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Arolygiaeth Ei Mawrhydi dros Addysg
a Hyfforddiant yng Nghymru

Her Majesty's Inspectorate
for Education and Training in Wales

A report on

**Ysgol Santes Helen
Twtl
Caernarfon
Gwynedd
LL55 1PF**

Date of inspection: September 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 Santes Helen Catholic voluntary primary school is unique as it is the only Catholic school in Wales which teaches through the medium of Welsh. It is situated in the Twil area of the town of Caernarfon in the Gwynedd local authority.

Currently, there are 77 pupils of compulsory school age at the school, along with 12 three and four-year-old pupils. These numbers are slightly higher than during the school's last inspection in 2005 and there are a higher number of pupils in the lower part of the school than in the upper part of the school. Most of the pupils transfer to Ysgol Syr Hugh Owen at the end of their time at the school as there is no Catholic secondary school nearby.

Nine per cent of the pupils are eligible for free school meals. Although this is lower than the county and national averages, a little less than half (42%) of the pupils live in the 20% most disadvantaged areas in Wales. While the majority of pupils speak Welsh at home, the proportion of pupils from ethnic backgrounds (20%) is close to five times higher than the percentage in the local authority.

Thirty-four per cent of pupils receive support for additional learning needs. This percentage is considerably higher than the national figure. Four pupils have a statement of special educational needs. No exclusions were recorded, either temporary or permanent, during the year prior to the inspection.

The headteacher and chair of governors have been in post since before the previous inspection.

The individual school budget per pupil in 2010-2011 for Ysgol Santes Helen is £3,116, compared to a maximum of £8,442 and a minimum of £2,717 for primary schools in Gwynedd. The school has the 78th highest budget per pupil of the 103 schools in Gwynedd.

Summary

The school's current performance	Adequate
The school's prospects for improvement	Unsatisfactory

Current performance

The school's current performance is adequate because:

- pupils' performance by the end of key stage 2 has risen and improved significantly compared to three years ago;
- oral communication skills are good;
- reading skills are good by the end of Year 6;
- bilingualism and translanguaging are promoted effectively;
- children from ethnic backgrounds are given appropriate support and those who have attended the school for a number of years make good progress;
- the school integrates pupils with behavioural problems well; and
- the standard of practical care that pupils receive is good.

However, it was judged that:

- the school's performance does not compare favourably to the performance of similar schools;
- writing skills in both languages are adequate;
- information and communication technology skills are unsatisfactory by the end of key stage 2; and
- there is too much of a difference between the attainment of boys and girls, with girls' attainment much higher than that of the boys.

Prospects for improvement

The prospects for improvement are unsatisfactory because:

- there is not sufficient progress in many of the main issues identified in the last inspection;
- the school's self-evaluation is not of an acceptable standard and it does not show that the leaders know their school well enough;
- the school development plan is not a sufficiently powerful tool to direct the school towards raising and monitoring standards;
- there is not a clear enough link between the self-evaluation process and the school development plan; and
- the governing body's role to hold the school to account for standards and challenge it as a critical friend has not been developed effectively enough.

Recommendations

In order to improve, the school should:

- R1 raise standards in Welsh and English;
- R2 raise standards in information and communication technology;
- R3 ensure a firm vision and a strategic operational system that is far more analytical;
- R4 ensure that the school's self-evaluation process is far more evaluative and that the school development plan is a far more purposeful document, which includes quantitative targets;
- R5 improve the governing body's understanding of benchmarking data in order to hold the school to account better;
- R6 ensure that the school has appropriate safeguarding procedures in place; and
- R7 ensure that the governing body responds fully to statutory requirements.

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 produce an action plan showing how it will address the recommendations. Estyn will monitor the school's progress 12 months after the publication of this report.

Main findings

Key Question 1: How good are outcomes?

Adequate

Standards: Adequate

The results of the baseline assessments when children start at the school show that their skills are consistently similar to or higher than the local authority figures.

In general, achievement in pupils' learning and progress is satisfactory. Many pupils can recall previous learning for a purpose and build upon it appropriately. On the whole, they work well together and respond appropriately to the tasks and questions posed by the teachers. By the end of Year 6, many of them show that their thinking skills and their ability to work independently has developed well.

