



Arolygiaeth Ei Mawrhydi dros Addysg a Hyfforddiant yng Nghymru
Her Majesty's Inspectorate for Education and Training in Wales

A report on

Ysgol Min-y-Ddol

**Plas Kynaston Lane
Cefn Mawr
LL14 3PA**

Date of inspection: May 2022

by

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

This report is also available in Welsh.

About Ysgol Min-y-Ddol

Name of provider	Ysgol Min-y-Ddol
Local authority	Wrexham
Language of the provider	Welsh-medium
Type of school	Primary
Religious character	
Number of pupils on roll	112
Pupils of statutory school age	78
Number in nursery classes (if applicable)	18
Percentage of statutory school age pupils eligible for free school meals over a three-year average <i>(The national percentage of pupils eligible for free school meals over a three-year average in the primary sector is 21.3%)</i>	14.7%
Percentage of statutory school age pupils identified as having additional learning needs (a) <i>(The national percentage of pupils identified as having an additional learning need in the primary sector is 20.6%)</i>	12.8%
Percentage of statutory school age pupils who speak Welsh at home	30.8%
Percentage of statutory school age pupils with English as an additional language	*
Date of headteacher appointment	May 2019
Date of previous Estyn inspection (if applicable)	06/12/2011
Start date of inspection	03/05/2022
Additional information	

Data reported is sourced from the latest available Pupil Level Annual School Census. These figures may be slightly different from 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.

Overview

Leaders, staff and pupils succeed in developing an environment where nearly all pupils enjoy and feel safe at school and are valued and respected. The school developed good ideas to support pupils' wellbeing during the pandemic, by strengthening their emotional resilience and reigniting their interest in fitness. Most pupils have good attitudes to learning, work respectfully with each other and adults and are willing to persevere with their work.

One of the school's clear strengths is the way that it provides stimulating and interesting learning experiences that engage most pupils' interest effectively. The school's significant investment in equipment and resources to create appealing and stimulating outdoor areas ensures excellent opportunities for pupils to engage in their learning.

Many pupils make good progress in their learning during their time at the school, but there is scope to improve their writing and numeracy skills. Pupils' oral Welsh skills are good and the work of teachers and staff to support this is sound.

The school is focussing well on preparing for the new Curriculum for Wales and making beneficial considerations to improve pedagogy. Teachers and staff plan interesting lessons and activities for pupils and encourage pupils' enthusiasm and thinking skills successfully. However, there is room to strengthen the feedback that they provide for pupils so that they know how to improve, and to challenge all pupils appropriately.

The school has a good record of making beneficial improvements and leaders ensure that they gather a good range of evidence so that they know what works well and what to improve for the future. Sharpening self-evaluation arrangements to scrutinise pupils' standards more would strengthen the process, in addition to developing methods to evaluate progress against the targets that have been set by the school.

Recommendations

- R1 Strengthen pupils' writing and numeracy skills, particularly at the top of the school
- R2 Strengthen the feedback that teachers give to pupils so that they can improve their work more effectively
- R3 Ensure that learning activities challenge pupils in line with their ability, particularly for more able pupils
- R4 Improve self-evaluation practices in order to evaluate pupils' standards and develop more effective methods to evaluate progress against targets for improvement

What happens next

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

Main findings

Learning

Many pupils make good progress in their learning during their time at the school. Pupils with additional learning needs make sound progress towards their targets. Overall, more able pupils do not make effective enough progress in relation to their ability.

Nearly all pupils start in the nursery class with language and communication skills and mathematical skills that are lower than expected for their age. The school's progress tracking information shows that many pupils make effective progress in a short period of time during their early education. Despite the effects of the pandemic, many pupils' Welsh communication skills are developing well in the reception class. They acquire the language at an early stage and develop effective vocabulary and sentence patterns by communicating with adults and their peers. Most pupils at the bottom of the school listen attentively to stimulating presentations and improve their Welsh vocabulary and syntax quickly. Many pupils in Years 1 and 2 ask and respond to questions to explain their understanding of that has been heard and summarise their ideas effectively, for example when explaining how to build a bridge successfully for Bendigeidfran the giant. Many of the school's oldest pupils are now developing their confidence to speak with increasing accuracy in a range of contexts and are willing to express an opinion about a fictional character, for example.

