



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

A report on

Ysgol Syr John Rhys

**Ponterwyd
Aberystwyth
Ceredigion
SY23 3JX**

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 Syr John Rhys

Name of provider	Ysgol Syr John Rhys
Local authority	Ceredigion County Council
Language of the provider	Welsh
Type of school	Primary
Religious character	
Number of pupils on roll	22
Pupils of statutory school age	19
Number in nursery classes (if applicable)	
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>	33.9%
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>	23%
Percentage of statutory school age pupils who speak Welsh at home	5%
Percentage of statutory school age pupils with English as an additional language	0.0%
Date of headteacher appointment	September 2009
Date of previous Estyn inspection (if applicable)	28/04/2015
Start date of inspection	11/03/2024

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

- a. The term 'additional learning needs' is being used to describe those pupils on the SEN/ALN register of the school.

Overview

Ysgol Syr John Rhys is a successful learning community that celebrates Welsh culture, courtesy and respect, and pupils' achievements, exceptionally well. The headteacher provides clear and wise guidance and respects the efforts of everyone who contributes to pupils' well-rounded education. Staff are committed to providing high quality care and pupils' well-being in a homely and supportive learning environment. This has a strong influence on pupils' positive attitudes towards each other and others. The strategic co-operation with two neighbouring schools that are under the headteacher's care has a positive effect on provision and pupils' progress.

Staff work together successfully to plan a range of stimulating play and learning experiences for pupils. They provide a broad curriculum that is relevant to pupils' interests, including studying the history and geography of the school's area. As a result, pupils' pride in their local area is clear.

Most pupils develop knowledge, understanding and oral, numeracy and digital skills that are appropriate for their age and starting points successfully. For example, most develop their English oral and reading skills skilfully, contribute purposefully to class discussions and express their views clearly and maturely. However, pupils' Welsh reading and writing skills do not develop soundly enough, particularly their ability to read aloud and discuss texts confidently.

Provision for supporting the learning skills of pupils with additional learning needs (ALN) is effective. As a result, they make good progress over time considering the targets of their individual programmes and their previous achievements.

The school's self-evaluation and quality assurance arrangements are thorough. Members of the governing body support the headteacher and staff purposefully. They have a sound awareness of the school's strengths and improvement priorities and provide an appropriate balance of support and challenge.

The relationship between the school and parents is sound. Parents are very proud that their children attend such a supportive small school which is completely central to the rural community of the Ponterwyd area.

Recommendations

R1 Develop pupils' Welsh reading and writing skills

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' skills are around what is expected for their age and stage of development. However, nearly all pupils do not understand or speak Welsh on entry to the school. During their time at the school, most pupils make appropriate progress from their starting points, including pupils with ALN and those who are eligible for free school meals.

From a young age, pupils develop their ability to respect each other's contributions, for example when sharing ideas during learning sessions and working together during group activities. By Year 2, many pupils understand and respond appropriately to staff's questions and instructions. They begin to expand their vocabulary appropriately to talk about their learning experiences and use simple sentence patterns in both languages, for example when discussing the results of an ice melting experiment. A majority of the oldest pupils use the Welsh language correctly to explain and respond to challenging questions. However, few pupils use the Welsh language spontaneously to talk in their learning groups.

The youngest pupils recognise basic letters and numbers appropriately and show enjoyment in learning them. Pupils in Years 1 and 2 enjoy listening to stories and are able to recount them enthusiastically to their friends and adults. Many pupils at the top of the school read fluently in a variety of contexts in English. They discuss text confidently, recalling what they have read and identifying the main points maturely. However, only a few pupils succeed in reading and discussing Welsh texts to the same standard.

On the whole, many pupils' writing skills develop purposefully from their starting points. The youngest pupils enjoy experimenting with making marks independently. In Years 1 and 2, a majority write simple sentences fairly independently, for example when choosing adjectives carefully to describe a penguin. The oldest pupils write in a number of genres across the areas of learning in both languages, for example when writing a portrayal of a special mother and composing a script for a radio programme. However, the Welsh writing skills of a minority of pupils do not develop to the same standard as their English writing skills.

From an early age, many pupils' mathematics skills develop purposefully within their experiences. The youngest pupils recognise simple 2D and 3D shapes appropriately and begin to use their number skills when solving simple mathematical problems, for example when measuring objects around the school by using standard units. Many pupils in Years 1 and 2 have a good grasp of the value of 2-digit numbers. By Year 2, they handle and understand the value of money in practice while playing and learning in the class fruit shop. Many pupils begin to apply their numeracy skills successfully, for example when analysing a bar graph to discover the link between a person's height and running speed. At the top of the school, many have a good understanding of previous numeracy concepts. They succeed in responding to mental arithmetic questions and solve problems confidently.

