



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

A report on

Lixwm Church in Wales Voluntary Aided School

**Ffordd Gledlom,
Lixwm,
HOLYWELL
Flintshire
CH8 8NF**

Date of inspection: May 2024

by

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

About Lixwm Church in Wales Voluntary Aided School

Name of provider	Lixwm Church in Wales Voluntary Aided School
Local authority	Flintshire County Council
Language of the provider	English
Type of school	Primary
Religious character	Church in Wales Voluntary Aided
Number of pupils on roll	45
Pupils of statutory school age	38
Number in nursery classes	11
Percentage of pupils eligible for free school meals over a three-year average (The national percentage of pupils eligible for free school meals over a three-year average in Primary is 23.7%)	*
Percentage of pupils identified as having additional learning needs (a) (The national percentage of pupils identified as having an additional learning need in Primary is 13.2%)	*
Percentage of pupils who speak Welsh at home	*
Percentage of pupils with English as an additional language	0.0%
Date of headteacher appointment	01/09/2023
Date of previous Estyn inspection (if applicable)	05/12/2016
Start date of inspection	13/05/2024

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

Lixwm Church in Wales Voluntary Aided School joined with Ysgol Yr Esgob, Caerwys, to become the Bryniau Clwyd Federation in 2020. At that time, the headteacher from Ysgol Yr Esgob took on the role of headteacher for the federation. In September 2023, the headteacher took a temporary position with the regional school improvement service. To cover this absence, a headteacher from another local school has taken up the role of headteacher on a secondment basis. This arrangement is set to be in place until April 2025.

Pupils at the school have positive attitudes to learning and apply themselves well during lessons and activities. Their behaviour is very good. Pupils have a notable influence on the life and work of their school which they use wisely and with appropriate autonomy to bring about positive change. During their time at school, they make good progress as learners and in their development as compassionate and caring contributors to school and the wider community.

There are warm and beneficial relationships between staff and pupils. Teachers and a skilled team of teaching assistants know the pupils, their needs and interests well. They provide an engaging and varied range of learning experiences that capture pupils' interests well and promote an enjoyment of learning and being at school. Provision to develop pupils' skills is effective overall and supports pupils to make good progress in writing in English, learning the Welsh language, using number and applying digital skills to research and present their ideas. However, pupils receive fewer opportunities to learn about other mathematical concepts such as shape and measure and their experience of coding and working with databases is limited. Teachers nurture a love of reading in pupils but do not always support pupils to develop a full range of strategies, for example to help them when they get stuck on a challenging new word.

School leaders have a clear vision to develop one school over two sites and are making good progress towards this goal. They have established a strong team ethos and are beginning to make effective use of the opportunities that a federation of school presents, for example by enabling leaders, teachers and teaching assistants to begin to share their ideas and practice. In a few instances, this work has had a notable and positive impact on pupils' experiences at school and their progress. Leaders work well with external partners, and this helps them to have a good understanding of many of the schools' current strengths and to identify opportunities for further improvement. However, within the federation, leaders' roles in evaluating the difference that teaching makes to pupils' progress in lessons and over time are generally at an early stage of development.

Recommendations

- R1 Further develop leadership capacity across the federation by sharing effective practice and improving the ability of staff to monitor and evaluate the difference that teaching makes to pupils' learning and progress

R2 Further improve provision to support the development of the full range of pupils' reading, numeracy and digital skills

What happens next

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

Main evaluation

Learning

Many pupils start school with skills and understanding at or above those expected for their age. During their time in school, most pupils make good progress from their different starting points, including those with additional learning needs (ALN).

As the pupils move through the school, most make strong progress in developing their language and communication skills. The youngest pupils are keen to chat with staff and with visitors and talk happily about what they are doing. Younger pupils listen with increasing interest and sustained concentration for extended periods of time. By Year 3, nearly all pupils converse well with peers and adults. Older pupils listen purposefully to gain information, for example when discussing the shared text during whole class reading. They volunteer opinions readily, explain their answers and collaborate well in pairs and groups. Most pupils across the school listen well and ask relevant questions, for example during collective worship.