On the whole, pupils' reading skills are developing purposefully. Younger readers enjoy reading simple texts with increasing confidence and accuracy. They use appropriate strategies when reading unfamiliar words. As pupils move through the school, many read an appropriate range of texts with increasing accuracy. Older pupils use their reading skills effectively for different purposes. A good example of this is that way that they use the internet confidently and effectively to find and share information about the Second World War. Most read English correctly and meaningfully. Many use their English reading skills effectively to gather and present information and use their translinguaging skills successfully to present that information.

From an early age, most pupils show enthusiasm towards writing by experimenting with mark making. They form letters correctly and begin to write simple sentences to convey meaning. Many build on these skills increasingly in Years 1 and 2, for example by using ordinal numbers effectively when writing a newspaper report on the story of Blodeuwedd. The school's older pupils have a sound understanding of different genres of writing, for example when writing a monologue by a fictional character. Although written work is structured effectively on the whole, standards of punctuation and Welsh syntax are not high enough. Many pupils' handwriting skills also do not reflect their age or ability and the presentation of their work is often untidy.

Many of the school's youngest pupils develop number, shape, measurement and data handling skills effectively. Most pupils in the Reception class use non-standard measurements successfully, for example to measure the size of animals. By Year 2, most pupils create frequency tables and produce bar graphs confidently and

correctly. However, at the top of the school, many pupils have gaps in their mathematical skills and understanding. For example, they do not always know how to use a scale when creating a block graph or know how to measure distance correctly. This is partly due to the lack of opportunities for pupils to develop an understanding of key mathematical skills. As a result, pupils do not apply their numeracy skills effectively across the curriculum and the most able pupils do not receive an appropriate level of challenge to complete tasks at a higher level.

During the pandemic and since returning to school, many pupils' digital skills are developing well. For example, older pupils work together on the cloud to present information about their local area for a live website.

Many pupils' thinking and problem-solving skills are developing well as they work on challenges independently in the outdoor classroom. For example, Year 1 and 2 pupils investigate an insect habitat to find, classify and record them.

Well-being and attitudes to learning

Pupils are extremely polite towards each other, staff and visitors and show pride in their school. This is a strong feature that contributes positively to the vibrant learning environment that exists. Nearly all pupils enjoy school, feel safe there and are valued and respected.

Nearly all pupils have a healthy attitude to learning. They make independent choices and support each other's learning effectively. Most pupils develop to become skilful, confident and resilient learners who are ready to learn through theme activities and challenges that stimulate their thinking skills, particularly at the bottom of the school. This is evident in the way in which they interact with adults and persevere with their work while working in the independent areas, including the 'forest school' and apply themselves to '*Llun Lles*' ('Mindful Monday'), '*Mawrth a Mercher Mwdlyd*' (Muddy Tuesday and Wednesday) and '*Gwener Gwych*' ('Feel Good Friday') activities. Most pupils show an interest in their work and are willing to apply themselves to tasks and complete them. However, at times, the work that is presented to them is not challenging enough, particularly for more able pupils and those at the top of the school. This disrupts the enthusiasm of a very few pupils.

Many pupils have a good understanding of how to be healthy and confident individuals and understand, for example, how to make healthy choices about their diet. They have a sound understanding of how to keep themselves safe online and visits from the community police officer reinforce this.

Many pupils develop as ethical and knowledgeable citizens, for example through their awareness of fairness. Example of this were seen in Years 5 and 6 in language work relating to the war in Ukraine. Although the school promotes pupils' knowledge of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, their understanding of their rights is limited, on the whole.

Most pupils feel that staff listen to their views and consider them in decisions that affect them. As a result, many pupils are beginning to undertake leadership roles and responsibilities confidently. An example of this is the way in which the Supportive Council is organised. Although there is always an adult present at the meetings,

pupils decide and prioritise ideas and ensure that there is a positive effect on the school's ethos and environment. Examples of this are their desire to promote the Welsh language on the playground, and during breaktimes, pupils who have succeeded in wearing a Welsh medal reward their fellow pupils who speak Welsh with each other. Another of the council's wishes is to welcome and invite parents back into the school following the pandemic and improve the front of the school for break times. It has already had an influence on improving the safety of the parking arrangements at the front of the school and creating interesting areas outside the building.

Many pupils persevere or search for new solutions when facing challenges while responding to activities that are presented, for example when solving problems during physical education sessions to discover whether the tallest child jumps the farthest.

