

A report on
Rhyl High School

**Grange Road
Rhyl
Denbighshire
LL18 4BY**

Date of inspection: May 2026

by

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

This report is also available in Welsh

About Rhyl High School

Name of provider	Rhyl High School
Local authority	Denbighshire County Council
Language of the provider	English
School category according to Welsh-medium provision	
Type of school	Secondary
Religious character	
Number of pupils on roll	1167
Pupils of statutory school age	1167
Number in sixth form	
Percentage of pupils eligible for free school meals over a three-year average (The national percentage of pupils eligible for free school meals over a three-year average in Secondary is 20.3%)	30.7%
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 9.0%)	8.0%
Percentage of pupils who speak Welsh at home	1.0%
Percentage of pupils with English as an additional language	1.6%
Lead partner for Initial teacher education	No
Date of headteacher appointment	02/06/2025

A report on Rhyl High School
May 2026

Date of previous Estyn inspection (if applicable)	03/10/2022
Start date of inspection	05/05/2026

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

Rhyl High School is a caring and inclusive community where staff place a strong emphasis on supporting pupils' well-being. Many pupils feel safe in school and value the support they receive from staff. The school provides extensive pastoral and well-being support, including beneficial specialist provision for vulnerable pupils and pupils with additional learning needs (ALN). Pupils benefit from comprehensive transition arrangements, helpful careers guidance and a worthwhile range of extra-curricular activities and educational visits. Leaders have strong links with the wider community and promote the Welsh language and culture appropriately.

The majority of pupils make at least appropriate progress in their learning. Many pupils behave well and engage respectfully in lessons. In many cases, teachers establish purposeful working relationships with pupils and use suitable routines, explanations and questioning to support learning. Where teaching is strongest, teachers plan activities carefully, use modelling skilfully and ask questions that encourage pupils to think more deeply. However, in a minority of lessons, teachers do not provide sufficient challenge or adapt learning well enough to meet the needs of all pupils. In these lessons, pupils become too passive and make more limited progress. In addition, the quality of feedback is inconsistent and does not always support pupils well enough to improve their work.

The school provides a broad curriculum, including beneficial opportunities for pupils to follow a range of vocational pathways through its work with external partners. However, leaders do not plan strategically enough for the progressive development of pupils' literacy and numeracy skills across the curriculum. As a result, too many pupils do not develop their reading, writing, speaking and numeracy skills well enough. Attendance is improving gradually and staff work purposefully with pupils and families, although overall attendance and rates of persistent absenteeism remain a concern.

The headteacher has a clear vision based on a strong moral purpose. Leaders work particularly effectively to support pupils' well-being. Senior leaders have begun to prioritise improvements in teaching and pupil outcomes more urgently and are strengthening professional learning and self-evaluation processes. However, leaders do not always focus sharply enough on the impact of teaching on pupils' progress and skills, and improvement planning in this area lacks precision. In addition, senior leaders do not hold middle leaders to account consistently enough for the quality and impact of their work.

Recommendations

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

- R1 Improve the quality of teaching so that pupils of all abilities make good progress
- R2 Strengthen the leadership of, and provision for, the progressive development of pupils' literacy and numeracy skills
- R3 Improve attendance
- R4 Strengthen strategic leadership and accountability at all levels, particularly in relation to teaching and learning
- R5 Refine self-evaluation and improvement planning so that leaders at all levels focus precisely on the impact of teaching on pupils' progress and skills

What happens next

In accordance with the Education Act 2005, HMCI is of the opinion that this school is in need of significant improvement. The school will draw up an action plan which shows how it is going to address the recommendations. Estyn will monitor the school's progress about 12 months after the publication of this report.

Main findings

Teaching and learning

Many pupils demonstrate positive attitudes to learning at Rhyl High School. They are welcoming and courteous to visitors and interact respectfully with their peers and teachers. They engage positively in paired and whole-class discussions, settle quickly to work and generally sustain concentration appropriately throughout lessons. In a few cases, pupils also support and encourage their peers particularly effectively when working in pairs and small groups, reflecting the school's strong sense of community.

Overall, a majority of pupils, including pupils with ALN, make at least appropriate progress in lessons. They recall prior learning suitably and apply this knowledge to new tasks and concepts. In many lessons, teachers establish positive working relationships with pupils and use effective classroom routines to support learning. They demonstrate secure subject knowledge and use subject-specific terminology appropriately. These teachers plan activities that build sensibly on pupils' prior learning and provide clear explanations and instructions. They ask suitable questions to check pupils' understanding, model successful learning and use resources appropriately to support engagement and progress.