From an early age, most pupils apply their digital skills in a range of creative contexts to support their wider learning. The youngest pupils use a digital tablet to support them to learn letters and numbers interactively. By Year 2, pupils use their word processing skills effectively to tell the story of a penguin. Many pupils in Years 3 to 6 use their digital skills confidently to support independent research and write, edit, redraft and present their findings. For example, they develop their skills effectively when creating and presenting a video to explain how to stay safe when mountain climbing. They develop their ability to handle data appropriately in spreadsheets and begin to develop their coding skills to control a programmable device.

Most pupils' physical skills develop robustly. The youngest pupils apply themselves enthusiastically to physical activities in the outdoor area, which includes taking risks while climbing and building in the outdoor area. They develop their skills successfully by taking part in a range of physical activities, such as attending regular swimming sessions and benefit from stimulating outdoor experiences. The oldest pupils develop creative dancing skills skilfully in an Urdd competition. Many enjoy attending the weekly sports club, which has a positive effect on their well-being and attitudes towards the importance of keeping fit.

Most pupils' creative skills develop soundly. Their enjoyment and pride in this area is clear, for example when performing confidently in the Christmas show. The oldest pupils develop their drawing skills by emulating the work of a famous French artist, by developing their ability to vary colour and texture skilfully. They use a variety of materials and styles effectively to produce attractive artwork, for example when creating a fashionable outfit and jewellery to compete in the Urdd Eisteddfod.

Well-being and attitudes to learning

Nearly all pupils behave well during their activities, when learning independently and when playing with their friends during break times. They are very considerate of their peers and respond sensibly when they face challenges.

Most pupils interact naturally with their friends and the staff who take care of them. They know what to do if they are concerned about any aspect of their lives. Many express their feelings confidently and are willing to share any concerns they have.

Nearly all pupils enjoy taking part in physical activities during their learning sessions and extra-curricular activities. They enjoy experiences such as a walk to the summit of Plynlimon and taking part in specific physical sessions on a weekly basis that support their well-being effectively. Pupils are aware of, and understand, the importance of eating and drinking healthily, including providing healthy snacks for all pupils.

During activities, most pupils are eager to learn. They demonstrate increasing independence from the outset in the youngest pupils' class. Most develop their self-confidence and succeed in concentrating for extended periods when playing and when developing their skills with equipment in the classroom and the outdoor learning areas. For example, the youngest pupils persevere diligently when measuring and cutting ribbons in the outdoor area. Many of the oldest pupils persevere maturely and offer support to their friends in completing their tasks. They

are willing to ask for support from members of the group and members of staff, as necessary.

Many pupils enjoy being challenged in independent activities and demonstrate increasing perseverance when trying to complete their tasks. For example, Year 1 and 2 pupils work diligently when planning and building an igloo in the challenge area in the classroom. Many show enthusiasm during learning sessions and concentrate effectively for extended periods.

Many pupils engage fully with their learning and show a positive attitude towards new activities. Purposeful opportunities are provided for pupils to provide input on what they would like to learn, which engages and holds their interest successfully.

Most pupils listen maturely to the contributions of others and learn to respect their views. The oldest pupils champion these behaviours for the youngest pupils effectively. They respect each other's views politely and understand the importance of tolerance, which promotes the school's kind ethos successfully.

As they mature, most pupils develop an increasing awareness of accepting and responding to support and feedback from their teachers and peers. By the top of the school, this working relationship matures and pupils understand the value and purpose of feedback as they develop their work and give of their best.

Pupils represent their peers on different councils purposefully, which include the school council and eco council. They value the close relationship they have with staff and enjoy working together when serving on these groups. Members of Cewri Cymru develop the school's radio station, which provides opportunities for pupils to produce and present items relating to Welsh events and Welsh language music. This inspires pupils successfully to take pride in the language.

Most pupils have a sound awareness of the importance of equality and respecting others. The oldest pupils consider and discuss children's rights meaningfully. They are aware of the importance of sustainability and are mindful of man's impact on the environment. Nearly all have a sound understanding of how to stay safe online. They understand and follow the school's rules and feel that they are treated fairly.

