



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

**A report on**

**Ysgol Rhydygors  
Llansteffan Road  
Johnstown  
Carmarthenshire  
SA31 3NQ**

**Date of inspection: November 2019**

**by**

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

## About Ysgol Rhydygors

Ysgol Rhydygors is a purpose built maintained residential special school in the town of Carmarthen. Currently there are 37 pupils on roll aged from 7 to 16 years. All pupils have a statement of special educational needs (SEN) or an individual development plan (IDP) principally for social, emotional and behavioural difficulties.

Many pupils attend the school from within the local authority and a few come from neighbouring local authorities. Nearly all of the pupils are from English-speaking backgrounds. Around 54% of pupils receive free school meals. A few pupils are looked after by the local authority.

It is not appropriate to compare the standards that pupils achieve at the school with national averages, or to analyse the performance trends of groups of pupils over time, because of the nature of pupils' social, emotional and behavioural needs.

The school was last inspected in September 2014. Since this time, there have been five headteachers appointed, one permanent and four interim. The current interim headteacher was appointed in September 2018.

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

Many pupils at Ysgol Rhydygors make steady progress from their starting points as they move through the school. By the time that they leave school at the end of key stage 4, almost all pupils progress to further education, training or employment.

Overall, many pupils are considerate to each other and they are keen to help others less fortunate than themselves. The level of care, support and guidance for pupils is consistent and generally high quality. Many pupils enjoy school and develop strong working relationships with staff, but a minority do not behave well enough. In almost all classes, teachers work well with learning coaches to enhance pupils' experiences. However, teachers do not always plan well enough for the different needs and abilities of pupils.

The interim headteacher provides visible and approachable leadership to the school, but aspects of strategic leadership require improvement. As a result, Estyn will review the school's progress in improving these key areas of its work in 12-18 months.

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

## **Recommendations**

- R1 Raise standards and improve pupils' literacy and numeracy skills
- R2 Improve pupils' behaviour and attitudes to learning
- R3 Improve the quality of teaching and the effectiveness of assessment
- R4 Strengthen improvement planning
- R5 Improve the learning environment

## **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**

As they move through the school, many pupils make steady progress from their starting points, and develop a mostly secure understanding of subject knowledge. By the time that they leave school at the end of key stage 4, almost all pupils progress to further education, training or employment.

Across the school, many pupils listen carefully to their teachers, peers and adults, and they respond suitably to the issues that they raise. Over time, they develop confidence to ask questions and to answer those of others, generally with appropriate use of subject terms. Many pupils make useful contributions to pair and group discussions and they share their ideas with relevant sensitivity to the context. For example, when key stage 3 pupils consider the differences between bullying and banter, they display empathy when pupils discuss their emotions. However, a minority of pupils often make inappropriate use of language during lessons and around the school.

Many pupils enter the school with difficulties in reading. Over time, many of these pupils learn to read basic texts accurately and develop increasing enjoyment in reading fiction. For example, younger pupils read extracts from *The Diary of a Wimpy Kid* fluently and confidently to Merlin, the school's reading dog. As they progress through the school, most pupils read simple instructions and non-fiction texts independently and with accuracy. However, overall, pupils do not have enough opportunities to develop their reading skills in different subjects across the curriculum and this hinders their progress in developing their abilities in this area.

From their individual starting points, a majority of pupils develop and apply their understanding of basic structures for their written work and extend those concepts appropriately. For example, older pupils use paragraphing competently to write about characters in a novel. Many pupils use subject vocabulary correctly to label diagrams and charts, and to provide short written answers. However, pupils' extended writing skills are underdeveloped, largely because they do not have enough opportunities or stimulating resources to progress them consistently in different subjects across the curriculum.

Many pupils develop secure numeracy skills, which they use assuredly in different contexts. For example, in science, pupils apply and further develop the skills they have learnt in their mathematics lessons to undertake experiments and practical activities. These experiments include pupils using their measuring and data handling skills accurately to test how waterproof different materials are, and to explore whether people with longer legs can jump further and higher.

Overall, the majority of pupils develop their thinking skills satisfactorily. However, in a minority of lessons, pupils do not always make the progress of which they are capable. Mostly this is because these pupils do not have enough opportunities to solve problems and think things through for themselves, or because the work does not stretch them enough or meet their needs, and they become disengaged.

