



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

A report on

**The Maelor School
Penley
Wrexham
LL13 0LU**

Date of inspection: February 2019

by

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

About The Maelor School

The Maelor School is an English-medium 11-18 mixed comprehensive school. The school is situated in the village of Penley to the south east of Wrexham and serves a wide geographical area which includes both rural and urban areas. Currently, there are 809 pupils on roll, including 146 in the sixth form. These figures are slightly higher than the numbers of pupils when the school was last inspected in 2014.

The percentage of pupils eligible for free school meals is 5%, which is lower than the national average of 16.4% for secondary schools. The school has about 12.4% of pupils on the special educational needs register, which is lower than the Wales average of 22.9% for secondary schools. The percentage of pupils with a statement of special educational needs is 0.6%, compared with the average of 2.2% for the whole of Wales. The school has a local authority special needs resource base for pupils with autism spectrum disorder and also those with dyslexia, with 12 pupils currently attending this resource as well as mainstream education at the school.

Around 1% of pupils have English as an additional language. Most pupils come from a white British background. Only a very few pupils speak Welsh as their first language.

The current headteacher was appointed in September 2011. The senior leadership team consists of the headteacher, one deputy headteacher and an acting deputy headteacher, three assistant headteachers, an associate headteacher and a business manager.

The school is currently a curriculum pioneer school and is working with the Welsh Government and other schools to take forward developments relating to curriculum reform.

Further information is available from the Welsh Government My Local School website at the link below.
<http://mylocalschool.wales.gov.uk/Schools/SchoolSearch?lang=en>

Summary

The Maelor School's inclusive and supportive ethos has a beneficial impact on pupils' wellbeing and personal development. Most pupils are well behaved and are courteous and respectful towards their peers, staff and visitors. Many pupils have good attitudes to learning and engage well in the wide range of extra-curricular activities offered by the school.

Most teachers have purposeful and respectful working relationships with pupils, and teaching in many lessons is effective in ensuring that many pupils make suitable progress in their knowledge, understanding and skills. However, many teachers' questioning does not probe pupils' understanding or challenge them to develop their verbal skills well enough, and in a minority of lessons, learning activities do not always challenge pupils sufficiently to achieve their full potential.

The headteacher provides assured and reflective leadership, and together with the senior leadership team, he fosters a supportive and caring ethos that creates an orderly and purposeful learning environment. Leaders have been successful in securing improvements in many aspects of the school's work, such as improving behaviour, the quality of written feedback and the provision for Welsh. However, leadership at all levels has not had enough impact on improving the quality and consistency of teaching and in raising standards.

Inspection area	Judgement
Standards	Adequate and needs improvement
Wellbeing and attitudes to learning	Good
Teaching and learning experiences	Adequate and needs improvement
Care, support and guidance	Good
Leadership and management	Adequate and needs improvement

Recommendations

- R1 Improve standards, particularly at key stage 4
- R2 Improve the quality of teaching
- R3 Improve leadership at all levels, including the rigour and effectiveness of quality improvement processes
- R4 Address the health and safety concerns raised during the inspection

What happens next

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

Main findings

Standards: Adequate and needs improvement

In many cases, many pupils make suitable progress in their knowledge, understanding and skills. They recall prior learning appropriately and a majority can apply this to new situations. In a few particularly effective lessons, most pupils make strong progress, for example when developing their reasoning skills in relation to measures of average for data represented in tables. However, a minority of pupils do not make enough progress in lessons, and over the last two years the school's performance at key stage 4 has been below that of similar schools in the majority of indicators.

Many pupils listen with attention and respect to their teachers and peers. A majority of pupils speak clearly and make suitable contributions to small group or whole class discussions. A few offer well developed extended answers and explain their reasoning in detail, for example when discussing whether gender was an issue in recruiting people to join voyages of exploration in the fifteenth century. However, a minority of pupils are reluctant to offer their opinions during whole class discussions or when working in small groups. A minority of pupils are confident to speak Welsh in Welsh lessons and show good pronunciation, such as when discussing their views on sports and pastimes.

Many pupils have sound basic reading skills. They locate facts and extract key information from a range of texts. For example, in science, Year 9 pupils skim and scan articles in order to identify the dangers of passive smoking. A majority of pupils have a clear understanding of persuasive techniques and use inference and deduction well, for example to enhance their understanding of characters in literary texts such as 'Of Mice and Men' and 'Martyn Pig'.

