



Rhagoriaeth i bawb – Excellence for all

Arolygiaeth Ei Mawrhydi dros Addysg
a Hyfforddiant yng Nghymru

Her Majesty's Inspectorate
for Education and Training in Wales

A report on

**Ysgol Pen Coch Special School
Prince of Wales Avenue
Flint
Flintshire
CH6 5NF**

Date of inspection: April 2011

by

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



During each inspection, inspectors aim to answer three key questions:

Key Question 1: How good are the outcomes?

Key Question 2: How good is provision?

Key Question 3: How good are leadership and management?

Inspectors also provide an overall judgement on the school's current performance and on its prospects for improvement.

In these evaluations, inspectors use a four-point scale:

Judgement	What the judgement means
Excellent	Many strengths, including significant examples of sector-leading practice
Good	Many strengths and no important areas requiring significant improvement
Adequate	Strengths outweigh areas for improvement
Unsatisfactory	Important areas for improvement outweigh strengths

The report was produced in accordance with Section 28 of the Education Act 2005.

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Context

Ysgol Pen Coch is a co-educational special school for up to 104 pupils aged from 2 to 11 years. The school opened in September 2009 following the re-organisation of special educational provision in Flintshire. The school operates on two sites. The main, purpose-built school is in Flint and there is an assessment centre in Mold. Both departments share sites with mainstream primary schools.

Pupils at Ysgol Pen Coch have a wide range of special educational needs. These include moderate, severe, and profound and multiple learning difficulties, specific learning difficulties and autistic spectrum disorders. A few pupils have additional sensory impairments and communication difficulties. A minority of pupils in the assessment centre also have challenging behaviour.

In the main school, classes are small with six to ten pupils working with a teacher and at least two teaching assistants. Pupils who have a more complex range of learning needs may receive additional support. The school is divided into Foundation and Primary departments.

Ysgol Pen Coch Assessment Centre is for pupils aged from two to seven years who require assessment prior to placement. Provision for these pupils may be part-time where appropriate.

English is the predominant language of almost all pupils. No pupils speak Welsh as their first language at home. Six pupils are from minority ethnic groups. Two pupils receive support for English as an additional language. Approximately 25% of pupils are entitled to free school meals, which is higher than the all-Wales average of just under 20%.

Almost all pupils live within the county of Flintshire. Five pupils are looked after by the local authority.

This is the school's first inspection.

Summary

The school's current performance	Good
The school's prospects for improvement	Excellent

Current performance

Ysgol Pen Coch is a good school because:

- leaders and managers have high expectations and ensure that the school functions effectively;
- pupils achieve good standards in their learning and in key learning skills;
- teaching is very good across the school, staff work well as a team and there is a positive environment for learning;
- work is planned very carefully to meet the needs of all pupils to ensure that they develop key skills; and
- there is a very strong commitment to continuous school improvement.

Prospects for improvement

The prospects for improvement in Ysgol Pen Coch are excellent because:

- the headteacher provides clear leadership and has created a culture of effective shared responsibility;
- the high quality assessment and recording procedures are at the forefront of practice in the sector;
- there are highly effective procedures to identify and address priorities for staff development;
- staff work very effectively as a team and have high expectations of the pupils; and
- self-evaluation is well embedded and enables the school to identify clear and appropriate areas for improvement.

Recommendations

In order to improve further, the school needs to:

- R1 continue to build on the good progress made by the school since opening;
- R2 further develop the role of the governing body to ensure that it provides appropriate levels of challenge to the school; and
- R3 further strengthen the links with the local community in order to increase the range of learning opportunities for the pupils.

What happens next?

Ysgol Pen Coch will produce an action plan that shows how it will address the recommendations.

The school will also be invited to prepare written case studies describing the excellent practice identified during the inspection.

Main findings

Key Question 1: How good are outcomes?

Good

Standards: Good

Across the school, pupils achieve good standards in relation to their learning needs and abilities. Programmes are individually tailored and it is not appropriate to compare the standards that pupils achieve with national averages or to analyse trends in overall performance over time.

All pupils achieve the agreed learning targets identified in their individual education plans. Due to their complex needs, pupils make very small steps of progress. These steps are very carefully recorded and analysed so that staff can give groups and individuals extra help where necessary. This has a positive impact on individual and groups of pupils' progress. There is no significant pattern to the performance of boys and girls. Pupils who are looked after by the local authority and those from minority ethnic groups make good progress.