The youngest pupils begin to recognise and name a range of sounds and use this knowledge to start to read simple texts. Most younger pupils use their knowledge of phonics to sound out unfamiliar words. By Year 2, many pupils read with confidence and use their skills purposefully in a range of contexts, for example to read the instructions on daily challenges. As pupils move through the school, they build on this progress and develop a suitable range of techniques to become fluent readers. By Year 6, many pupils develop a love of reading and read a range of suitable texts. However, in a few instances pupils do not have the strategies they need to help them to read unfamiliar words, for example by breaking the word down or using contextual clues to work out what the word might be. Older pupils generally use their reading skills appropriately to support their learning, for example when researching Welsh inventors.

The writing skills of most pupils develop effectively. From an early age, they practise mark making and drawing patterns correctly, which leads to forming letters well. They enjoy the range of opportunities to develop their independent writing skills, for example when writing a card to thank a school visitor. By the end of Year 2, most pupils write confidently in a range of genres that relate to their themes well. For example, they retell the story of the good Samaritan. Most older pupils plan their writing thoughtfully and show a good understanding of the writing process. They write for a variety of purposes well, such as instructions and persuasive texts to attract

visitors to Wales. By the end of Year 6, many pupils develop suitable independent writing skills which enable them to reflect and improve their writing successfully.

Most pupils develop their mathematical skills and understanding well as they progress through the school. The youngest pupils develop their knowledge of number through a range of games and songs and enjoy using counters and other maths equipment. By the end of Year 2, many pupils solve a range of word problems accurately, collect information and record their results in simple tables and graphs. Many older pupils develop a good working knowledge of number and place value and perform a range of calculations in all four operations accurately. They use their calculation skills to solve a range of word problems successfully and manipulate numbers mentally with accuracy. Older pupils develop their data handling skills well, for example by interpreting line graphs. However, there are few opportunities for pupils to develop their mathematical skills in other important areas, such as shape and measure.

Younger pupils use their digital skills to instruct a programmable toy to move in a variety of directions and use data handling software to display information about pupils in their class. They use a range of apps and programs to support their learning in language and maths. As they move through the school, pupils develop their use of multimedia tools and word processing packages to an appropriate standard to present and produce work across the curriculum. However, important aspects of digital learning such as pupils' use of databases, coding and spreadsheets are underdeveloped.

Most pupils develop their Welsh language skills very well and use them in a range of contexts successfully. The youngest pupils develop early Welsh language skills through a range of songs and rhymes and use them in purposeful contexts, for example when asking for snacks. By the end of Year 2, many pupils can ask and answer a range of questions about themselves or their peers, for example asking them, *ble wyt ti'n byw?* As pupils move through the school, they develop their Welsh skills strongly by increasing their vocabulary and varying sentence patterns. Many older pupils are keen to use their Welsh when speaking in class and with visitors.

Most pupils' physical skills develop well through a range of experiences and activities. For example, pupils develop their teamwork through regular sports sessions and competitions with local schools. Older pupils develop their thinking and problem-solving skills suitably. However, opportunities for younger pupils to engage in purposeful exploration and play that develops their independence are limited. Many pupils develop creative and musical skills during well-focused drama, art and music lessons. For example, older pupils develop and perform their interpretation of the play *Macbeth*.

Well-being and attitudes to learning

During their time at school, most pupils develop positive attitudes to learning. They enjoy and participate enthusiastically in the learning experiences on offer. Pupils take great pride in belonging to the school community and embody the school's values and ethos in their actions. Behaviour during lessons and at social times is generally very good.