As they progress through the school, many pupils acquire a useful range of skills and knowledge in information and communication technology (ICT). Many pupils use ICT confidently, for example to research subjects, record speaking and listening activities and, with older pupils, to develop photography skills. The high quality photographic work of pupils is evidenced in framed displays across the school.

Pupils enjoy developing their creative skills and become competent in using these in a wide range of activities across the curriculum. For example, in addition to photography, many pupils enjoy participating in creative activities such as cooking their own recipe for a cheese and potato bake and creating a jelly bath to stimulate sensory play for their peers.

Pupils' physical and independent living skills are a strength. Most pupils enjoy participating in practical and physical activities. For example, key stage 2 and 3 pupils participate in swimming lessons at the local leisure centre; and many key stage 4 pupils complete weekly fitness programmes at school.

Many pupils develop basic Welsh language skills largely competently in different subjects. For example, in mathematics, the majority of pupils recognise numbers in Welsh and use them to give their answers correctly. Welsh first language pupils speak confidently on a range of topics in both Welsh and English. However, these pupils do not always extend their learning and achieve appropriate levels of accreditation because the focus in lessons is on materials suitable for Welsh second language.

Over the past three years, almost all pupils left school with a recognised qualification. During this period, the performance of girls is generally stronger than that of boys, and there is little difference between pupils eligible for free school meals and those who are not.

### **Wellbeing and attitudes to learning: Adequate and needs improvement**

Many pupils enjoy school and develop strong working relationships with staff. The majority settle quickly to their work at the start of the lesson, understand classroom routines well and generally follow these closely. These pupils concentrate well during lessons, show interest and complete their work appropriately.

The majority of pupils maintain largely appropriate behaviour during lessons. As they learn more about the reasons for their behaviour, they increasingly employ strategies that help them successfully to remain calm and engaged in their learning. For example, if the behaviour of another pupil disrupts the lesson, these pupils demonstrate resilience in sustaining their concentration and remain focussed and on task.

A few younger pupils do not always engage well with their learning. They distract themselves too easily, come off-task and seek to leave the class. A minority of key stage 4 pupils are often too slow to engage with or apply themselves to their learning. These pupils display challenging behaviours that disrupt the learning of others. A few of these pupils continue this behaviour outside of the classroom, and, at its worst, this can cause younger pupils concern.

Most pupils feel safe in school and know whom they can turn to if they require help. However, a few younger pupils feel concerned about the poor behaviour of a few key stage 4 pupils.

Many pupils are aware of the importance of healthy eating and have a positive attitude to healthy lifestyles. For example, they participate enthusiastically in Friday afternoon activity sessions, which includes badminton, squash and skateboarding. Working together with staff, pupils have been successful in fund-raising to furnish the school's new fitness rooms by using exercise bikes to cycle the 1,400 kilometre equivalent of the coastal path of Wales. These fitness rooms are used regularly by pupils of different ages.

The school council has had a positive impact on many areas of school life. For example, members of the school council made a positive contribution to the discussions on identifying the school values. These values: trust, respect, positivity, honesty and relationships, are now evident on walls throughout the school and pupils refer to these values proudly.

Through the curriculum and a range of activities, pupils develop an appropriate understanding of different cultures and traditions. Overall, many pupils are considerate to each other and they are keen to help others less fortunate than themselves. For example, during a recent key stage 4 canoeing lesson, pupils worked extremely well as a team to rescue Daisy, a labrador who had fallen into a fast-flowing river. The pupils liaised with and handed Daisy over to the local RNLI team to return her to her owners.

### **Teaching and learning experiences: Adequate and needs improvement**

The school provides an inclusive and adaptive curriculum that meets the needs of nearly all pupils successfully. Generally, the curriculum builds suitably on pupils' previous learning and supports their progress and wellbeing soundly. However, provision for pupils whose first language is Welsh is underdeveloped.