When facing new and unfamiliar situations, many pupils act creatively and positively when working in the independent, stimulating and diverse areas. However, they do not always show the same enthusiasm and pride in the presentation of their work and do not use feedback effectively to move their learning forwards.

Due to the coronavirus pandemic, inspectors will not be reporting on pupil attendance rates during the 2020-2021 and 2021-2022 academic years. However, inspectors will consider the school's provision for monitoring and improving attendance as part of inspection area 4 (care, support and guidance).

Teaching and learning experiences

Teachers are working together effectively to adapt the curriculum to meet the purposes of the new curriculum for Wales. It is based on research and ensures that the four purposes and the areas of learning and experiences are considered effectively. Pupils are given appropriate opportunities to contribute their ideas about what they would like to learn. Through their termly themes, teachers plan a range of constructive activities and experiences purposefully. However, teachers at the top of the school do not plan rigorously enough to provide all pupils with an appropriate level of challenge.

Where practice is at its best, the school provides stimulating and interesting experiences that engage most pupils' interest effectively. At the bottom of the school, learning activities support pupils to make consistent progress in their skills within their lessons and over time. For example, many pupils in the reception class develop their communication skills effectively when discussing Tedi Twt's holiday tour in Africa. However, planning does not always build on pupils' previous knowledge, understanding and skills. As a result, in the school's higher years, planned experiences do not always enable pupils to make the best progress in their writing and numeracy skills.

Staff work together effectively and the good relationship between adults and pupils has a positive effect on nearly all pupils' behaviour and wellbeing. Teachers make very effective use of assistants to support pupils' learning and nurture pupils' independence in their learning. Nearly all teachers and practitioners have clear objectives for learning and use a range of methods and stimulating resources to

engage pupils' interest. Leaders have invested significantly in equipment and resources to create appealing and stimulating outdoor areas for all classes. Many pupils, including those with additional learning needs, benefit from rich opportunities to use these areas, for example as pupils in Years 5 and 6 create a moon vehicle using woodwork equipment in the construction area. Teachers develop the practice of facilitating learning as an integral part of experiences very skilfully. Teachers also organise rich experiences for pupils to develop their creative and physical skills through extra-curricular cooking and sports clubs and relevant curricular visits.

Teaching practices both inside and outside the classroom engage most pupils' interest effectively. Core activities develop pupils' linguistic and social skills successfully with content that increases pupils' confidence following the effects of the pandemic. The school has consistent techniques to give pupils timely feedback, for example through the '*melyn meddwl*' and '*gwyrdd gwych*' method. However, feedback from teachers that teach the school's oldest pupils is not comprehensive enough to address frequent errors, for example in written syntax in the Welsh language and basic punctuation.

Care, support and guidance

Staff know their pupils very well and are exceptionally caring and nurturing and ensure that pupils feel safe and happy. Pupils' emotional, health and social wellbeing are supported by providing valuable and purposeful intervention programmes. A good example of this is the 'Daioni' scheme that supports vulnerable pupils who find it difficult settling at the school.

The school succeeds in establishing productive relationships with parents and families by consulting them to discover the most effective communication methods to allow them to support their children. A beneficial element of this is '*amser awgrym*' ('suggestion time'), namely videos shared with parents with suggestions about how they can help and support their children with the Welsh language. Informal '*sesiynau sirioli*' (cheer up sessions) between pupils, their peers and the school's staff ensure beneficial opportunities to talk about wellbeing. The school has an ethos of promoting the principles of a growth mindset to develop pupils' skills through dedication and hard work, and relevant documents have been produced to promote parents' understanding of this aspect.

Staff support aspects of a healthy lifestyle and strengthening pupils' resilience and emotional wellbeing, including in trying to alleviate the effects of the pandemic. For example, following the lockdown periods as a result of the pandemic, the school organised a 6-week fitness and wellbeing programme that was conducted by the Wrexham Racecourse Foundation to promote healthy eating, enjoyment and more exercise. It also considered carefully how to improve pupils' skills in interacting with their peers by establishing 'playground buddies' from among the school's oldest pupils. This promoted pupils' interaction skills and developed their Welsh oracy skills. As a result, staff have identified that pupils are more observant of their peers.

The school has adopted effective methods of sharing the advantages of regular attendance with parents. This includes correspondence drawing families' attention to their child's attendance percentage and the traffic light graphic that refers to the effect of absence on their child's education. It has established these sensible

strategies to support families and as a response to patterns of absence that have emerged since the pandemic.

