



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

A report on

Ysgol Gynradd Hirael

**Orme Road
Bangor
Gwynedd
LL57 1BA**

Date of inspection: November 2023

by

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

This report is also available in Welsh

About Ysgol Gynradd Hirael

Name of provider	Ysgol Gynradd Hirael
Local authority	Cyngor Gwynedd
Language of the provider	Welsh
Type of school	Primary
Religious character	
Number of pupils on roll	202
Pupils of statutory school age	160
Number in nursery classes (if applicable)	19
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 23.7%)</i>	26.2%
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 13.2%)</i>	12.38%
Percentage of statutory school age pupils who speak Welsh at home	0.0%
Percentage of statutory school age pupils with English as an additional language	52.2%
Date of headteacher appointment	06/11/2023
Date of previous Estyn inspection (if applicable)	15/06/2015
Start date of inspection	27/11/2023
<p>The headteacher began in post on 06/11/23. However, although she has been in post less than a month, she has a very sound and thorough knowledge of the school in terms of pupils' learning and well-being, planning, teaching and assessment and care and child safeguarding systems. This is because she has acted as the assistant headteacher at Ysgol Hirael since 2016 and has been a member of staff at the school since 1992. As a result, her knowledge and understanding of leadership and management arrangements, self-evaluation processes and staff's professional development are up-to-date and extremely robust.</p>	

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

Ysgol Hirael is an inclusive and supportive community that promotes a caring ethos successfully. There are warm working relationships between pupils and staff, which fosters a caring environment and a firm sense of care and well-being among pupils.

Pupils enjoy learning and are enthusiastic during lessons and tasks. They are keen to please staff and, as a result, succeed as confident learners. During their time at the school, many pupils develop purposeful social, listening, reading, numeracy and digital skills.

Teachers plan the curriculum purposefully, which promotes beneficial learning opportunities for pupils. Pupils' outcomes are good where planning, teaching and feedback on their work are challenging and consistent. However, teachers do not provide activities for pupils to develop their oral Welsh skills, or their extended writing skills in Welsh and English, regularly and effectively enough. Feedback to support pupils in the next steps of their learning is also inconsistent across the school.

Staff support and care for pupils consistently and conscientiously. This contributes to pupils' desire to learn and persevere with tasks. Staff encourage pupils successfully to take responsibility for their own well-being and behaviour and to embrace the valuable relationships that exist within the school. As a result, emotional well-being support for pupils and their ability to use this support is a strong feature of the school.

Staff use the accommodation productively to meet pupils' needs purposefully and, as a result, teachers plan activities to promote learning effectively. However, provision of outdoor learning experiences is not as effective, particularly for the youngest pupils. Leaders keep in close contact with the school's wider community and build on the positive relationship with parents.

The headteacher leads the school purposefully and ensures that the care and well-being of pupils are a priority. This is central to her vision. She works diligently with staff and governors to ensure that the school is an inclusive learning community that promotes positive opportunities for pupils.

Leaders evaluate the school's work effectively by using regular and rigorous self-evaluation processes. The school's monitoring activities lead to relevant improvement plans and purposeful training opportunities for staff to develop their skills through agreed professional learning.

Recommendations

- R1 Improve the standard of pupils' extended writing across the school
- R2 Improve pupils' Welsh language skills, particularly their oral skills
- R3 Ensure that the quality of teachers' feedback targets the next steps in pupils' learning effectively

What happens next

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

Main findings

Learning

On entry to the school, many pupils' basic skills correspond to, or are lower than, what is expected for their stage of development and their age. During their time at the school, many pupils, including those with additional learning needs (ALN), make good progress in their learning. As a result, they develop their skills well and deepen their knowledge and understanding effectively.

Most pupils listen attentively to adults and each other and respond purposefully to presentations. The youngest pupils' oral skills develop appropriately. By Year 2, they develop the ability to talk independently, for example when creating dances on stage while playing percussion instruments. Many of the oldest pupils develop suitable oral skills in Welsh and a minority take pride in their use of the Welsh language. Most use English confidently with extensive and relevant vocabulary and language patterns. As a result, they communicate effectively and contribute purposefully to class discussions and express their views clearly and maturely when speaking English.

Many pupils' reading skills develop well. The youngest pupils use an appropriate range of phonic strategies to read familiar and unfamiliar words correctly. By Year 2, they use their reading skills in a satisfactory manner and explain the content appropriately. Many of the oldest pupils read confidently in various contexts, particularly in English. They vary their tone of voice and use punctuation intelligently. They also develop their higher-order reading skills purposefully to gather information from different sources, for example when researching Neil Armstrong's journey to the moon.

