



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

**A report on**

**Ysgol Bryn Onnen**

**Varteg Road  
Pontypool  
NP4 7RT**

**Date of inspection: March 2024**

**by**

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

This report is also available in Welsh.

## About Ysgol Bryn Onnen

Name of provider	Ysgol Bryn Onnen
Local authority	Torfaen County Borough Council
Language of the provider	Welsh
Type of school	Primary
Religious character	
Number of pupils on roll	191
Pupils of statutory school age	147
Number in nursery classes (if applicable)	26
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>	23.7%
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 13.2%)</i>	19.0%
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	0.0%
Date of headteacher appointment	02/09/2019
Date of previous Estyn inspection (if applicable)	06/07/2015
Start date of inspection	04/03/2024

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](https://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

Pupils, staff and parents take pride in the happy and homely ethos that exists at Ysgol Bryn Onnen. There is a wonderful working relationship between staff and pupils and a clear priority is placed on improving pupils' well-being. Nearly all pupils know whom to approach if they need a listening ear and, as a result, they feel very safe within the school's inclusive environment. Pupils are polite and respectful towards each other, staff and visitors. Most pupils are well behaved and treat others with courtesy and respect.

The Welsh language is new to all pupils on entry to the school. Overall, most pupils make appropriate progress in their oracy skills as they move through the school. Most pupils listen attentively and their commitment in lessons is good. On the whole, their English literacy and numeracy skills develop purposefully by the end of their time at the school. However, pupils do not develop their skills effectively enough to write at length across the areas of learning. Pupils' progress in their digital skills is also slow. Across the school, the quality of teaching is inconsistent. Overall, teachers do not ensure a consistent level of challenge for all pupils which, in turn, slows progress in their learning.

The headteacher has established a strong team ethos and a sense of belonging among the staff. The new senior management team are beginning to fulfil their roles appropriately and support teachers and assistants strongly. Leaders have stable self-evaluation arrangements to identify the school's strengths and improvement priorities. However, they do not always act strategically and incisively enough to ensure improvements in standards of teaching and learning. Members of the governing body are supportive of the headteacher and staff and ensure that the school's safeguarding arrangements are sound.

## Recommendations

- R1 Strengthen leadership at all levels to implement the school's improvement priorities more effectively
- R2 Raise pupils' standards of Welsh, particularly their writing skills
- R3 Ensure consistency in effective teaching practices across the school and raise teachers' expectations to provide a consistent challenge for all pupils

## What happens next

The school will draw up an action plan to show how it will address the recommendations. Estyn will review the school's progress.

## Main findings

### Learning

On entry to the school, many pupils' communication and social skills are lower than expected for their age and stage of development. During their time at the school, many pupils, including those with additional learning needs (ALN) and those who are affected by poverty, make appropriate progress in their skills compared to their starting points. However, more able pupils do not make suitable progress.

Although all pupils start school without having had previous access to the Welsh language, they acquire the language quickly. By the reception class, many pupils develop an increasing range of vocabulary and respond appropriately to familiar instructions and questions. As pupils mature, many develop their oracy skills purposefully when communicating with their peers and adults. Most pupils from Years 3 to 6 discuss their work with increasing confidence in formal and informal situations. A very few of the oldest pupils begin to use a range of effective vocabulary in their explanations in both languages. Most pupils listen well.

Through a variety of practical activities, many pupils from the nursery class to Year 2 develop their knowledge of letter sounds appropriately. They gain confidence and begin to make consistent progress in developing their reading skills. Many enjoy listening to stories and begin to place a story in order with support from staff. By Year 3, a majority of pupils read simple texts correctly and develop their skills in both languages suitably. They apply their reading skills competently to recall information to create presentations, for example on global warming. At the top of the school, pupils' English reading skills develop robustly. However, most pupils' progress is not consistent in both languages. Many pupils develop their Welsh reading skills slowly. Pupils' enjoyment of reading texts by different authors is also suitable.

Pupils in the nursery class begin to experiment by making marks and begin to form letters purposefully. Many pupils in Year 1 and 2 build on their skills to write words and form simple sentences, using their knowledge of sounds and letters appropriately. From Year 3 to 6, many pupils begin to consider the audience and, when given an opportunity to do so, choose more mature vocabulary and descriptive language. For example, pupils write a report about animals adapting to environmental changes appropriately. Many of the oldest pupils develop a sound understanding of different styles of writing. However, pupils do not develop their writing skills constructively enough over time. Overall, the quality of Welsh writing of many pupils across the school is weak.