A few teachers demonstrate enthusiasm and passion for their subjects. In these lessons, teachers use modelling skilfully to deepen pupils' understanding, plan activities that support independent learning and use questioning purposefully to stimulate deeper thinking. In these lessons, pupils show high levels of enthusiasm and engagement in their learning and reflect thoughtfully on the quality of their work. As a result, a few pupils make strong progress.

In a minority of lessons, shortcomings in teaching limit the progress that pupils make. In these lessons, teachers do not provide sufficient challenge and learning activities are not adapted well enough to meet the needs of all pupils, particularly for the more able. In these lessons, teachers often over-direct the learning and do not question pupils well enough to check their understanding. In a few lessons, teachers do not address pupils' passivity well enough and fail to secure their attention before giving explanations and instructions.

Many teachers provide suitable verbal feedback that helps pupils improve their work. In a few cases, teachers provide precise verbal and written feedback linked to success criteria which helps pupils respond meaningfully and improve the quality of their work. However, the quality of written feedback is too variable across and within subjects. Too often, feedback lacks precision and does not identify clearly enough what pupils need to do to improve. Teachers do not address misconceptions and literacy errors consistently enough.

Skills

The provision for the progressive development of pupils' literacy, numeracy and digital skills is not strategically planned or coordinated well enough. As a result, pupils do not have sufficient opportunities to apply and develop these skills in a range of relevant and challenging contexts.

Literacy

When reading across the curriculum, many pupils locate and retrieve information from a range of texts appropriately. Around half of pupils make appropriate annotations on the texts they read and can identify similarities and differences between two texts suitably. For example, in English when they compare the nutritional benefits of eating different insects. When given the opportunity, these pupils can summarise texts appropriately and make suitable inferences to analyse and interpret meaning in different reading materials. However, around half struggle to apply their inference skills successfully and as a result, make superficial comments about what they have read. A few pupils have particularly weak reading skills and are unable to access different texts across the curriculum.

A majority of pupils listen and respond to questions appropriately and around half use a range of subject-specific vocabulary suitably. A few pupils are particularly articulate and discuss their learning with clarity and confidence. These pupils use more sophisticated vocabulary well and provide extended responses to teachers' questions. However, around half of pupils offer only brief and underdeveloped responses and use a limited range of vocabulary. These pupils are not challenged or supported well enough by their teachers to improve the quality of their spoken responses.

Pupils do not have sufficient opportunities to develop or improve their writing skills. As a result, they do not develop their ability to write extended pieces well enough. A majority of pupils are able to organise their writing into paragraphs accurately. A minority adapt the tone and style of their writing for different purposes and use a suitable range of subject-specific vocabulary to express their ideas. When given the opportunity, a few pupils plan their writing purposefully to organise their ideas effectively. These pupils consider the content and vocabulary of their writing carefully and make more sophisticated choices in how to engage their reader. Around a half of pupils produce writing which is too brief and lacks technical accuracy.

Numeracy

Around a half of pupils have secure number skills and can use the four rules of number appropriately, for example when working with ratio. A majority of pupils develop a suitable understanding of geometry and measure. Around a half of pupils construct and interpret a range of graphs accurately. A few, more able pupils, demonstrate a breadth of

understanding across a range of topics, for example, they can solve compound angle problems involving polygons and parallel lines. Generally, pupils do not develop their understanding of mathematics and numeracy concepts well enough. As a result, around a half of pupils have weak number skills. They do not show their workings out clearly enough or construct graphs and diagrams with sufficient precision. This hinders their ability to recall prior learning and to apply their numeracy skills successfully in relevant contexts.

Digital skills

Pupils develop their digital skills suitably in a few subjects across the curriculum. For example, in music lessons they use software to create their own music re-mixes and in performing arts they use digital tools to review and evaluate their performances. In digital competence lessons, pupils use coding software to create their own web pages.

Cymraeg

The school provides many engaging opportunities for pupils to learn and appreciate the Welsh language and culture. For example, pupils perform in Welsh to residents in a home for the elderly, compete in Urdd competitions and visit residential camps in Glan Llyn and Cardiff. The school promotes the Welsh language well through, for example, wall displays, a weekly focus on Welsh phrases and an offer of Welsh lessons for staff. Most pupils are entered for a GCSE qualification in Welsh at the end of Year 11.

Many pupils respond appropriately to simple commands and greetings in Welsh. They pronounce Welsh words clearly when asked but lack confidence to engage in Welsh conversation. Many pupils use appropriate retrieval strategies to locate facts in simple texts to answer straightforward questions. They write basic sentences following a structure and pattern and a few write more developed extended pieces of text. However, the majority of pupils rely too heavily on vocabulary lists and structured sentence patterns rather than developing their speaking and writing skills independently. A very few pupils use the Welsh language outside their Welsh lessons.

