills.

Many pupils develop valuable creative skills when composing and performing in their rock and pop bands. They practise regularly, and with helpful feedback from staff they are able to experiment with styles and arrangements. Their commitment is evident in their participation in the annual 'Battle of the Bands' competition.

Cymraeg

The majority of pupils communicate suitably in Welsh in class discussions, with generally accurate pronunciation. Many pupils use appropriate retrieval strategies effectively to locate facts from Welsh video clips and poems such as 'Hoffi'r Ysgol? Ydw...ond...' by Dorothy Jones. More able pupils engage in short conversations in Welsh and can converse independently. However, pupils often rely too heavily on scaffolds and structures and lack confidence to speak or write in Welsh independently.

The school provides pupils with suitable opportunities to develop their appreciation of their Welsh heritage and culture, for example through learning about the Senghenydd colliery disaster and when studying traditional Welsh 'cerdd dant' and folk music. However, only a half of pupils are entered for a GCSE qualification in Welsh. In addition, opportunities for pupils to develop their Welsh speaking skills outside of lessons are underdeveloped.

Numeracy and digital skills

Across the curriculum, there is a suitable range of opportunities for pupils to develop their numeracy skills, although these do not always challenge pupils sufficiently. A majority of pupils have a secure grasp of number. They apply the four rules of number fluently, for example when using bar models to solve a variety of problems involving ratios or when using percentages to calculate efficiency in science. A few more able pupils develop a strong understanding of number. They work fluently with numbers in standard form and use tree diagrams competently to solve problems involving probability.

A majority of pupils have appropriate data handling skills. They calculate averages, plot graphs accurately and use these to draw suitable conclusions. For example, in geography they analyse a graph showing rainfall against the level of the river. A minority of pupils have weak number skills. They struggle to calculate using the four rules and when using percentages. For example, they have difficulty in calculating areas of circles and using simple scales on graphs.

Pupils generally make suitable progress in developing their digital skills. Overall, the opportunities to develop these skills across the curriculum are appropriate, although in a few areas there is strong provision for this aspect. In their citizenship lessons, pupils develop their understanding of using hyperlinks and in photography they use software to manipulate images. In mathematics they use spreadsheets to develop both their ability to use functions and formulae and mathematical concepts such as negative indices and measures of average.

Curriculum

The school has a clear vision for its curriculum based on providing every pupil with the best preparation for the world of work and life after school. Leaders meet regularly with their partner primary schools to ensure that there are shared expectations around progress and that the curriculum builds suitably on pupils' experiences. Over the last seven years, the school has trialled a number of different curriculum models at Key Stage 3 and adjusted its approaches appropriately according to findings from their self-evaluation processes. However, planning for the Curriculum for Wales lacks coherence across some areas.

At Key Stage 4, there is a wide range of general and vocational courses which includes photography, engineering and a variety of music courses. There are valuable pathways for pupils who need additional support, and more able pupils benefit from opportunities to study courses such as additional mathematics and triple science which provide a useful gateway to post sixteen studies in these areas. Leaders ensure that pupils are well informed about the content of courses and carefully consider pupils' opinions to ensure that the curriculum meets their needs and aspirations. Through the partnership with two nearby secondary schools, pupils in the sixth form benefit from a wide range of courses, including film studies, criminology and medical science.

There are suitable opportunities for pupils to learn about the history and experiences of Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic communities and LGBTQ+ people. These include learning about the legacy of Betty Campbell, the Windrush generation and opportunities to consider racial myths, prejudice and discrimination. There is a comprehensive personal and social education (PSE) programme which is delivered by a small team of specialist teachers and, where appropriate, external guest speakers. Leaders regularly seek the views of pupils on this provision and adjust the programme according to their feedback and any themes that arise during the year.

The school has a wide range of extra-curricular activities which enrich the formal curriculum. These include the chess club, the politics club, numerous rock bands and both local and international trips. Pupils are encouraged to understand the value of their participation in these activities.