Teaching and learning experiences

The school's curriculum provides broad and rich learning experiences with a depth that develops pupils' interests and skills effectively. The headteacher and staff have worked closely with pupils, parents and governors to form a vision and plan a curriculum based on the local community and the wider world. Pupils' knowledge and understanding are developed regularly in interesting activities as they learn about the highest peaks in Ceredigion and during a trip to the famous Pontarfynach area.

Staff work together strategically across the three schools to embed the curriculum effectively. The school's teachers present a prompt, an inquiry question and a culmination for pupils. They consider the themes carefully to deliver an interesting and broad curriculum. The curriculum enables pupils to acquire suitable information and show progress in their oral, creative and digital skills in stimulating activities. Across the school, pupils are given purposeful opportunities to develop their

mathematical skills appropriately. However, provision does not support pupils to develop their Welsh reading and writing skills effectively enough. As a result, their Welsh reading and writing skills do not develop as well as their English reading skills.

The youngest pupils benefit from purposeful opportunities to experiment with mark-making independently. By Year 2, learners are given appropriate opportunities to write in a range of genres. At the top of the school, teachers plan regular opportunities for pupils to write at length. On the whole, teachers provide literacy and numeracy activities that challenge pupils to achieve to the best of their ability.

Staff have a productive working relationship with pupils and provide a combination of methods to guide learning and provide opportunities for them to learn independently. They encourage pupils' respect and courtesy successfully, which contributes well to realising the school's vision and ethos. Staff model polished language effectively and encourage and support pupils to use spoken Welsh regularly. This, in turn, has an appropriate effect on their oracy skills. The assistant supports learning in the classrooms effectively, by supporting individuals and specific groups of learners skilfully. Teachers ask pupils challenging questions effectively to deepen learning and support them to make progress in their skills.

Teachers present stimulating experiences for pupils in learning sessions. They share and explain the aim of activities sensibly and include pupils in the process of agreeing on the steps that they should consider to complete their work to the best of their ability. Meaningful oral feedback from staff enables pupils to know how well they are achieving and the support they need to improve specific pieces of work. Regular opportunities are provided for pupils to reflect on their work and to identify and act on what and how to move their learning forward. Staff provide relevant annual reports for parents about their children's progress, achievements and attitudes to learning.

Staff use information about pupils' progress purposefully at the beginning of the year to plan the next steps in their learning. Staff identify the progress and development of individuals in detail, including specific groups of pupils. As a result, most pupils make sound progress from their starting points.

Staff invite various visitors to the school to enrich and develop pupils' understanding of specific areas of learning. For example, they organise workshops with a local chef and hold radio activities with a famous radio presenter to develop the oracy skills and raise the confidence of the oldest pupils. Staff take advantage of the expertise of local residents to stimulate learning well, which includes working closely with the community and parents to plan and create products to be sold in the local shop. The oldest pupils benefit from attending Urdd residential camps which develop their physical skills and well-being, their ability to work as part of a team and develop their pride in being Welsh.

Care, support and guidance

The school is an inclusive and happy community that supports the emotional, health and social needs of all pupils effectively. Staff place a strong emphasis on promoting positive behaviour and fostering pupils' respect for each other purposefully. This is highlighted in the good behaviour and courtesy of nearly all pupils.

The headteacher and all staff have a thorough knowledge of each child. They use detailed and accessible methods to identify the progress of all pupils, including those with ALN. This supports staff to ensure that most pupils make consistent progress in line with their individual starting points and learning targets.

The additional learning needs co-ordinator and the assistant who is responsible for support programmes support pupils conscientiously and are enthusiastic about their responsibilities. They provide purposeful procedures that ensure a good knowledge of all pupils who are on the ALN register and those who are a cause of concern. For example, they identify and support pupils with emotional needs from an early age. Staff have productive links with a range of external partnerships to support ALN provision. These include the educational psychologist and members of the authority's behaviour team, who are a key part of providing suitable support for specific pupils.

Staff provide effective sessions to meet pupils' well-being needs. Provision to promote health and fitness is popular among pupils and has a consistent effect on their well-being and educational development. The emphasis on taking care of physical, mental and emotional well-being is a priority in learning sessions. As a result, many pupils discuss these aspects confidently, which includes sharing their feelings and concerns with others. Purposeful opportunities are provided for pupils to celebrate that everyone is different and that the importance of this needs to be considered in the wider community.

The school's culture promotes pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development effectively and supports them to treat others with empathy. For example, they hold a harvest thanksgiving service with the community in the local church. Suitable collective worship sessions are provided, along with opportunities for pupils to reflect on morals and how to take care of each other. Opportunities for pupils to develop strong values and explore beliefs are beneficial, for example when learning about the story of Moses and researching the traditions of the Diwali festival.