The curriculum

Leaders plan the curriculum appropriately in line with the school's values of 'Good, Brave, Happy and Healthy'. In Years 7 to 9, the curriculum allows pupils to access a broad range of experiences and reflects the school's local context. However, the way curriculum time is allocated and planned means that the depth and pace of progress is inconsistent across subjects.

The school offers a broad range of subject choices in Years 10 and 11 that supports pupils' needs and interests suitably. In a few cases, pupils follow qualifications that do not

provide a suitable level of challenge for all pupils, particularly the more able. The school engages purposefully with external partners to provide a range of vocational choices in Years 10 and 11, such as construction, hair and beauty and small animal care. This is further supplemented by beneficial alternative curriculum arrangements in the 'Hafan' provision. Leaders ensure that nearly all pupils are able to study their chosen courses in Years 10 and 11. Parents and pupils value the support they receive when pupils are making their option choices.

The school's provision for personal and social education (PSE) supports pupils' personal development effectively and helps them to develop suitably their spiritual, moral, social and cultural understanding. The programme addresses a range of relevant themes, including respectful relationships, online safety and equality and diversity. This work is strengthened by contributions from a wide variety of external partners, such as North Wales Police and a charity that supports young carers.

The school offers a worthwhile programme of extra-curricular activities and experiences to enrich pupils' learning and support their personal and social development. These include a range of sports and creative clubs such as basketball and a performing arts club. In addition, pupils benefit from an extensive programme of trips and visits, including visits to local attractions such as Rhuddlan castle and international experiences to Madrid and Morocco.

The school has strengthened its provision for careers and work-related education, providing dedicated lessons from Year 9 onwards. Pupils in Year 10 have beneficial opportunities to undertake work experience placements, supported by Careers Wales, in a range of sectors.

Well-being, care, support and guidance

Rhyl High School has a strong culture of care and inclusion that supports pupils' well-being effectively. Staff place pupils' emotional and personal well-being at the centre of the school's work through beneficial form time activities, assemblies and mentoring support. The school provides extensive and responsive well-being interventions, including counselling, nurture groups and mental health support. The 'Well-being Hub' provides a calm and supportive environment where skilled staff respond effectively to pupils' emotional and health needs. Well-established partnerships with organisations such as Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services, youth services and Young Minds enhance the support for vulnerable pupils.

The school's transition arrangements for pupils moving from partner primary schools to Year 7 are comprehensive and well planned. These include regular visits, information evenings, 'Transition Week' and the 'Food and Fun' summer holiday programme. Pupils

receive helpful advice and guidance for their next steps after Year 11. The school provides beneficial careers guidance through dedicated careers lessons, strong external partnerships and support from a specialist adviser. As a result of targeted support, very few school leavers have not entered education, employment or training over the last three years.

The school has well-established systems to promote attendance such as rewards, league tables and attendance awareness assemblies. As a result, pupils understand the school's expectations and know their individual rates of attendance. The school monitors attendance closely and provides beneficial support to help pupils improve their attendance. For example, they focus strongly on building relationships with pupils and their families to support re-engagement with school. Overall, rates of attendance, including for those pupils eligible for free school meals, improved in the academic year 2024–2025. In addition, unverified data shows continuing improvements during this academic year compared to the same period in 2024–2025. However, attendance remains below pre-pandemic levels and that of similar schools, while persistent absenteeism is higher than in similar schools.

The school has robust systems to deal with any incidents of challenging behaviour. These procedures are clear and well-understood by both staff and pupils. 'Hafan', the school's alternative provision, helps pupils who access it to improve their behaviour and regulate their emotions effectively. Overall, pupils value the school's rewards systems and the emphasis the school places on celebrating success.

The school has a well-developed range of pupil leadership opportunities, including the school council, the pupil senior leadership team, the Criw Cymraeg, anti-bullying champions and anti-racism ambassadors. These leadership opportunities are inclusive, with representation from vulnerable groups such as young carers and pupils with ALN. In addition, pupils contribute positively to well-being and anti-poverty initiatives, including food banks and the uniform exchange.

The school maintains a secure culture of safeguarding, in which staff place pupils' safety and well-being at the centre of their work. As a result, many pupils say that they feel safe at school and report that bullying is not a concern for them. There are effective systems and processes to record and respond to any safeguarding concerns, and all staff receive appropriate safeguarding training. Leaders work productively with external agencies to support particularly vulnerable pupils and follow local authority procedures where appropriate.