Most older pupils develop appropriate levels of independence as learners. They use the skills and knowledge they have learned previously and feedback from teachers and teaching assistants successfully to help them move forward, for instance in their development as writers. They show appropriate levels of resilience and sustain focus when working to complete their tasks. Older pupils have suitable influence over what they learn in their topics, for example they suggest what they would like to learn about and teachers incorporate these suggestions into their planning. Recently, the school's very youngest pupils have responded well to adaptations to the learning environment. They are now beginning to take good advantage of opportunities to make choices about their learning and play and to develop confidence and independence in their surroundings. In a few instances, opportunities for pupils in the foundation learning class to direct their own learning or follow their own interests are limited slightly by prescriptive challenges set by adults or by adults being too influential in shaping pupils' play.

Most pupils support each other at work and play. They respect, value and learn from the contributions of others. This enhances their progress and enjoyment of school. Pupils embrace new challenges with enthusiasm and appreciate the importance of learning new skills. For example, they work hard to learn basic British Sign Language and understand the benefits that this learning will bring. Overall, pupils' positive attitudes and enthusiasm for learning support them to make good progress in their learning and wider development.

Pupils feel safe and valued at school. They form positive relationships with their peers and staff. They know that they are listened to and that they have a strong voice in influencing the life and work of the school. They are beginning to use this voice wisely, for example through their work as members of various pupil groups such as the School Council, who work hard to support charitable causes and the proactive Criw Cymraeg who work diligently to show others that learning Welsh 'can be fun'.

Through their work across the curriculum, pupils learn about the importance of rules, of their rights and of the rights of children around the world. They learn about the importance of sustainability, for example through such activities as growing their own produce.

Nearly all pupils understand the importance of a healthy diet and lifestyle. They bring water to school and understand that fizzy drinks are not good for them. They take good advantage of opportunities to be physically active, for instance during swimming sessions, the daily mile and drama lessons or as a natural part of their learning when pedalling vehicles in the outdoor learning areas. Nearly all pupils understand the importance of internet safety.

Teaching and learning experiences

Across the school, staff form caring and respectful working relationships with pupils that foster a supportive, inclusive and positive learning environment. This enables pupils to participate fully in learning experiences and make good overall progress during their time at school.

Pupils receive a broad and balanced range of learning experiences that meet their needs and interests well. Older pupils are beginning to influence what they learn by

suggesting ideas at the start of topics. The content of the school's curriculum and the effective teaching of it supports pupils' progress well across the areas of learning and experience set out in Curriculum for Wales. A range of interesting work, such as the innovative Halkyn Mountain project where pupils learnt about the history of their locality, along with a worthwhile range of visitors and trips, ensures that learning experiences are varied, interesting and relevant. Experiences include visits to the local church and residential trips to places such as Kingswood and Plas Menai. Pupils have also performed at William Aston Hall in Wrexham as part of 'The First Experiences' concert with the BBC orchestra.

There are valuable opportunities for pupils to develop and use many aspects of their literacy, numeracy, and digital skills. Provision to support pupils to become effective writers is developing well. Staff create an environment that promotes a love of reading where pupils have access to a good range of literature. This is enhanced by visits from the mobile library, which pupils enjoy greatly. However, teaching does not always ensure that pupils develop the reading strategies they need, for example when they encounter unfamiliar words. Provision to develop pupils' Welsh skills is strong and ensures that pupils generally make very good progress in learning the language.

The school's approach to teaching mathematics ensures that pupils work successfully with number and apply these skills well across the curriculum. However, there are fewer opportunities for pupils to learn about shape, space and measure. Pupils have regular and worthwhile opportunities to use a suitable range of digital skills, for example to present their work in posters or media presentations. However, opportunities for them to create databases and develop programming skills are limited.

Provision for the school's younger pupils is developing well, especially in Nursery when sessions are led by a teacher. There are worthwhile opportunities for pupils to learn through first-hand experiences and play. Challenges provided for pupils as they move through foundation learning are generally appropriate and ensure a suitable breadth to learning. However, this approach occasionally stifles pupils' capacity to lead their own learning and be creative.