A majority of pupils produce writing that is thoughtful, technically secure, and structured suitably, such as when writing about the development of gargoyles in art lessons. Many pupils write for a suitable range of purposes including literary essays on prose and poetry and opinionative pieces on challenging topics such as euthanasia, organ transplants and gun-crime. However, a minority of pupils make frequent, basic errors in their writing. They do not take enough responsibility for proof-reading their work before they hand it to the teacher. In Welsh, a majority of pupils write extended pieces that are suitably structured and include a wide range of vocabulary. They have a good understanding of tense and write well in the first, second and third person.

Many pupils have a firm grasp of the main number skills. They apply these skills well when solving problems which are set in everyday life. For example, in mathematics, pupils solve problems that involve calculating household bills. Many have an appropriate understanding of measurement, such as when completing practical work in physics such as determining the density of different materials. These pupils draw graphs accurately and analyse data from various sources suitably to reach sensible conclusions.

In general, pupils develop their information and communication technology (ICT) skills suitably in information technology lessons and a few other subjects. For example, in physical education, pupils use tablets to analyse their own performance and that of others. However, pupils' development of more advanced applications such as spreadsheets, databases and multimedia packages is underdeveloped due to there being insufficient opportunities across the curriculum.

Overall, pupils develop their physical skills suitably. For example, during physical education lessons they develop their defending skills and their awareness of space in netball. Many pupils develop their creativity well, for example when drawing masks to reflect the Mexican 'day of the dead' culture.

In recent years, the school's performance at key stage 4 has generally declined. In 2018, performance is below that seen in similar schools in many indicators. Over the last two years, performance in the level 2 threshold including English and mathematics has declined and is well below that in similar schools. Over the same period, performance in the capped points score also does not compare favourably with that in similar schools. Over the last three years, the proportion of pupils gaining five or more GCSEs or equivalent at grades A*-A has been consistently lower than in similar schools.

The performance of both boys and girls has declined over the last two years and in 2018 do not compare well with that of their counterparts in similar schools in many indicators.

At key stage 4, a majority of pupils achieve a level 2 GCSE qualification in Welsh.

At the end of Year 11, nearly all pupils continue their education either in a school or further education college.

In the sixth form, many pupils make secure progress in their lessons. They demonstrate enthusiasm, confidence and suitable subject knowledge. They work well in small groups and demonstrate well-developed oracy skills, for example when discussing changes to rural areas since the 1960s. In 2016 and 2017, performance in the sixth form has generally been lower than that in similar schools. Performance improved in 2018, however, and was broadly in line with that of similar schools in many indicators, though the proportion of pupils gaining three A Levels at grades A*-C remains lower than that in similar schools.

Wellbeing and attitudes to learning: Good

Most pupils feel safe in school and know who they can turn to if they require help. They feel that the school deals effectively with any issues. Most pupils behave well and are courteous to each other and to their teachers. They arrive promptly to lessons and are ready to learn. This contributes to a calm and purposeful learning environment.

Many pupils are capable learners who show suitable confidence in their learning. They work hard and sustain concentration, engaging well with their learning and taking pride in their work. In a few cases, pupils become disengaged from their work and do not listen with sufficient attention in class. A very few learners demonstrate inappropriate or immature behaviour but respond appropriately to the positive assertive discipline approach the school has adopted.

The majority of pupils show appropriate resilience when attempting challenging work. A minority have incomplete or missing work in their books or do not respond well enough to their teachers' comments.

Many pupils make informed healthy food choices and understand well the importance of exercise, for example when learning about the 'Eatwell plate' and nutritional values in design and technology and science. They understand well how to stay safe online. Pupils, particularly those in key stage 3, participate enthusiastically in the wide range of extra-curricular activities available. These include music, drama and sporting clubs such as netball, basketball, badminton and football.

Through the school council, pupils are actively involved in decision-making at the school. A few pupils show well-developed leadership and communication skills through their roles as sports leaders and as members of the school council. This has contributed to increased participation across the school in sporting clubs and to improving sustainability by reducing the use of plastic in the canteen. Sixth form pupils provide helpful support to younger pupils in the development of their literacy and numeracy skills.

Teaching and learning experiences: Adequate and needs improvement

Most teachers have secure subject knowledge and foster purposeful and respectful working relationships with pupils. They have well-established routines that ensure pupils settle quickly at the start of the lesson and are ready to learn.

Many teachers have appropriate expectations of pupils. They plan lessons suitably to include a range of activities that engage pupils well. They provide pupils with clear instructions and explain concepts well. These teachers ensure an appropriate balance between teacher-led activities and opportunities for pupils to work independently or in small groups to consolidate their knowledge and extend their understanding. They monitor pupil progress suitably and provide beneficial verbal feedback.