Nearly all pupils behave well, listen carefully and follow instructions. They respond well to questioning and reflect on how well they have worked during their lessons. They take pride in their work and recall their previous lessons well.

Less able pupils develop the communication skills that they need to make choices and express their likes and dislikes. They learn to make eye contact, to wait their turn, share and work alongside others. A few pupils use signing confidently and extend their responses without being prompted. Pupils use information and communication technology well to take part in their lessons, including switches and interactive white boards. Pupils with autistic spectrum disorders make good progress through the phases of the Picture Exchange Communication System. They use pictures well to help them understand what will happen next and to choose where they will play and work.

More able pupils develop appropriate working routines and become more independent. They read aloud with confidence and use words and short sentences well to describe the activities that they are working on. A few pupils write independently. They practise their developing numeracy skills by placing numbers in order, recording data, using graphs and counting in a range of situations. They make good use of information and communication technology to draft and present their work. Where appropriate, these pupils join a range of mainstream lessons in other primary schools. As a result of these valuable integration opportunities, pupils widen their horizons, increase their confidence and extend their knowledge.

All pupils make good progress in Welsh in relation to their needs and linguistic backgrounds. They understand Welsh adjectives that describe their progress and use them appropriately.

Wellbeing: Excellent

Almost all pupils report that they enjoy coming to school and they attend regularly unless they have periods of illness due to their medical conditions. Almost all pupils feel that they are safe in school and have the support they need from staff. Pupils are fully consulted about their targets for learning and are encouraged to work independently wherever possible. They regularly reflect on how well they have worked and what they can do to improve.

Pupils develop the skills that they need to get on well with others. They are polite, considerate and take care of each other. They take care of equipment and help keep their classrooms tidy. In circle time, pupils reflect on and discuss how well they have worked and played together and where they can make improvements.

Pupils have a clear understanding of how to keep themselves healthy and of the importance of exercise where possible.

Pupils know what to do if they are bullied. They have received valuable training in how to use the internet safely.

Nearly all pupils behave very well. They understand what is expected of them and how to relate to others. Where pupils have particularly challenging behaviour, staff help them to understand and manage their feelings and remain calm. Pupils enjoy sessions with puppets and gain useful insights into their feelings and how to manage them. From this work, they learn how to relax when feeling angry or frustrated. Pupils on the school council play a full role in the work of the school. They meet regularly and discuss pupils' ideas for improving the school's work and its facilities. They gain a good understanding of how to write agendas and run meetings.

Key Question 2: How good is provision?

Excellent

Learning experiences: Good

The school provides a wide and stimulating range of learning experiences. Teachers plan their lessons very carefully to meet all pupils' learning needs. The school ensures that pupils develop key learning skills very well. A range of communication techniques, such as signing and picture exchange, allow all pupils to develop their communication skills in line with their needs and ability. There is well-planned provision for pupils to develop skills in information and communication technology across the curriculum.

Pupils take part in a wide range of activities planned to improve their self-esteem, widen their experience and develop their skills. These activities include working in a forest, cycling, horse riding and dance sessions.

The school also provides a range of therapies such as hydrotherapy, massage and dance. These therapies are designed to promote pupils' emotional wellbeing and relaxation so that they are ready for learning.

Easter and summer holiday clubs and the well-attended breakfast club extend and enrich pupils' learning opportunities.

Staff provide very good opportunities for pupils to develop and use their Welsh language skills and learn about the culture of Wales. Pupils develop a good understanding of other cultures through well-planned topic work. For example, pupils in key stage 2 enjoy learning about African culture through music and art.

The school council promotes sustainable development by organising recycling around the school and encouraging energy conservation.

Teaching: Excellent

Teachers' planning is based on careful and accurate assessment of individual pupils' needs and abilities. They use this assessment to inform comprehensive and well-focused individual education plans. All staff have good up-to-date knowledge of effective teaching approaches and use these consistently throughout the school.

Teachers and support staff work very well as a team. All staff have high expectations for pupils' learning and behaviour in class and around the school. The management of the pupils' behaviour by all staff is sensitive and effective.

All staff work very well together to plan and deliver lessons in a very supportive but purposeful environment. They use an extensive range of appropriate resources very well. All staff use a wide range of communication techniques, including information and communication technology, signs and symbols, to develop pupils' communication skills.

Systems for tracking, analysing and recording information about pupils' progress are very good. The school uses a wide range of assessment tools appropriate to the needs and abilities of the pupils. Teachers use a wide range of strategies to record pupils' progress, such as photographs of their achievements. As a result, records of the pupils' achievements are clear and informative. This enables the school to provide well-targeted support for all pupils.