Most pupils' mathematics skills develop soundly. From the nursery class, many pupils acquire basic mathematics skills appropriately, for example as they recognise a variety of familiar shapes and count objects up to 10. By Year 2, most have a thorough understanding of mathematical features and use them confidently in their learning and play experiences, for example when measuring the length of objects in centimetres. Pupils build on their numeracy skills with increasing confidence in mathematics activities and begin to use them across the curriculum. For example, Year 6 pupils apply their knowledge of money to create a weekly food budget within the boundaries of specific rations.

Most pupils' digital skills are adequate. Many of the youngest pupils use their digital skills to direct a device to move and use apps to support their language and mathematics work purposefully. By Year 5 and 6, many pupils use relevant programs skilfully when using spreadsheets, for example when calculating the average of different temperatures and when developing their coding skills to create a clock. However, across the school, pupils do not develop a range of digital skills constructively over time.

Most pupils develop sound creative skills as they move through the school. They develop a good range of techniques to create pictures of rugby players and use natural resources from the local environment to create simple pieces of art, for example. Many pupils develop their confidence and engage enthusiastically when performing in school concerts and by learning to play various instruments.

Most pupils develop physical skills with increasing confidence. They take part enthusiastically in activities and in local competitions when the opportunity arises. Overall, most pupils' thinking and problem-solving skills do not develop effectively enough.

### **Well-being and attitudes to learning**

The school's happy and welcoming environment contributes effectively to ensuring that nearly all pupils are valued within the school's caring community. Nearly all know whom to approach for support as necessary and purposeful working relationships between staff and pupils support them to feel safe at school. They communicate politely and respectfully with each other, staff and visitors. Pupils' care and support towards each other is a strong feature, for example when the oldest pupils play happily with the youngest pupils during break times. Most pupils show a sense of pride in their school and their community. Most understand the importance of attending school regularly and, as a result, the attendance rate is positive.

Most pupils behave well in the classroom and around the school. Nearly all pupils across the school contribute to what they would like to learn and are keen to discuss their work. Many of the oldest pupils apply themselves enthusiastically to their learning, listen attentively to each other and concentrate for extended periods.

The youngest pupils develop independent skills increasingly skilfully as they work in small groups without adult guidance. At the top of the school, most pupils persevere with tasks and are enterprising contributors in a group, for example when they create a tool to measure the effect of exercise on the heart rate. However, most pupils in Years 3 to 6 do not build on their independent learning skills effectively enough.

A majority of pupils are given an appropriate opportunity to represent their peers on pupil's voice councils. Members are proud to be part of a council and are beginning to fulfil their roles appropriately. For example, the school council organises a fundraising activity for the local food bank, which deepens pupils' understanding of the impact of poverty on the community. The Criw Cymraeg is also beginning to promote the use of the language successfully during break times. However, pupils do not develop their leadership skills effectively enough to suggest ideas and influence the school's work directly.

Across the school, many pupils develop strongly as ethical and informed citizens. They show care for others by sending bilingual Christmas cards to children in Ukraine, for example. When learning about the history of people's immigration during the 'Windrush' period, many pupils also develop empathy for fairness and equality effectively. Taking part in a project working with the area's older residents to learn how to weave develops most pupils' confidence, new skills and resilience well. Many pupils understand how to keep themselves safe online and know that they must not reveal their passwords to others.

Most pupils develop well as healthy and confident individuals and understand how to make correct choices in relation to diet and physical activity. They enjoy taking part in physical education and fitness to develop their physical skills, for example as they enjoy swimming sessions and by using the various equipment on the school playground.

### **Teaching and learning experiences**

The school has begun to plan a curriculum that develops pupils' skills suitably. Overall, teachers provide valuable learning experiences across the areas of learning to engage and hold pupils' interest and to deepen their knowledge appropriately. They provide purposeful opportunities for pupils to choose their themes at the beginning of each term to motivate them to enjoy their learning.