In a few lessons, inspirational teaching motivates and enthuses pupils. In these lessons, teachers are passionate about their subject and this enthusiasm engages pupils well. They plan stimulating and challenging tasks that encourage pupils to think deeply. They monitor pupil progress closely and use this information expertly to adapt activities. There is a brisk pace to learning and pupils make strong progress. These teachers use questioning skilfully to deepen pupils' understanding.

In a minority of cases, teachers' expectations of what pupils can achieve are too low. They do not plan activities that are matched closely enough to pupils' ability. These teachers' instructions and explanations are not clear enough. They do not monitor pupils' progress well enough and in a few cases, teachers do not address pupils' misconceptions in a timely manner. In a minority of instances, teachers' presentations are too long and they do not offer pupils enough opportunities to develop their independent learning skills. These factors contribute to pupils not making enough progress.

In many instances, teachers' questioning does not probe pupils' understanding effectively. They ask too many closed questions that require pupils to give only a brief response. As a result, pupils do not develop their verbal and thinking skills well enough.

Many teachers provide constructive and valuable written feedback to pupils on how they can improve their work and give them opportunities during lessons to do so. In a few instances, pupils do not respond appropriately to these comments, or teachers do not revisit the pupils' responses to check their progress.

The curriculum builds appropriately on pupils' learning from previous key stages. The school has developed useful partnerships with other providers and offers a comprehensive range of vocational and academic subjects that meets the needs of pupils well.

The school offers a suitably co-ordinated approach to the progressive development of pupils' skills across the curriculum. In many cases, departments provide an appropriate range of meaningful activities that contribute to the development of pupils' literacy skills, including valuable opportunities to write at length. In addition, there are generally suitable opportunities for them to develop their numeracy skills. However, learning experiences for pupils to improve their oracy skills are underdeveloped, and in a minority of instances, numeracy tasks do not offer a sufficient level of challenge. Provision to develop pupils' ICT skills, in particular the higher order skills, is underdeveloped.

The school identifies well pupils with weaker literacy and numeracy skills and provides helpful intervention programmes. It provides pupils with useful opportunities to consolidate these skills during form tutor time.

There is a wide range of valuable extra-curricular opportunities available for pupils such as cultural activities, sporting clubs and educational visits. More able pupils have access to relevant enrichment experiences that encourage progression on to higher education and appropriate career paths. For example, Year 10 girls develop their interest in engineering through the 'Make it Enterprising Challenge' competition and 'Seren' pupils in the sixth form have engaged in many successful events to support their career aspirations.

The school provides pupils with suitable opportunities to develop their appreciation of Welsh culture, including the annual eisteddfod, St David's Day assemblies and participation in a variety of Urdd competitions.

Care, support and guidance: Good

The Maelor School is an inclusive and caring community. It provides a welcoming environment for pupils, staff and visitors. There is a strong commitment to promoting equality and supporting pupils' social and emotional development, for example through a programme designed to develop positive relationships and a culture of friendship in Year 7.

The school has developed a thorough and useful tracking system to monitor the progress made by different groups of pupils. This provides senior leaders with a comprehensive oversight of school performance in subjects and key performance indicators throughout the year. This information is used efficiently to identify those pupils requiring a range of interventions. However, in a few instances teachers' assessment of pupil attainment is not accurate enough.

Behaviour and attendance are tracked closely. School leaders make purposeful use of the half-termly wellbeing reports to identify those pupils requiring specific pastoral interventions in order to remove their barriers to learning. The school has a comprehensive system for dealing with any instances of poor behaviour and this is applied consistently by teachers. This has a positive effect on nearly all pupils' ability to manage their behaviour appropriately. The very few reported incidents of bullying are managed efficiently.

Support and guidance for pupils with additional learning needs is strong and contributes well to the standards they achieve. Valuable and well-coordinated support is provided for pupils with additional learning needs in mainstream classes. Two learning resource units provide worthwhile individual and small group intervention to develop social, literacy and numeracy skills. Targets in individual education plans enable the school to monitor pupils' progress carefully within these intervention schemes.

The school engages productively with a wide range of specialist agencies and partners to address the varied needs of vulnerable pupils. The school creates effective packages of support such as counselling, mentoring and alternative courses for these pupils. The school's Pastoral Hub provides a safe environment that vulnerable pupils can access when required.

Parents receive helpful information about their children's progress, attendance and attitudes to learning. In addition to an appropriate annual report, useful interim reports inform pupils and parents regularly of developing strengths and areas for improvement. A range of workshops on aspects such as revision, mental health, and literacy and numeracy skills helps parents to support their child's academic progress and wellbeing. The school gives valuable advice and guidance to pupils and their parents to inform subject and future career choices.