Staff promote pupils' understanding of their Welsh identity, heritage and culture effectively. For example, staff enrich pupils' learning by providing learning experiences about local significant locations, such as the history of constructing Nant-y-moch reservoir and the effect on the community. As a result, pupils understand the inherent nature of their local area in comparison with living in other areas of Wales and beyond. Teachers provide rich opportunities for pupils to take part in performances and events to foster their self-confidence and expressive ability. These opportunities include taking part in shows and concerts in the community in a productive partnership with two neighbouring schools and in the Urdd Eisteddfod. A close link with the community is a strong element of the school's work.

The school has robust procedures for monitoring pupils' punctuality and attendance rates. It promotes the importance of good attendance and works closely with families and the welfare officer, where necessary. As a result, the school's attendance rate is on the increase this year. The headteacher and staff understand their responsibilities in safeguarding pupils and there is a purposeful culture of caring for pupils.

Leadership and management

The headteacher has a clear vision based on a caring and supportive ethos in which most pupils make progress and develop into conscientious members of the school community. They realise the school motto successfully, namely 'Dysg, Dawn, Daioni', and foster values that motivate pupils to be confident and healthy learners who take pride in their community and culture.

The headteacher sets high expectations for herself, staff and pupils. This contributes firmly to developing a team of hard-working and supportive staff and promoting staff's well-being. They uphold professional values and behaviour well, which contributes directly to improving provision and ensuring that effective co-operation is a key part of the school's arrangements. Co-operation across the three schools has a positive influence on pupils' education.

Leadership procedures, which have been established extremely effectively across the three schools under the skilled care of the headteacher, have a positive effect on the progress and well-being of the school's pupils, in addition to provision in the classrooms and the wider learning areas. Leaders and staff plan purposefully to meet local and national priorities, for example in introducing the principles of Curriculum for Wales and implementing key elements of the Additional Learning Needs Act effectively. Teachers are responsible for specific areas of learning and experience, which enriches pupils' learning experiences. The assistant is a key member of the school team who contributes purposefully to improving progress in pupils' learning, well-being and social skills. Staff promote the Welsh language and Welshness purposefully, which contributes to developing pupils' pride in their language and heritage successfully.

The school's priorities for improvement are based on a purposeful range of first-hand evidence and staff's understanding of them is sound. Effective procedures have been established for reviewing progress, identifying areas for improvement and identifying actions to be implemented. These include an analysis of progress in pupils' outcomes and sensible opportunities to scrutinise work and observe learning sessions. Opportunities to work with staff at the two neighbouring schools strengthen these arrangements. As a result, the headteacher and staff have a thorough knowledge of their school and address most of the improvements purposefully.

Members of the governing body receive and consider useful information about the effect of the school's improvement procedures on provision and pupils' progress and well-being. There are opportunities for members of the governing body to play an active part in the self-evaluation process, which includes visiting classes, discussing with pupils and scrutinising their work. Overall, they question the school on suitable issues, including various teaching methods. This helps leaders consider the clear steps for improvement intelligently. Governors work with staff and pupils to ensure that the school has suitable arrangements to promote healthy eating and drinking. Governors take pride in the active partnership between the three schools in the area, which has a positive influence on the progress and well-being of the school's pupils and provides them with valuable extra-curricular activities.

Expenditure links purposefully with the school's objectives and improvement plans. The headteacher and governors use the school's budget effectively to enrich the

curriculum and support and raise pupils' standards. They link expenditure appropriately with the priorities in the development plan and monitor funding carefully to ensure its best use. Leaders plan the expenditure of the pupil development grant sensibly, which includes providing support programmes that are tailored to the learning and emotional needs of individuals.

There are valuable opportunities for staff to develop professionally. These include opportunities for purposeful training on teaching science and technology and training on specific aspects of support methods for pupils with ALN. Performance management procedures promote staff's professional learning appropriately and are beginning to have a positive effect on standards and provision.

The school has an active relationship with the local secondary school and cluster schools, which includes opportunities for pupils from small schools to attend transition days. This raises pupils' confidence as they move to secondary school.

The relationship between the school and parents is sound. The school communicates effectively with them to ensure that they are aware of day-to-day events and share their children's achievements and successes. Parents are very proud that their children attend such a supportive school that is completely central to the rural community of the Ponterwyd area.

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).