These high-quality assessment and recording procedures are at the forefront of practice in the sector and make sure that teachers and support staff capture pupils' progress accurately and plan effectively for pupils' future learning. These processes are, increasingly, having a positive impact on the standards achieved by all pupils and are leading to higher levels of achievement.

Parents and carers are well informed of the progress their children are making. All pupils take progress records home regularly so that parents and carers are kept up-to-date with their child's progress.

Care, support and guidance: Excellent

There are very effective arrangements to support pupils' health and wellbeing. The school works with a wide range of specialist services which provide good quality care guidance and support for pupils. The school also makes very good use of in-house

expertise to help teachers engage their pupils. This includes support from the communication co-ordinator and information and communication technology technician.

Processes for identifying, supporting and monitoring pupils' additional learning needs are exemplary. Individual education plans identify appropriate learning targets which are known and used very effectively by all staff. Targets are reviewed on a regular basis.

There are carefully constructed and valuable individual behaviour plans for pupils who do not behave well. These plans provide staff with effective strategies to manage behaviour, keep the pupils on task and link very well to the development of pupils' personal skills.

Pupils with complex needs benefit from comprehensive care plans and support with their mobility and sensory needs.

In personal and social education, pupils have a range of opportunities to help them to understand how they are feeling. Staff plan well to promote pupils' spiritual, moral social and cultural development. They make sure that pupils have time for reflection and that their views are heard and valued. All pupils are encouraged to know the difference between right and wrong. They are encouraged to discuss and agree school and community rules.

All pupils participate in a range of appropriate physical activities. They are encouraged to eat healthy food and receive very good medical help when this is required.

The school has an appropriate policy and procedures for safeguarding.

Learning environment: Excellent

The school has developed a positive ethos which actively welcomes and accommodates pupils and visitors from all backgrounds and abilities. It is an inclusive community which values diversity and ensures that all pupils have equal access to the curriculum and wider learning activities.

There are effective policies and procedures in place to deal with any form of discrimination. All staff work hard to ensure that the school is a welcoming and safe environment.

The accommodation is of a very high standard and is well maintained. Resources are of good quality, are well matched to the needs of the pupils and are used effectively to enhance the standards achieved by all pupils. Displays throughout the school are attractive and reflect the achievements of pupils of all abilities.

The outdoor environment provides stimulating and challenging areas for learning and recreation.

Key Question 3: How good are leadership and management?
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Good

Leadership: Good

The headteacher and senior staff have established a very clear vision for the school which is shared by all. They have implemented comprehensive policies and plans, in a relatively short period of time, which focus well on meeting the wide range of pupils' needs.

The school meets both local and national priorities effectively. This includes the local authority's priorities for special schools, the School Effectiveness Framework agenda and the Unlocking Potential of Special Schools initiative.

Senior leaders and middle managers work consistently across the school to support and challenge colleagues and communicate very high expectations to those they manage. They have created a school ethos where staff, pupils and others who work in the school on a regular basis, feel valued.

The well-considered distributed leadership approach is moving the school forward effectively. Staff meetings focus directly on school improvement targets and result in action points to improve practice.

The governing body shares the school's vision and is very supportive of the school. It meets regularly and has appropriate sub-committees in place. It monitors the school's performance but does not yet fully challenge and hold the school to account for the standards and quality it achieves.

Staff performance is monitored regularly, and evaluated through an inclusive and secure performance management and appraisal system. All staff contribute well to school planning and improvement.

Leaders use the performance management and appraisal procedures well to identify whole school training and development needs. As a result, the school is able to meet the diverse and changing individual needs of the pupils. Several staff train colleagues in-house and also provide valuable outreach training and support for mainstream schools.

Improving quality: Excellent

The process of self-evaluation is very firmly embedded in the school. All staff contribute fully and effectively to the process. The school has sound systems for seeking the views of parents and carers and a wide range of stakeholders. These views are highly valued and incorporated very well into a comprehensive self-evaluation report. As a result, leaders have an honest and very accurate view of the school. They set appropriately challenging targets for improvement which lead to measurable improvements in standards.

There are very well-established procedures in place for regular classroom observation by senior managers. These observations provide teachers with valuable written feedback and clear actions for improvement. Highly effective systems for

managing performance are used creatively to identify further areas for development and training for teachers and other school staff.