Classroom evidence shows that many pupils develop effective oral communication skills in Welsh by the end of the Foundation Phase. The way in which pupils from ethnic minority backgrounds develop these skills is a strength. Overall, their reading skills do not develop to the same extent. Most of them can write sentences consistently; however, some letters are not formed correctly and basic spelling errors can be seen.

By the time pupils reach Years 5 and 6, most of them show good progress in their literacy skills in Welsh and English in terms of oral communication. Many of them read meaningfully and show understanding of the text in both languages. They use appropriate language when discussing and they succeed in reading in one language by using information in the other language. In general, writing standards are adequate and the range of written work is limited. More able pupils write thoughtfully and imaginatively, but a minority show difficulty with correct expression.

By the end of key stage 2, pupils' information and communication technology skills are unsatisfactory. Although there are elements of good work, they do not have the range of necessary skills, particularly in handling data and modelling.

Pupils' awareness of Welsh authors, their area's history and artists through the Cwricwlwm Cymreig is good.

In key stage 1, the performance of pupils who receive free school meals, as a group, is higher than that of the rest of the cohort. Although the opposite is true in key stage 2, there was no clear pattern over a period in 2011. Pupils with additional learning needs make acceptable progress. Pupils who receive behavioural support make very good progress.

By the end of key stage 2, pupils' performance has risen and improved significantly compared with three years ago; progress at the end of key stage 1 has not been as good over time. However, compared the averages of similar schools, performance is consistently lower. Girls perform consistently better than boys at every level and there is a significant gap between them. Looking at the school's data, it must be remembered that the percentage of pupils who speak English as an additional language, along with the percentage of pupils with additional learning needs, is far higher than that of the local authority.

Wellbeing: Adequate

Most pupils have a good awareness of what is needed to stay healthy and the need to adopt healthy personal routines, including fitness. They take advantage of regular opportunities to exercise and take part in relevant activities in after-school clubs.

Without exception, all pupils feel very safe and happy at school. They know whom to turn to for support and advice. Behaviour in the classrooms and during playtime is good and the pupils are courteous to each other and to adults.

The school plays an important part in the life of the local community and Catholic church, and purposeful links have been forged with a number of organisations and agencies. Through these links, they develop a good range of social skills.

Pupils' punctuality is good. However, their attendance levels have been satisfactory over a period of time compared with those of similar schools in terms of the percentage of pupils who receive free school meals. Overall, the pupils' voice is not given a prominent place as the school council has not developed as a sufficiently effective forum for pupils to propose and implement improvements.

Key Question 2: How good is provision?

Adequate

Learning experiences: Adequate

The school provides an adequate range of experiences that respond to pupils' needs. Termly plans give appropriate attention to subjects within the curriculum. Staff collaborate purposefully to plan schemes of work, which aim to ensure rich experiences. These are not reflected adequately in each classroom on every occasion.

The provision for developing thinking skills, problem-solving skills and promoting independence means that these elements of pupils' work are good by the end of key stage 2.

Differentiated work is planned in order to meet pupils' needs. However, there are not enough opportunities for pupils to write at length across the curriculum and the needs of more able pupils are not met adequately.

Planning for developing Welsh is good and the provision for pupils who have no knowledge of Welsh when they arrive at the school is effective. The Cwricwlwm Cymreig is promoted successfully across all subjects.

The school caters appropriately for sustainable development and global citizenship. Joint worship is used well to raise awareness of fairness and equality.

Teaching: Adequate

All teachers have a very good relationship with the pupils. This creates a supportive ethos, which promotes learning. Praise is used well to motivate pupils and control within classrooms is good. Teachers consistently demonstrate good language patterns.

Overall, support for pupils with additional learning needs is purposeful and aids are used effectively to meet pupils' specific requirements.

Teaching ranges from good to adequate, with most of the teaching adequate. Where teaching is good, lesson plans identify clear and specific learning outputs, a range of appropriate teaching methods are used, by asking searching questions that promote thinking skills, and pupils' progress is monitored well. Where lessons are adequate, expectations are not high enough and extended work is not provided to challenge more able pupils.

Assessment for learning strategies are developing satisfactorily across the school and they are good by the final years.

Pupils' work is marked consistently. Where the standard of marking is good, appropriate comments are made to develop learning. At times, comments are not sufficient to lead to improvement. Individual targets are set for pupils, but it is not ensured that they are used consistently enough. Information is shared consistently with parents about their children's progress.

