

A report on

Ysgol Hafod Lon

**Parc Busnes Eryri
Penrhyndeudraeth
Gwynedd
LL48 6LD**

Date of inspection: March 2026

by

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

This report is also available in Welsh

About Ysgol Hafod Lon

Name of provider	Ysgol Hafod Lon
Local authority	Cyngor Gwynedd
Language of the provider	Welsh
School category according to Welsh-medium provision	Welsh
Type of school	Maintained Special
Religious character	
Number of pupils on roll	128
Pupils of statutory school age	88
Number in nursery classes	0
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 the maintained special sector is 45.8%)	28.9%
Percentage of pupils identified as having additional learning needs (a) (The national percentage of pupils identified as having an additional learning need in the maintained special sector is 100.0%)	100.0%
Percentage of pupils who speak Welsh at home	65%
Percentage of pupils with English as an additional language	2%
Lead partner for Initial teacher education	Yes
Date of headteacher appointment	01/09/2004
Date of previous Estyn inspection (if applicable)	05/02/2018

Start date of inspection	02/03/2026
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Further information

Ysgol Hafod Lon is a special day school situated on the outskirts of the village of Penrhyndeudraeth. It is one of two special schools maintained by Gwynedd local authority. Nearly all pupils have an individual development plan. The school caters for a wide range of additional learning needs, including severe learning difficulties, profound and multiple learning difficulties and autistic spectrum disorders.

There are currently 128 pupils between 3 and 19 years old on roll. Most pupils come from the Meirionnydd and Dwyfor area and a very few come from the Arfon area and neighbouring local authorities. Around half of the pupils come from Welsh-speaking homes. Around 29% of pupils are eligible for free school meals. A very few pupils are looked after by the local authority.

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

Ysgol Hafod Lon is a lively, caring and welcoming community where pupils respond very positively to the school's inclusive and supportive ethos. As a result, most pupils make strong progress in a wide range of skills, which supports their personal development and prepares them effectively for future life. The school provides valuable opportunities for pupils to develop independent living skills and occupational experiences, which prepares them well for the next steps in education, training or employment. All pupils receive appropriate accreditations and move on to specialist colleges, day centres or the world of work. Staff also nurture a proud sense of Welshness and ensure that Welsh identity, language and culture are a prominent part of school life. The school's arrangements for safeguarding pupils are sound.

All pupils have additional learning needs and staff know these needs very well. They provide effective support and offer rich opportunities for pupils to work towards their personal targets. The school's resources are used extremely effectively, including the hydrotherapy pool, the rebound therapy room and the outdoor areas, to support pupils' learning and well-being. Sensory and therapeutic provision are a strong feature of the school's work and support pupils' engagement, well-being and progress effectively.

The school works very effectively with parents, health agencies, social services and other partners to ensure an inclusive approach to meeting learners' complex needs. Parents are supported to use strategies that help their children's development and there are strong links between the home and the school. Pupils are also given regular opportunities to visit local businesses and venues, developing important social and life skills in real-life contexts.

Teaching is effective across the school and is based on a sound understanding of pupils' needs. Staff plan practical and interesting activities that build on previous learning and focus on small steps in terms of progress. A variety of communication methods are used, including sign language and communication devices, to support the development of pupils' communication skills. Teaching assistants provide very effective support and encourage pupils to engage enthusiastically with their learning. Assessment and feedback are used successfully to track and improve learning.

The school plans the development of pupils' skills very effectively across the curriculum. Pupils make strong progress in their communication, social, independent, physical and creative skills. They develop valuable life skills through activities such as working in the cafe, taking care of allotments and taking part in business enterprises. Many are also given valuable work experience opportunities in the community. The school's sensory provision

is a strong feature, with pupils benefitting from a variety of sensory and therapeutic experiences.

The curriculum is broad, balanced and planned carefully to meet the needs of all pupils. Pupils follow purposeful learning pathways that support their development and aspirations for the future. There are rich opportunities to broaden their experiences, including business enterprises, community activities and programmes such as the Duke of Edinburgh Award.