The school's younger pupils are given a good opportunity to have input into their work and members of the school's councils are given excellent opportunities to inform decisions. However, provision does not always succeed in supporting pupils to contribute to decisions that would inform their experiences, including opportunities to influence what they learn.

The school provides very beneficial support for pupils with additional learning needs (ALN) and by identifying other cohorts of pupils who would benefit from tailored support, such as pupils who are eligible for free school meals. The school takes strong advantage of a good range of professional development for the workforce to support provision, including training to support vulnerable pupils. This is a strength at the school. The additional learning needs coordinator (ALNCo) is very effective in her role and leads the school in terms of tracking the progress of pupils with ALN thoroughly. She reviews and monitors pupils' progress from their starting points and leads whole-school training to develop staff's understanding.

The school makes valuable use of partnerships and external agencies to provide effective support for pupils with ALN and those who may need additional support. An example of this is the beneficial link between the ALNCo and the local authority's services, such as the latecomers service and social services.

Pupils' understanding of their identity, heritage and culture is developed successfully. Opportunities are organised for pupils to identify with the local community and the wider world through stimulating creative work and themes in the classrooms. Across the school, there are attractive displays produced by pupils following workshops with famous people and various artists, including some from Wales. An example of this is the work on '*Cerddoriaeth yw'r iaith y mae pawb yn ei ddeall*' ('Music is the language that everyone understands'), which promotes the Welsh language by writing a song about Wales.

The school's safeguarding culture and arrangements to keep all pupils safe are sound. Staff promote and support an anti-bullying culture and positive attitudes to managing pupil behaviour. The school's provision develops pupils' knowledge and understanding of behaviour that is emotionally harmful or unsafe appropriately.

Leadership and management

Under the robust leadership of the headteacher, the senior management team and an enthusiastic team of teaching and support staff, there is a good track record of making recent improvements and recognition of the need to continue to improve specific aspects of teaching and learning further. Leaders and staff give good attention to developing their professional development and participate beneficially in the performance management process. They have benefitted from seeing good practice in other schools and invite visitors from nearby schools to share good practice. Staff work together beneficially as a team and, for example, make a valuable contribution towards achieving the school's priorities.

Leaders have reviewed the school's vision and strategic direction and have succeeded in incorporating the views of parents and all staff. This includes focussing sensibly on preparing for the new curriculum and fostering effective pedagogy for the future. Governors support the work of the headteacher and the team of staff enthusiastically. They increase their knowledge of the school's life and work by scrutinising pupils' work and conducting learning walks. As a result, they use this knowledge to make meaningful suggestions, for example when asking how many opportunities there are for pupils to discuss and express an opinion about one of the school's priorities for improvement.

Leaders and staff use a good range of methods to identify strengths and areas for improvement. This includes scrutinising first-hand evidence of teaching and learning. Leaders also consider the opinions of parents and pupils often, which provides a valuable picture of their views. Leaders make sensible use of this information to create a manageable number of sensible priorities for improvement. Although the self-evaluation process provides substantial information about the quality of provision, such as teaching and the curriculum, it does not focus enough on pupils' standards. As a result, leaders do not address some aspects that need to be improved purposefully enough, such as the quality of pupils' numeracy and writing skills. Leaders also recognise the need to strengthen their approach to measuring progress against their priorities more effectively.

Leaders ensure that the school curriculum fosters appropriate attitudes to eating and drinking healthily. They also promote the school's safeguarding culture appropriately. They provide a suitable evaluation of their safeguarding arrangements and staff receive a suitable range of training at the appropriate level.

Leaders make good use of their resources. The school's investment in creating stimulating learning environments has been successful in engaging pupils' interest and creative attractive areas that improve pupils' attitudes to their learning. Leaders are aware of the effects of poverty on pupils' attainment, particularly in the wake of the pandemic. They use funding purposefully to support these pupils, for example to improve their oracy skills, their attendance, their emotional wellbeing and their behaviour.

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/members of the management committee 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, middle leaders, 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
- visit a broad sample of lessons, including learning support groups and the specialist resource base (where appropriate), 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 (where appropriate) and in outdoor areas
- visit the specialist resource base within the school to see pupils' learning (where appropriate)
- observe and speak to pupils at lunch and break times and at a sample of after-school clubs
- 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

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 going to press. Any enquiries or comments regarding this document/publication should be addressed to:

Publication 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 (Welsh to English).