Care, support and guidance: Unsatisfactory

A caring and inclusive community is ensured where everyone feels valued. The advantages of healthy living are promoted effectively across the curriculum and in extra-curricular activities.

Provision for personal and social education is good throughout the school. The school gives particular attention to pupils' personal and emotional needs.

The school provides appropriate support for children with additional learning needs and succeeds in integrating them well. This is especially true for pupils with English as an additional language and pupils with challenging behaviour. Statemented pupils receive appropriate support according to the requirements of their statements.

The school works satisfactorily with external agencies to identify pupils' learning needs. There have not yet had a sufficient impact on pupils' attendance.

The school has an appropriate safeguarding policy. However, the procedures for dealing with safeguarding issues have not been fully developed as ancillary staff are not proficient enough in them and leaders are not completely sure of their facts.

Learning environment: Good

There is a warm and friendly atmosphere at the school, which encourages the children to respect others and treat them fairly. Teachers develop tolerant attitudes and promote the prevention and removal of oppressive behaviour well. Pupils work well together and value the contribution of others in group work.

The school's buildings and grounds are well maintained and they provide an appropriate environment for play and learning.

The building offers a range of appropriate classrooms and facilities for the number of pupils. The school makes good use of these. Classroom displays stimulate and develop thinking skills. A good range of resources is used in order to enrich teaching and learning.

Key Question 3: How good are leadership and management?	Unsatisfactory
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Leadership: Unsatisfactory

The headteacher promotes a happy and caring ethos at the school. All members of the teaching staff are aware of their role and responsibilities across the school and they work together closely. However, the school does not have a clear and specific enough strategy for raising standards.

Although the school has a wide range of policies, there are no current policies for accessibility or equality for those with disabilities. There is no reference to them, as is required, in the school's prospectus or the governors' annual report to parents.

The governing body is very supportive of the school, and visits the schools to discuss issues and to observe lessons. Governors receive regular reports from the headteacher. However, these do not contain enough comparative information about the family of schools to which the school belongs or the benchmarks of the free school meals group. As a result, the governors do not receive good information about the school's performance. This, in turn, hinders the governing body's ability to hold the school to account for the standards and quality achieved, and to take a sufficiently prominent role in the school's self-evaluation process.

The school succeeds in giving appropriate attention to local and national priorities. The Foundation Phase provision was established effectively and the principles are operational throughout the department, with suitable and stimulating resources. The practices of developing pupils' thinking skills and assessment for learning are integrated into the teaching following the sharing of best practice within the school.

Improving quality: Unsatisfactory

The school's self-evaluation system includes teaching staff in the process of looking at pupils' work and observing lessons. However, subject reports do not always identify the important areas to be developed. Performance data, tracking information and first-hand evidence are rarely used to plan improvements. Although the school's self-evaluation report follows the three key questions, it gives lists that outline what the school does rather than providing an analytical evaluation. Insufficient attention is given to the school's data and quantitative targets. The report identifies the school's strengths, but not the areas for development.

There is not a sufficiently clear and obvious link between the self-evaluation report and the priorities in the school development plan. The development plan refers appropriately to the steps to be taken, the success criteria, the timing and the person responsible, monitoring arrangements and budgeting. However, the content is not specific enough and does not provide quantitative targets that will be easy to measure in terms of progress or an improvement in standards. There is insufficient reference to training needs and arrangements for taking advantage of good practice.

Four of the six recommendations made following the previous inspection have not been implemented.

The school has an appropriate procedure for managing performance, which offers opportunities for continuous professional development. The school continues to develop internal networking and has endeavoured to share good practice on some recent areas such as thinking skills and assessment for learning. There is constructive collaboration with other primary schools in the catchment area, which continues to develop well, specifically on delivering and assessing science. There is also contact with other Catholic schools in north Wales to share practice in specific areas of the curriculum. The current activities do not have enough impact on raising standards at the moment.

Partnership working: Adequate

The schools has forged a range of useful strategic partnerships. A strong relationship exists with the parents and they support improvements such as painting parts of the school and raising money to buy additional resources. There are close links with the local community and the church, which have a positive influence on the quality of pupils' experiences, such as volunteers listening to pupils reading.

There are good links and appropriate transition arrangements between the school and the local secondary school. Suitable moderation work has been in operation until this year. There are no transition arrangements in place with the local nursery.