Sixth form

Overall, pupils in the sixth form have positive attitudes towards their learning and are conscientious and hard working. Their contributions to classroom discussions are valuable and they explain their reasoning well, making effective use of terminology. Sixth form pupils have secure recall of prior learning and in the small number of lessons observed, they make sound progress.

Well-being, care, support and guidance

Lewis School Pengam is a nurturing environment where pupils are treated fairly and are encouraged to embrace their individuality. Consequently, most pupils are courteous, polite and respectful to their teachers, peers and visitors to the school.

The school has a wide range of beneficial interventions to support pupils' academic progress, well-being and safety, including work with many external agencies. These include school counsellors, youth workers and organisations which support individual pupils' needs. The majority of pupils who access these interventions make good progress in developing their skills, improving their attendance or better regulating their behaviour.

The school supports pupils' understanding of diversity and inclusion and how to challenge negative stereotypes and attitudes effectively. This is promoted appropriately through its PSE programme, assemblies and in relevant subjects across the curriculum. The LGBTQ+ group lead 'Pride of Pengam', an event which is celebrated by the whole community.

The school has effective transition arrangements, including for pupils who transfer into the community from other secondary schools. Staff provide pupils with helpful advice and guidance on their next steps in learning. There are suitable arrangements in place for transition to post-sixteen and higher education including strong links with the careers service, apprenticeship providers and colleges. These help pupils to have a clear understanding of the options available to them and to raise their aspirations.

The school provides generally helpful support for pupils with additional learning needs (ALN). Staff identify pupils' needs early and use a wide range of beneficial interventions to support them. As a result, many pupils with ALN make at least suitable progress from their starting points and a minority make strong progress. The school works closely with partner primary schools to ensure that pupils with ALN have a smooth transition and that their learning and well-being needs are met. All pupils with ALN have valuable one-page profiles, which are readily accessible to staff, although these do not focus sufficiently on identifying teaching strategies to help these pupils learn best. Pupils who receive additional learning provision have comprehensive individual development plans. In general, teachers use the information they receive about pupils with ALN suitably in order to make appropriate adaptations to their teaching.

Spotlight – Improving pupils' attendance

The school's work to improve pupils' attendance is particularly successful. Leaders promote the importance of good attendance well. They use rewards for pupils with high attendance strategically and meet regularly with pupils to ensure their views inform how the reward system for attendance works. Leaders analyse closely the attendance rates for groups of pupils, year groups and individuals.

Rates of attendance, including those for pupils eligible for free school meals, have improved over the last two years by more than the national average.

To address attendance that causes concern, there is an appropriate graduated response. There are clear criteria for worthwhile interventions which are communicated well with pupils and parents. Leaders and staff work closely with pupils and their families to identify individual barriers to regular attendance. They have identified certain groups of pupils and periods during the year when attendance is lowest and introduced helpful strategies. Leaders track the effectiveness of attendance interventions closely to measure the impact of their work and adapt the strategies when necessary.

Evidence provided by the school suggests that there have been further improvements to the rates of attendance during this academic year, although they remain below pre-pandemic levels. Rates of persistent absence have fallen over the last two years and are below the national average. This has been achieved despite the high number of pupils with a poor record of attendance who join the school from other schools.

There are beneficial opportunities for pupils to take on leadership roles and help to make improvements to the school. Leaders focus on inclusivity, ensuring all pupil groups are represented in the school Senedd. The Senedd successfully petitioned for a summer uniform and is actively involved in the planning for the new school. The eco-committee has recently led a valuable community tree-planting project.

The school provides safe spaces for vulnerable pupils when needed. Pupils across the school benefit from a rich range of lunchtime and after-school activities that support pupils' social skills, for example, the pupil-initiated rock band events, a range of sports clubs and a flourishing Duke of Edinburgh programme.

The school has a strong culture of safeguarding. The safeguarding team ensures that staff are clear about the school's processes to keep pupils safe, receive regular training and are updated with relevant information. The school has appropriate systems for recording and dealing with any child protection or well-being concerns that arise. As a result, most pupils feel safe in school and free from bullying and harassment. They say that when the very few negative incidents do occur staff deal with them promptly and effectively.