The school provides valuable curriculum opportunities for pupils to enhance their learning experiences through a range of stimulating activities. These include outdoor education, links with further education to participate in vocational training such as construction, and at the S4C media centre where pupils learn about robotics and coding. These activities enhance pupils' life and leadership skills and enable them to achieve accreditation awards such as sports coaching, the Duke of Edinburgh's Award and BTEC certificates. In key stage 4, the school offers pupils particularly beneficial work placement provision. This provision links closely to pupils' individual needs and interests such as agriculture, forestry and fishing. The school provides worthwhile extra-curricular activities that enrich pupils' experiences such as visits to Parc y Scarlets and to the Liberty Stadium.

Provision for the development of pupils' skills across the curriculum is at an early stage. The school has recently undertaken a skills audit and appropriate steps to incorporate the national frameworks for literacy, numeracy and digital competency in different subjects. The school has introduced a few creative opportunities to develop pupils' literacy skills such as reading aloud to Merlin the dog. However, overall, the school does not have a fully co-ordinated approach to ensure that pupils acquire the

necessary literacy, numeracy and ICT skills they need to support their work across the curriculum. Teachers do not incorporate worthwhile and progressive opportunities regularly enough for pupils to apply these skills in meaningful contexts in lessons. In particular, pupils do not get enough opportunities to develop their reading and extended writing skills in different subjects, which hinders their progress in this area.

The positive and supportive working relationships between teachers and pupils are a strong feature of teaching at Ysgol Rhydygors. Teachers know pupils well and have a secure understanding of their emotional needs. These strong features help many pupils to develop high levels of trust in their teaching staff. As a result, these pupils build their confidence, show a willingness to try new and more challenging tasks and take sensible measured risks.

In almost all classes, teachers work well with learning coaches to enhance the quality of teaching and learning. Together, they provide positive role models and generally work effectively with pupils. However, a minority of staff do not always manage pupils' behaviour consistently and, when this occurs, it results in disruption and limited progress.

Most teachers have secure subject knowledge and use this competently to ensure that their planning meets the majority of pupils' needs. During classes, the majority of teachers use questioning efficiently to prompt recall and to assess pupils' understanding. This approach is particularly effective when they work with individual pupils. However, teaching and learning resources do not always engage pupils effectively. In a minority of classes, this is because teachers do not plan well enough for the different learning needs and abilities of pupils. This means that, in these classes, work is not suitably challenging for all pupils and they do not make sufficient progress.

Most teachers and learning coaches give pupils useful and encouraging verbal feedback to probe their level of understanding, draw out their answers and further develop their knowledge. This feedback helps pupils to understand how well they are doing and what they need to do in the next stages of their learning. However, in pupils' books, feedback is frequently too general and does not help pupils to improve their work well enough.

### **Care, support and guidance: Adequate and needs improvement**

The school generally tracks and monitors pupils' behaviour efficiently, and provides relevant targets for improvement. The positive behaviour support plans for individual pupils are robust. They demonstrate a secure understanding of the complex nature of each pupil's needs and state clearly how best to support them, particularly when their behaviour is challenging. Pertinent support strategies encourage staff to help pupils to think before, during and after challenging behaviour incidents, and include a suitable focus on recovery time and relationship building.

Across the school, staff log and track behaviour incidents suitably. Leaders' analysis of behaviour trends is starting to identify where there are a high number of incidents, the timing and type of these incidents, and how to reduce them. However, overall, the school's arrangements for analysing and managing poor behaviour have not had



enough impact on improving the behaviour of a minority of pupils. Further, there is not always enough rigour in how the information that is collected is used, such as the number of positive handling incidents, to plan to reduce challenging behaviours and measure the full impact of the school's behaviour strategies.

The school community has worked together successfully to establish a strong values base with a focus upon nurture to support pupils' learning and development. Pupils' holistic one-page profiles and individual development plans contribute strongly to this person-centred ethos. The school's beneficial working relationships with parents and carers assist them to support their child's learning and improve their behaviour considerably. This partnership includes the school helping parents and carers to attend very worthwhile family support programmes, and offering extended access to after-school clubs and care facilities. Staff also work closely with parents and carers to support their child over holiday periods. This initiative helps to maintain effective working relationships with pupils, and extend their cultural experiences with activities such as organised day trips and attendance at local sporting events.

The school works closely with a range of outside agencies, such as the educational psychology service, social services and police community liaison officers, to benefit pupils. However, the demand for specialist therapeutic provision is greater than availability, and pupils' needs are not always met. The school also offers a number of in-house therapeutic initiatives, but monitoring the impact of these recent developments is at an early stage.