Staff work together purposefully to encourage pupils to speak Welsh from their first time at the school. On the whole, they support them well to practise spoken language in their work and play to develop their fluency and skills. Staff also take advantage of every opportunity to extend pupils' spoken Welsh skills through stimulating outdoor activities, for example by supporting them to extend their vocabulary when describing objects in the local environment. However, provision does not offer enough opportunities for many pupils to improve their writing skills, particularly in their ability to write at length across the areas of learning.

Teachers are beginning to plan beneficial opportunities for pupils to develop their reading skills in specific sessions. Through this, pupils are supported to develop their research skills in a number of texts successfully, for example as they learn about the Mari Lwyd. On the whole, pupils' skills in reading Welsh texts develop suitably. Across the school, increasing opportunities are provided for pupils to use their numeracy skills in a range of beneficial activities. However, provision to develop pupils' digital skills is limited, which slows their progress over time.

Teachers provide learning activities that offer appropriate opportunities for pupils to celebrate Welshness and Welsh traditions. For example, pupils are given an opportunity to climb the nearby mountain so that they can appreciate the landscapes of the local area. This also contributes to their ability to develop as resilient learners when persevering to reach the summit. Teachers also provide valuable learning experiences for pupils by using local museums to deepen pupils' understanding of the area's industry. Teachers provide valuable opportunities for pupils to expand their knowledge and appreciation of Wales by organising residential visits outside the local area.

A majority of the youngest pupils' teachers plan a range of purposeful learning and play activities and experiences. On the whole, they provide tasks that make good use of the outdoor learning area as a means of supporting pupils to make progress in their independent, social and creative learning skills.

Teachers and assistants have a positive working relationship with pupils and manage behaviour effectively. Overall, many teachers have appropriate knowledge of pupils' needs. However, across the school, the quality of teaching is inconsistent. Teachers do not provide enough opportunities that challenge most pupils to achieve to the best of their ability and make sufficient progress in their learning.

Staff use praise and oral feedback appropriately in activities to celebrate pupils' successes and guide them towards the next steps in their learning. They are beginning to use relevant methods for pupils to reflect and improve the quality of their work. The aims of most activities are clear and are shared with pupils on a regular basis. However, across the school, pupils are not always given enough opportunities to improve the quality of their work following written feedback from teachers.

### **Care, support and guidance**

The school is a warm, caring and happy community that places a clear emphasis on promoting pupils' well-being robustly. All staff work together closely as a team to support the development of nearly all pupils' social and emotional skills successfully. There is a friendly relationship between staff and pupils and the respect with which they treat each other is a strength. Teachers and assistants know the pupils well and respond purposefully to their needs successfully.

Teachers manage pupils' behaviour effectively. Staff work closely with pupils to develop purposeful self-regulation methods. As a result, pupils have a sound understanding of how to resolve differences that arise between them successfully. The '*bore braf*' outdoor morning sessions also develop pupils' attitudes and co-operation skills in a positive manner.

The school provides valuable opportunities for pupils to take part in a range of activities to promote health and fitness, such as swimming lessons and physical exercise sessions. Teachers provide an annual dance festival to support pupils to develop their dance skills. This contributes well to developing pupils as healthy and confident individuals. There are also a number of opportunities to encourage pupils to make the correct choices about what to eat.

Provision for pupils who have been identified as having ALN is appropriate. By considering the needs of each individual pupil, the ALN co-ordinator and staff plan purposeful support programmes. Assistants engage pupils' interest skilfully in literacy and numeracy sessions that support pupils to access their learning well. The school works closely with various external agencies to provide specific activities and support sessions for pupils and their families.

Staff are beginning to provide opportunities for pupils to voice their opinion about certain aspects of provision, including purposeful opportunities for them to discuss their ideas at the beginning of a new theme. However, staff do not provide regular opportunities for members of the school councils to discuss and develop their ideas.

As a result, pupils are not given enough opportunities to present suggestions increasingly independently about which elements of provision they would like to influence.

Teachers provide robust opportunities to celebrate and develop pupils' understanding of their Welsh identity, heritage and culture. For example, pupils study the area's historical features by visiting a nearby coal mine and valuable opportunities are provided for them to learn about famous Welsh people, such as Hedd Wyn. The school takes part in extra-curricular sports activities and competes enthusiastically in the Urdd Eisteddfod.