Leading and improving

The headteacher is a passionate and committed leader who cares deeply about the pupils, the staff and the community of the school. His vision of giving all pupils the best life chances is embraced wholeheartedly by staff and governors.

The headteacher is supported ably by senior leaders. They work collaboratively to realise the high ambitions they have for the school and its pupils, and to manage the significant changes facing the school. On the whole, the roles and responsibilities of senior leaders are distributed sensibly, and lines of accountability are clear, though there are a few areas where this is not the case.

The impact of effective leadership can be seen in important areas of the school's work such as improving attendance, promoting a strong safeguarding culture, developing middle leaders and alleviating the impact of poverty on educational attainment. Many of these areas reflect leaders' strong focus on national priorities. Leaders' work has had less impact on improving the quality of teaching in a minority of cases and the provision for Welsh. Leaders have also focused determinedly and generally effectively on responding to the recommendations from the last inspection.

The school has a strategic approach to alleviating the impact of poverty on educational attainment. The school uses the pupil development grant carefully to support pupils. This has contributed to sustained improvements in attendance and outcomes for pupils eligible for free school meals.

Since the last inspection, leaders have focused closely on developing the leadership skills of staff. The impact of this work is clearly evident in the way senior leaders and many middle leaders undertake their roles. Many middle leaders have a sound understanding of their role and responsibilities as leaders. Curriculum middle leaders in particular, have benefitted from the professional learning to develop their leadership skills. Pastoral middle leaders are also beginning to develop these skills.

Leaders have developed organised and integrated systems to support the work of the school. These are well understood by staff. A clear calendar of self-evaluation, quality assurance and improvement planning activities underpin these systems. Senior leaders have recognised the need to streamline their systems and paperwork.

All leaders are regularly involved in helpful self-evaluation activities such as lesson observations, learning walks, work scrutiny and analysis of relevant data. Often, middle and senior leaders complete these jointly, which supports quality assurance and develops the skills of leaders effectively. In general, leaders' evaluative skills are developing well. On the whole, these leaders focus suitably on the impact of their work on pupils' standards, skills and experiences, though at times they overly-focus on provision without giving due consideration to its impact on pupils. As a result, leaders can sometimes be a little too generous in their evaluations or miss valuable opportunities to evaluate pupils' progress.

Senior leaders and many middle leaders make effective use of findings from self-evaluation activities to inform their improvement priorities and to monitor progress against their improvement plans. Improvement planning is an iterative process whereby plans are helpfully adapted and amended during the year in light of findings from these activities.

There is a clear system for line management. Staff feel well supported by leaders but also discuss examples of where they are offered constructive challenge. Meetings are held regularly and follow a set agenda which covers appropriate topics such as pupil progress and findings from self-evaluation activities. However, there is some inconsistency in how well this system is implemented and lines of accountability are not clear in all areas. Useful action points are identified from line management processes, but these are not always followed up.

The school has recently reviewed its approach to the professional development review process. Generally, individual objectives align suitably with individual and whole school development priorities and there is a clear link to professional learning. On the whole, leaders deal with underperformance appropriately.

There is a helpful programme of professional learning opportunities for all staff. These include professional dialogue triads for middle leaders, coaching for teachers and a sharpened focus on key teaching strategies. This is helping to foster a reflective culture amongst staff.

Staff well-being is a high priority for the school. Leaders have created a resource bank to support staff's mental health and well-being, and staff well-being is discussed in all meetings.

Governors are enthusiastic advocates for the school. They have a sound understanding of their role and the school's main strengths and areas for improvement. They understand well their responsibilities for healthy eating and drinking and have worked closely with the catering provider. They provide suitable challenge through full governing body meetings. However, the sub-committee structure and meetings do not currently support and challenge the school effectively enough.

The headteacher, the business manager and the Chair of Governors have a clear understanding of the school's financial matters and ensure that spending decisions are considered within the context of the school improvement priorities. The governing body's finance committee monitors this work carefully. However, the school has a budget deficit. The school is working with the governors and the local authority to manage this during a period of transition.

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 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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