On the whole, many pupils' early writing skills develop appropriately. By Year 2, many write in a suitable range of contexts for different audiences, such as creating questions about the lives of workers in the princes' castles. Many of the oldest pupils build on their writing skills effectively and show a secure grasp of familiar spelling patterns and paragraphing. They adapt the style and structure well to different topics, for example when describing the life of a young girl in a camp in Germany during the Second World War. However, pupils' extended writing skills do not build systematically as they move through the school.

In the youngest pupils' classes, most pupils make good progress in their mathematical development. In the reception class, most pupils have a good grasp of number facts up to 1 and, by the end of Year 2, many are confident when counting numbers up to 100. They also describe the features and properties of three-dimensional shapes correctly when building models of dragons, for example. By the top of the school, most pupils develop their mathematical knowledge effectively. For

example, they produce conversion graphs confidently when comparing miles and kilometres and use data efficiently to study populations in different countries. As a result, many pupils have a sound understanding of mathematical concepts and, as a result, they apply their numeracy skills beneficially across the curriculum.

Most pupils develop effective digital skills. They log into digital platforms confidently to access their work. Many Year 1 pupils program electronic robots confidently to arrive at numbers by following specific paths. Year 2 pupils also make good use of appropriate software, for example when creating a film about Victorian schools. Many of the oldest pupils make wise choices about the most effective equipment and software to consider for different purposes. They use a range of programs to present information well. For example, they develop their coding skills well by using degrees and measurements to create digital image shapes and insert text and graphics to convey a try for Wales in the Rugby World Cup.

Most pupils develop their artistic skills well. The youngest pupils create art in a variety of contexts. For example, from the nursery class to Year 2, pupils work well together to mix colours when creating faces with paint and emulating the artist Kandinsky's circles with crayons. Across the school, most pupils take advantage of opportunities to develop their creativity. This includes older pupils using tone and shadows independently to practise drawing when comparing horses' ears with those of their peers.

Well-being and attitudes to learning

Most pupils show pride and respect for their school. They feel safe within an inclusive and familial ethos, which is a core element of the headteacher and staff's vision. They implement the shared values, trust and vision effectively and, as a result, pupils know whom to approach if something is worrying them. Most pupils appreciate that adults respect them, which contributes soundly to developing a close working relationship which is based on the school's motto, namely '*Dysgwn fel teulu, tyfwn fel cymuned*' ('We learn as a family, we grow as a community').

Most pupils are polite and respectful as they move around the school. They behave well in the classrooms without encouragement from adults and are caring towards each other. Nearly all pupils also have a sound awareness of how to keep themselves and others safe online. Pupils' attendance is good and higher than the national average.

Most pupils enjoy the fact that adults listen to their views and consider them in decisions that affect them. Nearly all pupils, including those with ALN, are willing to assume leadership roles and responsibilities and play a full part in the life and work of the school. Pupils who are members of various committees, such as the school council, '*Sgwad Seren a Sbarc*' and the '*Dŵds Digidol*' make effective contributions to the daily life of the school. For example, members of the '*Dŵds Digidol*' work with pupils and assistants to train them to use various apps and digital platforms. The '*Criw Clên*' also rewards pupils who use the Welsh language regularly on the school playground.

Most pupils have positive attitudes to learning. They listen well to teachers' instructions and focus conscientiously on their work in lessons. Most are enthusiastic

learners who apply themselves willingly to new experiences. They also work diligently with their friends and adults, and offer to help each other voluntarily.

Most pupils concentrate regularly for extended periods. They respect their work and show resilience and motivation in what they learn. They work with their peers in pairs or groups to solve problems without support from adults, for example by using the 'three before me' method when thinking about how to improve their work. Many discuss their work confidently and are prepared to listen to the views and ideas of others effectively. As a result, most develop as independent learners.

Most pupils develop well as healthy and confident individuals and understand how to make the right choices in relation to diet and physical activity. For example, in Year 6, pupils plan effective experiments to measure the difference in their heart rates following different types of physical exercise. Most pupils also appreciate the importance of regular exercise and opportunities to eat healthily. They enjoy taking part in fitness lessons and activities to develop their physical skills, such as swimming and rugby sessions.

Most pupils take advantage of opportunities to work together in the school's well-being activities, such as the gardening group and the life skills group. They also make purposeful use of the well-being areas and the relaxation room, 'Y Nyth', which promotes their emotional well-being highly effectively. As a result, most are aware of how to make wise decisions to take care of their well-being.

Most pupils develop a good understanding of the importance of moral citizenship through their awareness of the values promoted by the school. The oldest pupils are fully aware of the importance of equality and inclusion as part of their work on diversity and children's rights, for example. Most pupils learn about values to support others successfully and are keen to raise money for local and national charities. This increases pupils' awareness of the importance of their contributions towards creating a caring society.