Pupils benefit from access to a comprehensive range of physical activities as part of its emphasis on promoting healthy lifestyles. These include many pupils exercising in the school's new fitness suite and exciting off-site outdoor learning provision, such as coasteering and canoeing. Many pupils enjoy cycling either in the fitness suite or on the road, and the very recent implementation of a bike maintenance scheme is currently generating great interest. The school offers suitable arrangements for pupils to become active citizens and to take on responsibilities such as becoming school council representatives and participating in the Duke of Edinburgh's Award's Scheme.

Across the school, staff implement the personal, social and emotional curriculum consistently to enable pupils to develop a suitable understanding of different cultures and traditions, and to help others. Pupils use this knowledge in their charity work, such as supporting Young Minds and Macmillan Cancer Care.

The nature of the difficulties that pupils who attend the school face means that nearly all pupils can find developing positive relationships a challenge. However, the school's restorative approaches encourage pupils successfully to reflect upon the impact of their actions and focus upon strategies that provide them with the skills to rebuild meaningful relationships.

The school's arrangements for safeguarding meet requirements and give no cause for concern.

## **Leadership and management: Adequate and needs improvement**

Since her appointment in September 2018, the interim headteacher has provided visible and approachable leadership for the school. Communication and collaboration with staff and parents have strengthened notably over the last year. This improvement has enabled her to work successfully with pupils, staff and parents to create a new shared vision and set of values for the school. However, the nature of the interim headship arrangements over the last few years has held the school back from making important improvements such as developing the accommodation to meet pupils' needs better.

Leaders have recently introduced a suitable revised timetable of monitoring activities to evaluate the school's performance and plan for improvements. These activities are helping leaders to understand the school's strengths and shortcomings. During the last year, leaders have identified the key priorities for action and have reviewed and updated policies and procedures efficiently. This approach is helping the school to take appropriate actions to target priority areas that need improvement, for example by successfully changing teaching arrangements in key stage 2 and key stage 3 to provide a thematic approach that better meets pupils' needs.

Other improvements are under way, but are at an early stage and have not had time to make a positive difference to pupils' performance and wellbeing. For example, teachers are only beginning to map pupils' skills against the national frameworks for literacy, numeracy and digital competency. As a consequence, leaders do not have a clear enough grasp about any gaps in provision to plan securely for pupils' skills development and progress across the school.

Leaders have recently refined arrangements for managing the performance of staff. There is now a relevant cycle for these activities. Staff performance objectives and targets link tightly with the school's priorities. Staff recognise the need for and take helpful steps to keep up-to-date with developments that influence their professional practice. In addition to school-based professional learning, many staff are beginning to make useful links with other schools and organisations to learn about good practice and bring new ideas into their work. For example, several staff have visited a trauma unit to identify effective practice in behaviour management and therapeutic support.

The governing body provides the school with high quality advice and support. Governors are developing a sound understanding of many important issues at the school. They have established useful links with staff responsible for subjects and areas of learning and undertake learning walks to develop their understanding of their work. They are beginning to hold leaders to account for improving important aspects of the school's work. Many governors use their professional skills and expertise to good effect to support the school's work. Where necessary, they take useful actions to try to secure improvements, such as obtaining clarity about the local authority plans for the school's future.

Leaders and governors manage the school's resources well. Their prudent management of finances over the past three years has brought the school budget from a significant deficit into balance. There are appropriate numbers of teaching and learning coaches, and the school makes effective use of grant funding to enrich

pupils' learning experiences. However, staff expertise and the learning environment do not always meet pupils' complex needs well enough, and particular areas of the school are not a suitable or stimulating learning environment. For example, there is no satisfactory access to an outdoor learning environment for pupils, and the accommodation and facilities for key stages 2 and 4 are too close.

## Evidence base of the report

Before an inspection, inspectors:

- analyse the outcomes from parent and pupil questionnaires and consider the views of teaching, support staff and the governing body 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 and middle leaders (where appropriate) 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, where appropriate
- visit lessons and undertake a variety of learning walks to observe pupils learning and to see staff teaching in a range of settings
- 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' wellbeing, 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](http://www.estyn.gov.wales))

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

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