Staff demonstrate a strong commitment to supporting pupils with ALN. They build positive relationships with pupils and their families. The school has appropriate arrangements to identify and support pupils with ALN and offers a worthwhile range of provisions to meet

their needs. The 'Achieve' centre provides a welcoming environment where pupils with ALN benefit from beneficial tailored interventions. The school's enhanced transition arrangements support pupils with ALN well. Leaders work effectively with a range of external agencies to support pupils with ALN. In addition, they engage well with the local authority to provide helpful and coordinated support for pupils with English as an additional language.

The ALN team provides helpful one-page profiles to help teachers plan their lessons. However, in a minority of cases, teachers do not always use this information effectively enough to adapt learning to meet pupils' needs. Leaders monitor the progress of individual pupils with ALN closely. However, they do not evaluate the impact of ALN provision sufficiently or plan sharply enough for improvement.

Leading and improving

The headteacher has a clear vision, underpinned by a strong moral purpose, to support all members of the school community 'to be the best they can be'. He has secured a commitment to this vision, with leaders and staff supporting its delivery throughout the school. The school has strengthened its communication with families, in order to place the school at the heart of its community. For example, the weekly newsletter gives a helpful overview of the work of the school and celebrates pupils' achievements.

Leadership roles and responsibilities are generally clear and well understood. The leadership to support pupils' well-being is a notable strength of the school. Leaders have maintained a strong culture of safeguarding at the school and promote Welsh language and culture appropriately. However, leaders have not addressed other national priorities, such as improving teaching and learning, developing pupils' literacy and numeracy skills and raising attendance well enough.

There are appropriate line management arrangements and regular meetings between senior and middle leaders. While middle leaders value the support they receive, there is too much variation in how well senior leaders hold them to account. Middle leaders meet regularly with their teams, however these meetings do not always focus well enough on the quality of teaching or the progress that pupils make over time.

The school's professional development review processes are clear and generally align suitably with roles and whole school priorities. However, the objectives are often broad, which makes it difficult for staff to measure the progress that has been made. The school is establishing a culture of professional learning with a sharper focus on teaching. In addition, staff are provided with appropriate opportunities to develop as leaders through internal support and external courses.

Since his appointment, the headteacher has engaged with pupils, parents, staff and the wider community to establish a clear and accurate understanding of the school's strengths and areas for improvement. As a result, he has identified an urgent need to secure improvements in the quality of teaching and pupil outcomes. Termly 'Teaching and Learning reviews' draw on learning walks, lesson observations, book scrutiny and canvassing pupils' opinions. Leaders analyse data suitably to gather a broad overview of performance in their areas. Within the teaching and learning reviews, curriculum middle leaders benefit from joint observations with senior leaders. However, leaders do not always evaluate the quality of provision by its impact on pupil progress well enough. Overall, leaders identify sensible improvement priorities including strengthening leadership, improving teaching and raising pupil outcomes. At times, leaders do not plan improvements precisely enough to ensure that they are timely.

Leaders have a suitable understanding of the school's financial position. The school has a deficit budget which has been agreed by the local authority. There are appropriate systems for monitoring the budget and leaders consider staffing and resource implications appropriately to ensure that they align closely to pupils' needs.

Governors are passionate and committed. They are developing their role as critical friends and are beginning to strengthen capacity, visibility and support for leaders. They have developed a clear understanding of the school's strengths and areas for improvement. For example, they have a detailed overview of how the school supports the well-being of all pupils. The school has recently strengthened its governance structures through the introduction of dedicated sub-committees. However, it is too early to evaluate the impact of this work.

Leaders have a strong understanding of the local context and work deliberately to mitigate the impact of poverty on pupils' well-being and aspirations. They use a range of information appropriately to identify the needs of pupils from low-income households and provide suitable support for pupils and their families. Leaders have a broad overview of how grant funding, including the pupil development grant, is used. However, they do not plan or evaluate well enough whether spending improves teaching or impacts positively on pupil standards. Rates of attendance for those pupils eligible for free school meals are improving. However, over the last three years the performance of these pupils has remained below that of their peers in similar schools, particularly in numeracy and science.

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.

Although leaders and governors manage the school's finances appropriately, including the use of the pupil development grant, the school has an agreed deficit budget.

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:

Publications Section

Estyn

Anchor Court, Keen Road

Cardiff

CF24 5JW or by email to publications@estyn.gov.wales

This and other Estyn publications are available on our website:

<http://www.estyn.gov.wales/>

This document has been translated by Trosol (English to Welsh).

© Crown Copyright 2026: This report may be re used free of charge: (a) in any format or medium; and (b) may be translated by or on behalf of an education and/or training provider in respect of which this report relates into any language, in each case provided that it is re used and/or translated accurately and not used in a misleading context. The material must, in each case (including in the case of a translation) be acknowledged as Crown copyright and the title of the report specified.

Publication date: 08/07/2026