The school is beginning to provide beneficial opportunities for pupils to be an active part of the local community and the wider world. Staff help pupils to understand issues relating to equality, diversity and inclusion appropriately. In whole-school assemblies, staff discuss how to be good citizens in society. The oldest pupils also take part in a project with a group of local residents in Blaenavon, which expands pupils' practical skills well by creating a piece of art about the area. Staff promote pupils' spiritual, social and cultural development appropriately. Although moral aspects permeate the life of the school appropriately, there are very few opportunities for pupils to learn about equality and diversity within the local community.

The school creates and maintains a safe environment for all pupils. Leaders have established a strong culture of safeguarding successfully, which includes effective site safety. Visits by the local police officer develop pupils' understanding of how to keep themselves safe in the wider community. The school works closely with families where pupils do not have good enough attendance which, in turn, has a positive effect on their attendance rates.

## **Leadership and management**

The headteacher, senior leaders, staff and governors have a good understanding of the needs of pupils and the local area. He provides purposeful, caring leadership and, with all staff, has fostered an inclusive culture in which all pupils feel safe. Leaders work conscientiously to meet the needs of all pupils and to address the impact of poverty. All members of staff show consistent commitment to ensuring that all pupils enjoy and learn at school.

Following a period of instability in terms of staffing, the headteacher has restructured the senior management team, which includes the appointment of a new deputy headteacher. The headteacher has worked conscientiously alongside leaders to create a strong team ethos among staff, ensuring that the well-being of all pupils is at the heart of everything they do. Leaders share the school's culture of safeguarding effectively with all of the school's stakeholders.

Leaders work well together and support each other in a positive manner. Staff have an appropriate understanding of their new responsibilities and are beginning to fulfil their roles purposefully. An effective feature of this is the way in which assistants join teachers to lead different areas of learning and experience. Robust performance management processes are implemented appropriately and, on the whole, targets link directly to the school's improvement priorities. Leaders prioritise professional learning purposefully for all members of staff. Targets are beginning to have a

positive effect on developing staff expertise and on improving pupils' outcomes, such as planning more opportunities for pupils to apply their numeracy skills and use the outdoor area more regularly.

Governors fulfil their responsibilities well and show full commitment to the work and life of the school. They support the headteacher meaningfully and act diligently to do their best for pupils. Through regular visits and learning walks, they have a comprehensive understanding of the school's strengths and areas for improvement. As a result, they are beginning to support and challenge leaders appropriately to acquire knowledge of the strengths and areas for improvement in relation to teaching and learning. However, leaders' arrangements are not strategic and incisive enough to have a sufficiently timely and positive effect, for example to improve standards of teaching and learning. Governors ensure that the school has appropriate arrangements to promote healthy eating and drinking.

Leaders have an appropriate timetable for evaluating provision and pupils' outcomes. Recently, they have identified areas for improvement in provision, such as ensuring regular opportunities for pupils to use and improve their Welsh reading skills. However, leaders do not always evaluate the quality of provision on pupils' progress and achievement in sufficient detail. Overall, the school's self-evaluation and planning for improvement arrangements are not effective enough to address important areas for development. Progress monitoring reports against the priorities are also not evaluative enough and do not highlight the next steps clearly enough. As a result, there are inconsistencies in the quality of provision and staff's expectations in terms of pupils' achievement are not high and consistent enough across the school.

The school has purposeful arrangements for managing financial resources and leaders are aware of the importance of trying to reduce the impact of poverty on pupils' achievement. This includes using the pupil development grant effectively to improve the well-being, progress and attendance of specific groups of pupils.

Leaders implement and meet national priorities adequately. The school is developing the principles of Curriculum for Wales appropriately and suitable changes have been made in provision to support pupils with ALN. Leaders plan beneficial opportunities for pupils to develop their oracy skills in both languages and pupils' number skills develop robustly. However, leaders do not provide regular opportunities for pupils to develop their extended Welsh writing skills constructively enough as they move through the school. Provision also does not support pupils to make progress in their digital skills effectively enough.

There is a strong relationship between the school and parents. The school's staff communicate with them effectively to ensure that they are aware of the school's daily events. Recently, the school has begun to share information by holding coffee mornings which strengthen parents' awareness of the school's work and expectations.

## 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).**