Teaching approaches, for older pupils, are effective. They ensure that pupils engage well with all opportunities to learn and make good progress. Sequences of lessons have clear and relevant objectives and match pupils' needs well. Older pupils use these objectives with increasing independence to evaluate their own progress, especially in writing activities. Learning develops at a suitable pace and there are high expectations for pupils' progress. Teachers generally provide useful opportunities for pupils to work in pairs and small groups, supporting them to share their own ideas and understanding and to listen and learn from each other. Teachers make effective use of questioning and feedback to address misconceptions and to move learning forward. They provide detailed termly and annual reports for parents.

In classrooms, teachers deploy teaching assistants well to support learning. These staff contribute significantly to the effective learning culture at the school.

Care, support and guidance

The school is a highly inclusive learning community. Staff place a high priority on the well-being of pupils. The care, support and guidance provided supports pupils to engage fully with their learning experiences and to develop as confident members of the school community. They take pride in sharing their learning with parents, for example by sharing their school experiences via a digital platform.

Provision to support pupils' social, cultural and moral development is effective. For example, from a very young age pupils learn to share, to take turns and collaborate with others. Staff support pupils to develop an understanding that there are differences and similarities between people in school, in their local community and around the world. They do this imaginatively in engaging contexts, for example through topic work on the theme of 'this is me' and by broadening pupils' communication skills through teaching British Sign Language. Pupils have valuable opportunities to consider moral issues. They develop a good understanding of their rights and of the rights of children across the globe. Staff help pupils to develop important values and to become caring and compassionate. Pupils exemplify these attributes consistently, for example when older and younger pupils support each other through the school's house system.

Across the school, relationships between staff and pupils underpin a positive and calm learning environment. The school's approaches to teaching and the learning experiences provided for pupils generally ensure that standards of behaviour are good. When necessary, skilled staff deal positively and sensitively with any situations that arise to help pupils to reengage with the learning on offer.

Provision for pupils with ALN is effective. Teachers and leaders use assessment information well to identify pupils who are not making the expected progress. They offer a wide range of beneficial strategies to boost pupils' literacy and numeracy skills and to support their emotional development. Staff monitor the impact of interventions closely and keep their effectiveness under review. As a result, most pupils who receive additional support make strong progress from their starting points.

There are valuable opportunities for pupils to influence the life and work of the school. Staff ensure that pupil voice groups receive a good balance of autonomy and support. This enables groups such as the Criw Cymraeg and School Council to have an authentic experience of taking responsibility for representing their peers. Staff take appropriate account of pupils' input when planning topics.

The school provides a suitable range of opportunities for pupils to celebrate local and Welsh heritage and culture. For example, staff ensure that pupils have extensive opportunities to hear and use the Welsh language and explore the work of Welsh artists. They celebrate Saint David's Day with an annual Eisteddfod. Pupils participate enthusiastically in various activities including art and craft competitions that enable them to showcase their creative talents.

The school has extensive outdoor areas and use these imaginatively to support pupils' well-being and the development of pupils' understanding of their environment and the importance of healthy lifestyles. Opportunities to grow produce including

vegetables and fruit enable all pupils to become aware of the importance of healthy eating as well as the route 'from field to plate'.

The school's arrangements to safeguard pupils meet requirements and give no cause for concern.

Leadership and management

The Bryniau Clwyd Federation was formed in 2020 through the amalgamation of Ysgol Yr Esgob and Lixwm Primary School. The headteacher from Ysgol Yr Esgob became headteacher of the federation of schools. In September 2023, the headteacher took up a temporary role with the regional school improvement service. The federation seconded a headteacher from another local school to take over the leadership responsibility in the absence of the substantive headteacher. This arrangement will be in place until April 2025.