Teaching and learning experiences

Teachers plan a variety of engaging experiences in line with the principles of the Curriculum for Wales, which support many pupils to make good progress from their starting points. For example, teachers provide interesting activities that promote pupils' interest in the local area when studying Bangor cathedral and the history of the coast and local rivers.

Teachers encourage pupils to contribute their views about what they would like to learn by collating their ideas at the beginning of themes. They welcome pupils' views when planning skilfully to improve their skills, knowledge and understanding in different contexts. They use their suggestions effectively when preparing activities, for example in providing stimulating activities about the castles of north Wales, the mountains of Eryri and human rights in the United States. By doing so, pupils are keen to share their experiences with others about the local area and beyond.

The curriculum gives good consideration to the diversity of the world and global events, such as wars and their devastating effect. Teachers plan learning experiences that reflect the cultural heritage of Wales and Welshness successfully.

All staff also promote the advantages of learning Welsh purposefully. However, staff do not always motivate and support pupils to communicate and respond in Welsh consistently enough.

On the whole, the staff's teaching skills are sound. In the most effective lessons, teachers challenge pupils regularly to achieve to the best of their ability. Where expectations are high, the pace and energy of activities engage and hold pupils' interest and motivate them to persevere and succeed. However, at times, presentations for activities are too lengthy, which hinders pupils' enthusiasm and desire to apply themselves to activities promptly.

The working relationship between staff and pupils is productive. Staff know the pupils well and adapt learning activities effectively to respond to pupils' needs, including the number who need help with their work. Assistants provide these pupils with good support, knowing when to intervene and when to allow them to complete their work with increasing independence.

Pupils have a range of purposeful experiences to develop their skills across the curriculum. For example, teachers in the nursery and reception classes provide good opportunities for pupils to follow instructions and use authentic ingredients to make cakes in the mud kitchen, for example. As a result, pupils begin to discuss the difference in the volume of boxes and the weight of particular goods effectively while working together enthusiastically. Year 6 pupils also develop their writing skills appropriately, for example when presenting interesting newspaper articles on sightings of unidentified flying objects. However, provision to develop pupils' extended writing skills across the school is not effective enough. As a result, pupils do not make enough progress in applying all of their writing skills across the curriculum.

Teachers use appropriate assessment activities and methods when responding to pupils' work in lessons. In the most effective practices, most teachers share feedback skilfully orally to challenge and assess the quality of pupils' learning and to target any needs promptly. Staff also question pupils well and provide suitable opportunities for them to respond to teachers' written feedback and comments. However, teachers' feedback does not target the next steps in pupils' learning purposefully enough to support them to understand how to improve their work wholly effectively. The school's reports for parents provide detailed information about progress and the next steps in pupils' learning effectively.

The school provides a beneficial and interesting learning environment where specific areas are used purposefully to support pupils' learning. Staff create attractive displays and learning areas inside the building to stimulate pupils and provide opportunities for them to make choices about what and how to learn. Valuable opportunities are provided for pupils to apply their skills well in practical situations, particularly indoors. Staff use the available outdoor areas appropriately. However, teachers do not provide stimulating and regular learning experiences for pupils to develop their skills outdoors, particularly for the youngest pupils.

Care, support and guidance

The school is a caring and inclusive community and staff motivate pupils successfully to contribute to its warm and friendly ethos. The productive working relationship between staff and pupils, and between the pupils themselves, is a strong feature of the school. For example, the diligent work of the oldest pupils, by using questionnaires to discover pupils' aspirations, led to communal benches on the playground and play equipment.

Teachers and assistants know the pupils well and respond sensibly and promptly to their social and emotional needs. They contribute well to purposeful strategies to manage pupils' behaviour. This includes the beneficial use of nurture groups, which support individuals and groups of pupils intelligently. The school's collaborative methods contribute well to pupils' happiness and desire to participate in the school's activities. This support helps nearly all pupils to settle smoothly into school life.

Provision for pupils who have been identified as having ALN is sound. The ALN co-ordinator works conscientiously with other members of staff, external partners and local schools to ensure that individuals and groups of pupils are identified, tracked and supported well from an early age. Pupils' progress reviews mean that members of staff have a clear understanding of pupils' needs. Staff interact beneficially with a range of services to ensure additional and timely resources to provide specialist support for pupils with a range of learning, emotional and social needs. These arrangements, together with the specific support at 'Y Nyth', are one of the school's strengths. As a result, most pupils who benefit from additional support make good progress in relation to their stage of development and their starting points.

The school develops effective opportunities for pupils to contribute to decisions to improve their experiences. Staff encourage all pupils to undertake leadership roles effectively on a variety of elected groups. This provision expands their understanding of developing as active citizens and the importance of individual contributions to support and maintain a purposeful society. For example, members of the school council organise fundraising days for local and national causes. The eco council also evaluates the school's daily practices thoughtfully, such as saving energy and recycling.