A beneficial programme for personal and social education supports wellbeing and informs healthy life choices well. A wide range of external providers deliver useful sessions which enhance the range and quality of the topics addressed, for example diversity, youth justice, organ donation and resilience in adolescence. Whole school 'Pastoral Guidance days' also promote awareness of global development issues through the established link with Lesotho. Pupils' spiritual and moral development is addressed through effective assemblies and reflection time during tutor periods.

The school has beneficial arrangements to promote healthy eating and drinking. Pupils are offered a suitable range of extra-curricular activities in creative arts, music and sports, and educational visits that promote their health and social development.

There are suitable opportunities for all pupils, including those with additional learning needs, to undertake leadership roles. The school council influences school improvement competently, for example the introduction of the Play Shed which provides access to a wide range of activities during lunch-times. However, pupils have insufficient opportunities to influence how the school improves the quality of teaching and learning.

Safeguarding procedures generally meet requirements and there are no significant areas for concern. However, a health and safety issue identified during the inspection was brought to the school's attention.

Leadership and management: Adequate and needs improvement

The headteacher provides assured and reflective leadership. He promotes a clear and well-understood sense of direction and vision for pupils to 'realise their potential'. Together with the senior leadership team, he fosters a supportive and caring ethos that creates an orderly and purposeful learning environment. Effective communication, for example through a range of bulletins, team meetings and staff briefings, ensures that the school operates efficiently on a day-to-day basis. However, leadership at all levels has not had a sufficiently sustained impact on the quality of teaching and the standards pupils achieve.

Leadership roles and responsibilities are well-balanced and generally allocated appropriately. There is a particular emphasis on distributing leadership responsibilities which contributes well to staff professional learning and has helped to strengthen the capacity of the leadership team.

There are clear and systematic line management arrangements. These help senior leaders to hold middle leaders to account for performance in their areas of responsibility. Regular meetings have a clear purpose and focus appropriately on pupils' progress and wellbeing as well as the school's priorities. However, the rigour and effectiveness of line-management varies too much, particularly in the evaluation of the quality of teaching.

The majority of middle leaders carry out their roles successfully in supporting school improvement. However, a few do not provide effective leadership of their areas. Where necessary, the school has taken suitable action to address staff underperformance.

The school has a suitable range of useful strategies to evaluate its performance. This includes an appropriate analysis of pupil performance data and departmental reviews where lessons are observed and pupils' work scrutinised. In addition, the school operates a programme of learning reviews that focus upon the development of pupils' skills. These processes help to give leaders at all levels a generally sound understanding of the school's strengths and areas for development and to identify appropriate improvement priorities. However, there is too much variation in the rigour with which leaders evaluate the impact of teaching on the progress that pupils make and, in particular, on how well they develop their literacy and numeracy skills. This has contributed to an overly positive view of the quality of teaching and makes it difficult for leaders to identify precisely enough the specific aspects that need improvement.

As part of its role as a pioneer school, the school has developed suitably its approaches to professional learning. This includes acquiring a clearer view of the requirements for curriculum reform which it has shared with partner primary and local secondary schools. The school's comprehensive professional learning programme, including opportunities to share good practice both within and outside of the school, is starting to have a positive impact on the effectiveness of teaching. Staff at all

levels have access to a range of suitable development opportunities, including training for aspiring senior and middle leaders. The school evaluates suitably the impact of its professional learning activities.

Members of the governing body show strong commitment and provide valuable support to the school. The governing body has a secure understanding of the school's performance and contributes appropriately to determining its strategic direction. Through their developing links with particular departments, governors are deepening their understanding of specific aspects of the school's work and provide helpful support to staff and pupils. However, while governors are prepared to discuss and question specific initiatives, they do not hold leaders at all levels sufficiently to account for their areas of responsibility.

The headteacher, together with the business manager and governing body, manages the school's resources robustly. Staff are appropriately qualified and are deployed suitably. The school has achieved necessary financial efficiencies and raised additional funds to help finance agreed strategic priorities. The school makes effective use of grant funding to support the wellbeing and progress of vulnerable pupils.

Copies of the report

Copies of this report are available from the school and from the Estyn website (www.estyn.gov.wales)

Estyn evaluates a provider's effectiveness using a four-point judgement scale:

Excellent	Very strong, sustained performance and practice
Good	Strong features, although minor aspects may require improvement
Adequate and needs improvement	Strengths outweigh weaknesses, but important aspects require improvement
Unsatisfactory and needs urgent improvement	Important weaknesses outweigh strengths

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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