The school has made major strides in a short time, since opening, in developing as a very strong learning community. Staff are continuously encouraged to develop and share their professional knowledge. The school has established effective networks of professional practice within the school and with other schools and partners. Staff take every opportunity to develop their expertise and are very keen to take part in a range of activities to improve their effectiveness.

The school is developing and using a good range of data to monitor the progress of individual pupils and groups of pupils over time.

Partnership working: Good

The school works closely with an extensive range of partners. These include parents, mainstream primary schools, the secondary special school and police liaison officer. There is a high level of trust and clear communication between the school and its partners. However, good links with the local community are still in the early stages of development.

Staff from the local authority work closely with the school to support teachers to develop the curriculum in areas such as information and communication technology and the Welsh language. They also provide valuable support for pupils with the most complex needs with accessible technology so that these pupils can take part fully in school life.

More able pupils from Ysgol Pen Coch access lessons, when appropriate, in a primary school near their home or in the primary school on the same site. A few pupils have the opportunity to meet and mix socially with children from the mainstream primary school. This impacts very positively on their wellbeing and on the progress they make in their learning.

The partnership working and sharing of resources between the staff and the pupils in the foundation phase works well.

Unlocking the Potential of Special Schools funding has been used very effectively to increase the outreach training to improve the capacity of mainstream schools to meet a wider range of pupils' special educational needs.

Parents and carers are fully involved in decisions about their children's education and are well informed about their progress. They feel supported by the school staff and value the successful parent partnership initiative. There are very good transition arrangements in place when pupils move on the next stage in their education.

Resource management: Good

The school has a very good range of experienced, specialist teachers and other staff who are deployed appropriately to meet the needs of individual pupils.

Staff have appropriate planning, preparation and assessment time. This enables staff to be fully effective in ensuring that the pupils are provided with a wide variety of personal and learning experiences. High quality resources are used very effectively to match the interests and abilities of all pupils.

The school's financial management is efficient and effective. In view of the good standards achieved by the pupils, the effective teaching and careful management of resources, the school provides good value for money.

Appendix 1

Stakeholder satisfaction report

Responses to parent questionnaires

Twenty-one parents completed questionnaires and, overall, most are satisfied or very satisfied with the school and feel that it is well run. All of them agree that their child likes school, feels safe there and was helped to settle in at the start. All parents feel that their children make good progress, that teaching is good and that staff expect the children to work hard. All parents agree that the school encourages children to take on responsibility, be healthy and take regular exercise. All parents agree that pupils behave well in school although only one third strongly agree. A few parents do not feel that the school keeps them well enough informed about their child's progress.

Most parents who responded do not know if the school prepares their children well for the next stage of education.

Responses to learner questionnaires

Twenty-one pupils, thirteen boys and eight girls, responded to the questionnaire and, overall, are very positive about their school. Almost all pupils agree that they feel safe, know what to do and whom to ask if their work is hard, and have enough resources to support their learning. All pupils agree that they are doing well, know whom to talk to if they are worried or upset, and agree that the school teaches them to be healthy and that homework helps them understand their work.

Almost all pupils who responded agree that children behave well so that they can get their work done.

Appendix 2

The inspection team

Michael Munting	Reporting Inspector
Claire Yardley	Team Inspector
Meinir Rees	Team Inspector
Carol Edwards	Lay Inspector
Justine Barlow	Peer Inspector
Angelique Anderson	School Nominee

Copies of the report

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Year groups and key stages

Schools use a common system of numbering year groups from the start of compulsory schooling to 18 years of age. This system emphasises the importance of continuity and eases communication among schools, governing bodies, parents and LEAs.

The term 'Reception' (R) refers to the year group of pupils in a primary school who reach the age of five during the academic year. Year 1 refers to the year group of pupils who reach the age of six during the academic year and so on. Year 13 is the year group of students who reach the age of 18 during the academic year.

Primary phase:

Year	R	Y1	Y2	Y3	Y4	Y5	Y6
Ages	4-5	5-6	6-7	7-8	8-9	9-10	10-11

Secondary phase:

Year	Y7	Y8	Y9	Y10	Y11	Y12	Y13
Ages	11-12	12-13	13-14	14-15	15-16	16-17	17-18

The four key stages cover the following year groups:

Key stage 1	Year 1 and Year 2
Key stage 2	Year 3 to Year 6
Key stage 3	Year 7 to Year 9
Key stage 4	Year 10 and Year 11