In recent times there have been notable challenges to the school community. The acting headteacher has responded to these challenges sensitively, proactively and effectively. She has worked with pupils, staff, governors and parents to develop a strong team ethos and common sense of purpose. She provides reassuring leadership and understands the needs of the communities the schools serve extremely well. This leadership ensures that the federation moves forward as a single body. Across the federation, leadership ensures that there is a calm and compassionate ethos and an uplifting learning environment where nearly all pupils thrive.

The acting headteacher has a clear vision for establishing one school on two sites. In collaboration with leaders across the federation, she is beginning to implement this vision successfully. Leaders are beginning to take advantage of a few of the opportunities that the federation of schools presents. Leaders identify valuable opportunities for pupils from the two schools to learn and enjoy experiences together, for example through residential visits and musical activities. There are increasing opportunities for staff to collaborate and share their expertise for the benefit of pupils. For example, collaboration has led to improvements to the learning environment and provision for younger pupils at Lixwm whilst the digital lead teacher from Lixwm is supporting staff in Ysgol Yr Esgob in mapping out digital skills across the curriculum. Joint working in literacy has seen writing skills improve in both schools.

Staff understand their roles and responsibilities well. Arrangements to deploy teaching assistants are effective overall and, in a few instances, highly effective. For example, leaders take make best use of teaching assistants' varied skills and specialisms to benefit pupils' learning and development.

Leaders have a suitable understanding of strengths and areas for development across the federation. They draw upon a range of first-hand evidence, including classroom observations and pupils' work. Leaders work with external partners to support evaluation and improvement work appropriately, for instance when developing their strategy for mathematics and numeracy. However, whilst leaders have an accurate overall picture of the schools' current position, evaluation work lacks precision. It does not focus sharply enough on evaluating the difference that teaching makes to pupils' progress. This means that they occasionally miss

opportunities to identify and share highly effective practice or to address areas that need improvement. Arrangements to develop leaders' and staff capacity to engage in monitoring work and share classroom practice across the federation are at an early stage of development overall.

Leaders and staff show the capacity to bring about improvement. For example, they have developed a highly effective curriculum that matches the needs of pupils and the ethos and principles of Curriculum for Wales. Leaders ensure that provision to develop pupils' Welsh language skills has a high priority. This provision is consistently strong and nurtures positive attitudes to learning the language.

There are meaningful professional learning opportunities for staff to improve aspects of their practice, for example to develop assessment strategies across the federation. Professional learning supports school improvement and the effective performance management processes for teachers and teaching assistants. This work enhances staff performance appropriately, for example, by enabling them to provide bespoke support for pupils with ALN. Work with external partners such as the local cluster of schools and specialist agencies is beneficial.

Across the federation leaders and staff have positive working relationships with parents. Parents value the effective communication between home and school as well as opportunities to learn about the schools' work at first-hand, for example by attending workshops about Curriculum for Wales and Assessment. There are regular opportunities for parents to learn about their child's progress.

Governors undertake their roles effectively. They have a suitable understanding of the schools' strengths and of their progress towards meeting improvement goals. They support the schools' safeguarding culture appropriately and ensure appropriate arrangements for healthy eating and drinking. Governors work with school leaders to use and monitor finances effectively. This includes the use of the pupil development grant.

Evidence base of the report

Before an inspection, inspectors:

- analyse the outcomes from the parent/carer and pupil questionnaires and consider the views of teachers and the governing body through their questionnaire responses

During an inspection, inspectors normally:

- hold a meeting with parents/carers to hear their views on the school and its effectiveness
- meet the headteacher, governors, senior and middle leaders (where appropriate) and individual teachers to evaluate the impact of the school's work
- meet pupils to discuss their work, to listen to them read 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 classes, including learning support groups 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 and in outdoor areas
- where appropriate, visit the specialist resource base within the school to see pupils' learning
- observe and speak to pupils at lunch and break times and at a sample of after-school clubs, where appropriate
- 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 (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 publication. Any enquiries or comments regarding this document/publication should be addressed to:

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