The school's leadership is robust and based on a clear vision for developing pupils. Leaders promote a strong culture of well-being, safeguarding and staff's professional development. Effective monitoring and evaluation processes help the school to identify strengths and plan for continuous improvement. Governors understand the school's work well and challenge and support leaders appropriately, while funding is managed effectively to support the quality of teaching and pupils' well-being.

As a result of effective provision and robust leadership, pupils make strong progress and are prepared well for their lives beyond the school.

Recommendations

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

- R1 Continue to disseminate the most effective practices across the school and beyond

What happens next

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

Main evaluation

Ysgol Hafod Lon is a lively, caring and welcoming community. Pupils respond very positively to the school's inclusive and supportive ethos. As a result, most pupils make strong progress in a wide range of key skills, which supports their personal development and prepares them very effectively for life in the future. They develop confidence, resilience and the ability to participate more independently in everyday activities. Pupils make sound progress at the school and benefit from the staff's careful support and guidance. Nearly all pupils receive accreditations at a suitable level and move on to specialist colleges, day centres or the world of work when they leave the school. This is a strong feature.

Staff nurture a proud sense of Welshness, ensuring that Welsh identity, language and culture are a priority in all aspects of pupils' lives.

Leaders promote a strong culture of safeguarding. The school's arrangements for safeguarding pupils are sound.

Supporting pupils' needs and supporting families

All pupils have additional learning needs (ALN) and have individual development plans (IDPs) that are maintained by the local authority. The needs of individuals have been identified clearly and staff provide support to meet these needs effectively. Appropriate outcomes are set for pupils and staff provide rich opportunities for pupils to work towards their personal targets.

Staff make extremely effective use of the school's range of stimulating resources. These are tailored successfully to meet pupils' individual needs successfully, including, for example, the hydrotherapy pool, the rebound therapy room and the rich outdoor areas. This sensory provision helps pupils to engage more effectively with their learning and contributes positively to their well-being and progress.

Spotlight: Partnership working

Leaders and staff develop and maintain strong strategic partnerships that contribute directly to pupils' well-being, progress and wider experiences. The school works extremely effectively with parents, health agencies, social services, other schools and community organisations to ensure a wholly inclusive approach that meets pupils' complex needs. As a result, the school responds to their needs sensitively and effectively.

Person-centred practice contributes purposefully to successful relationships between the school and parents. Parents are supported to use agreed strategies to support their children's needs. For example, leaders have established a group jointly with parents, which supports them to develop pupils' communication skills, play methods and emotional well-being. As a result, parents feel more confident in supporting their children's progress and well-being, and consistent strategies between the home and school support pupils effectively.

The school's behaviour staff support pupils effectively to self-regulate and communicate their feelings. They analyse patterns of behaviour skilfully and adapt provision to meet the needs of individuals. For example, staff have developed sensory rooms and a relaxation area to help pupils self-regulate.

Regular trips to local shops and cafes provide valuable opportunities for pupils to develop life skills in real-life situations. Staff share communication resources with local businesses to help them understand pupils' needs. As a result, pupils develop confidence and apply their social skills successfully in everyday contexts.

Leaders have established beneficial transition processes for pupils and families. Developing robust relationships happens at an early stage, before pupils start at Ysgol Hafod Lon. Staff meet with parents, visit schools, observe and forge valuable early relationships. As a result, families feel that they are supported and pupils get to know the new school's staff and environment. This leads to settling in successfully and beneficial early progress in pupils' skills.

Effective teaching

Teaching staff create welcoming and positive learning environments. They foster effective and supportive working relationships with pupils. Teaching staff know the pupils very well and have a sound understanding of their additional learning needs. Teaching staff use this knowledge very effectively and flexibly to plan practical, stimulating and cohesive learning activities. In the most effective lessons, teaching and learning are planned purposefully within the context of pupils' real lives. As a result, most pupils engage enthusiastically with their learning and develop a wide range of important skills.

Teaching builds effectively on pupils' previous learning and focuses on developing small steps of progress. Teachers plan interesting activities that develop a wide range of skills, including a clear focus on communication skills and independence. Many staff make effective use of pupils' preferred communication methods, including sign language and other communication devices. As a result, pupils' communication skills develop very effectively.