Staff and pupils at the school benefit from the links with Bangor University, Coleg Menai and Gwynedd Training by receiving trainees on work experience and teacher training.

Resource management: Adequate

The school has enough suitably qualified staff to undertake their work effectively. The use of support staff adds to the experience and support for pupils in each class.

The good range of available resources is used appropriately to reinforce learning.

Overall, teachers use their planning, preparation and assessment time purposefully.

The governing body controls the budget appropriately and any reserve expenditure is linked with priorities in the school development plan.

As standards are adequate and the school makes acceptable use of resources, the school offers adequate value for money.

Appendix 1

Comments on performance data

An analysis of benchmarking data.

Pupils' performance by the end of key stage 2 has risen and improved significantly compared to some years ago. Performance at the end of key stage 1 has not been as good over time.

In 2011 in both key stages, and having been benchmarked against schools with a similar percentage of pupils who are eligible for free school meals, the school was in the lowest quartile in each subject. However, there has been no pattern over a period of time as performance in key stage 1 was in the two highest quartiles for subjects for two of the past four years. Performance in key stage 2 has not been as good, as subjects have been in the lowest two quartiles during the same period.

Comparisons with schools in the family that the school belongs to show that, in 2011, pupils at the end of key stage 1 performed consistently lower than expected in terms of the school's level of challenge. However, there has been no definite pattern over a period of four years. Data at the end of key stage 2 for 2011 shows that pupils' performance was generally close to expectations in subjects apart from mathematics. Despite this, over the period, pupils performed less well than those of the family for most of the period in subjects apart from Welsh. Results in Welsh have been consistently higher than those of the family.

In general, girls' performance in terms of reaching the expected level is better than that of the boys in key stage 1. In key stage 2, there is a significant difference between the sexes in each subject, with girls outperforming boys at every level. Not one boy has achieved level 5 in Welsh or English during the past five years.

The percentage achieving higher levels in Welsh and science in key stage 1 is consistently higher than that of the family. However, the percentage achieving higher levels in English, mathematics and science in key stage 2 has been lower than that of the family over time.

The percentage reaching the expected level in speaking and reading in Welsh at the end of key stage 1 has been higher than that of the family, over time. However, the percentage not reaching the expected levels has also been higher than that of the family. In key stage 2, standards in speaking and reading are fairly consistently higher than that of the family. As in English, standards of writing are consistently significantly lower.

Appendix 2

Stakeholder satisfaction report

Responses to parent questionnaires

Seventeen responses were received to the parent questionnaires.

Almost all of the parents note that their children:

- are supported to settle in well; and
- are encouraged to be healthy and to undertake regular exercise.

Many note that:

- the school is well run and that they are satisfied with the school, in general;
- teaching is good and that staff expect children to work hard and to do their best;
- they receive regular information about their children's progress;
- their children enjoy school and make good progress;
- their children are safe at school;
- children receive appropriate additional support in relation to any specific individual needs; and
- the school helps the children to mature and to take responsibility.

A minority note that:

- the school does not treat each child fairly and with respect;
- pupils do not behave well at the school;
- they do not understand the school's procedure for dealing with complaints;
- they do not feel comfortable asking questions, making suggestions or highlighting problems to the school;
- the homework that is given does not build well upon what is learnt at school; and
- their children are not, or they are not aware that their children are well prepared to move on to the next school.

A few note that:

- there is not, or they are not aware if there is, a good variety of activities, including trips or visits.

Responses to learner questionnaires

Responses were received from 39 pupils in key stage 2 and they agreed unanimously that:

- they feel safe at school; and
- they know whom to speak to if they are worried or upset.

Almost all believe that:

- teachers and other adults at the school help them to learn and make progress; and
- they know what to do and with whom to speak if they find the work difficult.

Most believe that:

- they are doing well at school;
- their homework helps them to understand and improve their work at school;
- the school deals well with any bullying; and
- the school teaches them how to stay healthy.

Many believe that:

- there are many opportunities at school to have regular exercise.

A minority believe that:

- other children do not behave well and that they cannot do their work.

A few believe that:

- children do not behave well during playtime and lunch time; and
- they do not have enough books, equipment and computers to do their work.

Appendix 3

The inspection team

Maldwyn Pryse	Reporting Inspector
Glyn Roberts	Team Inspector
Gwynoro Jones	Lay Inspector
Jane Peate	Peer Inspector
Eirian Bradley-Roberts	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