The school has a beneficial range of opportunities that help pupils to develop a good understanding of their Welsh heritage. For example, the school promotes pupils' cynefin, or local area, effectively by studying the history of Bangor Pier and the life of an evacuee in the Sibols area of the city. The school promotes Welsh culture effectively, for example by holding eisteddfodau at the school, clog dancing and learning about Welsh myths and legends. These activities encourage pupils to engage enthusiastically with Welsh culture and to feel proud of the school's inclusive ethos within its Welsh community.

Staff place a strong emphasis on providing a diverse range of trips and visits that support the curriculum and engage pupils' interest in their learning. For example, the youngest pupils learn about the world of work effectively. This includes opportunities for them to study the lives of people who help them, such as emergency services officers. The oldest pupils also plan to sell products such as necklaces and bracelets to enrich pupils' knowledge and profit and loss.

Staff enable pupils to make strong contributions to the life of their community. They use experiences positively so that pupils develop respect and understand that caring for others is important. As a result, pupils learn that acts of kindness make a difference to the lives of families within their neighbourhood and beyond. The school uses collective worship sessions successfully to promote pupils' spiritual and moral development. For example, pupils support a local food bank in the cathedral by collecting donations in their classes during the Christmas period. These activities contribute well towards deepening pupils' understanding of the importance of supporting each other in a caring society.

The school's processes for monitoring attendance and punctuality are efficient. Staff communicate well with each other and external agencies to support pupils and their families to improve pupils' attendance. Staff understand their roles well in keeping pupils safe and maintaining the school's inclusive ethos, such as dealing well any cases of alleged bullying. The school's arrangements for safeguarding are good and are not a cause for concern.

Leadership and management

Since her recent appointment, the headteacher has built on her role as the school's former assistant headteacher successfully. She works diligently with staff and governors to implement improvements in the school's strategic and daily practices. In a short period of time, she has reconsidered the important areas for improvement in provision accurately through agreed monitoring and evaluation practices.

The headteacher focuses on placing the school at the heart of its community and ensures that the care and well-being of these pupils is at the heart of this vision. Governors and staff support her philosophy well and the headteacher encourages staff to model strong and consistent behaviours and values. They are based directly on a caring ethos, which aims to benefit the school community and the lives of pupils. As a result, leaders ensure that a caring and supportive ethos permeates the school.

Leaders allocate responsibilities sensibly and the headteacher holds staff to account directly for the quality and effect of their work. Leaders' processes for evaluating the effectiveness of provision are thorough and based on a wide range of robust evidence. The purposeful systems include scrutiny of pupils' books and analysing internal and external progress of pupils' progress. This includes improving pupils' numeracy skills through practical and real-life activities. Leaders also seek the views of other stakeholders well to inform their practices. For example, they consider parents' views and act on any findings intelligently, such as better communication through regular newsletters and social media platforms.

Regular evaluations and reviews by the headteacher and the governing body create a clear picture for leaders of the school's strengths and areas for improvement. The link between self-evaluation activities and improvement planning is skilful. Leaders use their findings effectively and set purposeful targets to move the school forward. Leaders share the school's culture of safeguarding with all staff in detail, which includes regular checks on the safety of the school's site.

Leaders keep in close contact with the wider school community. They build on the strong relationships with parents and support them empathetically. This includes

attending meetings with health workers and other support agencies. Governors ensure that pupils eat healthily and drink water regularly and advise parents about the importance of nutritious food in their lunch boxes.

Leaders and staff make the best use of most of the school's grounds. For example, pupils use the adventure equipment effectively to master physical tasks. However, the outdoor provision for the youngest pupils is not completely purposeful. This limits their opportunities to develop their skills through a wider range of learning experiences.

Governors are knowledgeable and their thorough input creates systematic improvements across the school. They develop a first-hand understanding of the school's activities through learning walks and discussing pupils' work alongside teachers, for example. They are supportive of the new headteacher and work purposefully with her and the staff by questioning the effect of their work as critical friends. Since being appointed, the headteacher advises them realistically and honestly on how to improve provision. This includes the need to challenge pupils to improve their extended writing skills and develop the standard of teaching further.

Governors monitor the budget carefully and ensure that decisions on expenditure align with the school's priorities for improvement, such as investments in digital equipment and reading resources. Leaders use the pupil development grant wisely to provide specific interventions across the school by staff, which provide beneficial support for pupils to improve their learning.

Leaders ensure that staff have access to effective learning opportunities. These opportunities support their professional development and correspond to their individual needs. These link well with the school's improvement priorities and have a good effect on developing pupils' skills, such as their emotional well-being.

The school shares effective practices with local schools, which provides good opportunities for teachers to compare and share their experiences with other professionals. As a result, professional learning opportunities support the school's ability to improve successfully.

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:

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