Teaching assistants provide extremely effective support. They encourage and motivate pupils purposefully. As a result, pupils engage enthusiastically and demonstrate positive attitudes to learning.

Teaching staff establish beneficial practices as pupils move from one activity to the next, by using timetables and visual clues. As a result, pupils are confident, settle well and are ready to engage with their learning. Staff also support pupils sensitively with sensory activities and breaks during lessons to promote engagement.

Assessment and feedback methods are used very effectively across the school to improve pupils' skills and behaviour. In most lessons, oral feedback is positive and moves learning forwards. This fosters an environment in which pupils have the confidence to learn from their mistakes and are proud of their achievements.

The school has very effective arrangements for assessing and reviewing pupils' progress. Staff collect and analyse information from a range of purposeful frameworks to track pupils' progress, including data on achieving the 'small learning steps' personal targets. These targets are used successfully to promote learning and progress in skills that are important to all pupils.

Developing skills

Leaders and teaching staff plan the development of pupils' skills very effectively. This leads to extensive opportunities for pupils to develop and apply their communication, social, creative, physical and independent skills across the curriculum. As a result, most pupils make strong progress from their starting points in a range of skills that are important to them.

Most pupils make very effective progress in their communication skills during their time at the school. They use a wide, varied and purposeful range of communication methods to answer questions, share information and express their opinions confidently. In lessons, most pupils listen attentively to their teachers and their assistants and respond appropriately by using their preferred communication method. A few pupils convey their choices by aiming their gaze at pictures, while many use signs and symbols confidently to support their communication. For example, they use signs and symbols when identifying spring items and when asking the teaching staff to throw the ball again. Pupils with

advanced oral communication skills use their skills successfully in a variety of contexts, including while working, playing and co-operating with adults. For example, they discuss the most suitable locations to place their bird boxes and express a logical opinion when discussing who would be the best next First Minister. Over time, all pupils make significant progress in their personal communication skills from their starting points. This contributes significantly to their contentment, confidence and overall success at the school.

Pupils develop valuable social skills by working together very successfully. They support each other to overcome difficulties and persevere extremely effectively. They treat each other with natural empathy within the school's inclusive provision.

Most pupils develop valuable independent learning skills during their time at the school. They follow the order and routine of their learning activities effectively. Where relevant, pupils develop their independent living skills very successfully by participating in beneficial activities, such as working in Caffi Paned Penrhyn and taking care of the gardens and plants in the allotments. They also take part in a commercial enterprise where they sell cards, plants, fruit and vegetables. Many post-16 pupils are also given valuable opportunities to attend work experiences sessions in the community, which prepares them effectively for life after school.

Many pupils benefit from opportunities to develop their physical skills very effectively. Where relevant, a few pupils relax their muscles and improve their posture during sessions on the trampoline or in the hydrotherapy pool. Many pupils develop their physical skills effectively, including throwing balls into Welsh hats, playing and climbing on the equipment in the school's attractive outdoor areas, in addition to enjoying activities such as the Welsh Special Games or skiing on school trips to Norway and Italy.

The development of pupils' creative skills is a strong feature. Most pupils are given rich opportunities to enjoy singing, play instruments and dance together in lessons, in Christmas shows and experience success in Eisteddfodau. Pupils create colourful pieces of artwork when emulating the work of Pablo Picasso.

The school has developed extremely effective provision for sensory learning, which is a prominent feature of the school's work. Staff have developed stimulating learning environments with a variety of attractive resources, which enable pupils to explore and learn safely. Pupils experience a variety of textures such as soil and water by using their sense of touch, smell daffodils and listen to the rhythms of percussion instruments. They follow objects that light-up and benefit from regular sessions in the hydrotherapy pool and the sensory and interactive rooms.

An exciting curriculum

The school provides a broad and balanced curriculum that offers rich and interesting experiences. The ambitious curriculum has been planned carefully to meet the needs and requirements of all pupils across the age range. Leaders have included valuable contribution from staff, pupils, parents and specialist agencies when planning its curriculum. Pupils follow one of six purposeful learning pathways within the school. This strategy ensures that pupils have access to beneficial activities that reflect their individual needs and identify the next steps in their development. As a result, most pupils engage very effectively with activities and make good progress.

Skilful teaching staff plan learning programmes intelligently to meet pupils' individual needs and adapt planning, as necessary. The strong focus on independence and communication and emotional skills when planning is a strength.

Leaders and staff work together to provide extremely rich opportunities for pupils to broaden their horizons and aspirations for the future. They provide opportunities for pupils to develop rewarding business enterprises, along with skills for the world of work. This leads directly to pupils being employed locally and starting apprenticeships. Through this, pupils develop a sense of belonging as full citizens of their area, their '*cynefin*' and the local economy.

A wide range of specialist partners make a valuable contribution towards creating a curriculum that meets the needs of pupils very well, including support for a comprehensive relationships and sexuality education programme. Leaders provide a wide range of exciting opportunities to enrich the curriculum purposefully, including the Duke of Edinburgh Gold Award and overseas skiing trips.

Listening to pupils

Through the work of the school council, staff provide opportunities for pupils to influence the work and strategic direction of the school effectively, in addition to developing pupils' leadership skills. They contribute successfully to the school's priorities, including planning provision and equipment in the outdoor area, for the use of their peers.

Robust leadership

The school's senior leaders are passionate and dedicated. They work in close partnership with the whole of the school family in forming and sharing a clear vision. They work together effectively to prepare all pupils to become independent, respectful communicators who are able to play an active part in their communities. The whole team of staff and governors follow the robust and energetic example of the leaders in providing

the best possible experiences for pupils. As a result, a strong culture of co-operation, well-being and professional learning is evident across the school.

Leaders ensure that all staff place pupils' well-being at the heart of everything that takes place at the school. Leaders also place a strong emphasis on staff's well-being. They consider the well-being of all members of staff, paying attention to their workload. Leaders ensure a helpful and supportive environment which enables staff to share any concerns through regular conversations and through a specific app. This leads to a dedicated and resilient team of staff who value the support, challenge and guidance.

The headteacher has high expectations of herself and all staff. She has distributed roles and responsibilities sensibly to meet pupils' needs and stimulate improvement. She ensures that the whole team has the skills and knowledge to undertake their duties effectively.

Leaders implement comprehensive and purposeful monitoring and evaluation processes which are planned strategically. Processes have been established firmly and all members of staff contribute to them purposefully. Leaders also ensure that the voice of pupils, parents, wider partners and governors are included in the process. Leaders use the evidence from these processes effectively to identify strengths and inform improvement planning, which leads to clear and relevant priorities. Over time, leaders ensure regular improvements for the benefit of pupils, for example ensuring consistency in provision to support pupils' communication, reading and writing skills throughout the school.

Spotlight: Promoting the professional development of teaching staff

Leaders promote a strong culture of professional learning and co-operation. Staff work together extremely effectively within the school in sharing good practice following professional research. They often cascade best practice in meetings and are willing to implement strategies and new ways of working.

Teachers train and support staff in other schools for the benefit of pupils. For example, they upskill staff in mainstream schools on the most effective methods of supporting pupils who divide their time between Ysgol Hafod Lon and a mainstream school. Staff also support the local authority often to conduct information-sharing sessions and best practice in education for pupils with additional learning needs for the county's schools.

Arrangements for reviewing professional development are robust and effective. Staff have clear and measurable objectives that align with the school's priorities and they have an influential voice when seeking personal professional development opportunities. As a result, managing staff's development makes a valuable contribution towards improving teaching, learning and developing pupils' skills.

Governance

Governors have comprehensive knowledge of the school's current situation. They visit regularly to better understand specific aspects of the school's work. This equips them to challenge and support leaders effectively. Governors have a comprehensive grasp of the school's finances, including the steps they take to reduce the impact of poverty on pupils.

Managing finances

The headteacher and the governing body have a sound grasp of the school's finances. They manage funding successfully, which allows them to invest in staffing levels that support high quality teaching and learning and support for the development of individuals. They provide resources of a high standard, which are used skilfully to meet the well-being needs and progress of all pupils.

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:

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