



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

A report on

Rhayader C.I.W. School

**Bryntirion
Rhayader
Powys
LD6 5DE**

Date of inspection: October 2022

by

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

This report is also available in Welsh.

About Rhayader C.I.W. School

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| Name of provider | Rhayader C.I.W. School |
| Local authority | Powys County Council |
| Language of the provider | Dual Stream |
| Type of school | Primary |
| Religious character | Church in Wales |
| Number of pupils on roll | 203 |
| Pupils of statutory school age | 177 |
| Number in nursery classes | |
| 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 23.0%) | 20.4% |
| 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 16.1%) | 18.1% |
| Percentage of pupils who speak Welsh at home | 8.5% |
| Percentage of pupils with English as an additional language | |
| Date of headteacher appointment | January 2008 |
| Date of previous Estyn inspection (if applicable) | 28/01/2014 |
| Start date of inspection | 10/10/2022 |

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

The school is well led and has staff that know their pupils, their backgrounds and the local community very well. They promote a caring ethos where there is a strong focus on improving pupil well-being in a school where 'everyone matters'.

Leaders and staff work purposefully to make improvements, such as strengthening the support for pupils' well-being following the pandemic and in making progress towards implementing the Curriculum for Wales. As staff make continued improvements to the provision for pupils learning, many pupils make steady progress from their starting points. Generally, pupils' literacy, numeracy, digital, creative and physical skills all develop well, although a few aspects require the provision to be strengthened further, such as that to support pupils reading, writing and Welsh.

Teachers and staff provide effective care, support and guidance for pupils and often create worthwhile and exciting learning activities, particularly in the outdoor learning area. Here, well planned and purposeful activities provide a wide variety of high-quality experiences for nearly all pupils on a consistent basis, developing a range of beneficial skills. However, across the school, the teaching isn't always consistent in providing appropriate challenge for pupils to make as much progress as possible. Teachers provide appropriate feedback for pupils, although it is not always clear what areas of the work needs to be improved for them to build on their skills systematically.

Recommendations

- R1 Improve pupils' literacy skills, in particular their reading and extended writing skills
- R2 Strengthen provision to develop pupils' skills in Welsh from their different starting points
- R3 Ensure that teaching provides appropriate challenge for all pupils and that feedback helps them further improve their work

What happens next

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

We have asked the school to provide a best practice case study on the use of the outdoor learning environment to support pupils learning and well-being.

Main evaluation

Learning

During their time at school, many pupils in both the Welsh-medium and English-medium streams, including those with additional learning needs (ALN) and those eligible for free school meals, make steady progress from their starting points. Many are developing their skills to communicate increasingly confidently in Welsh and English and develop sound numeracy and digital skills.

Across the school, most pupils respond well to each other during classroom discussions. They make good progress in developing their oracy skills effectively in different contexts. The majority of pupils listen respectfully and appropriately to their teachers and each other. Most of the younger pupils focus and listen purposefully whilst participating in developing their fine motor skills through music and movement. As they progress through the school, the older pupils respond successfully to a range of different stimuli within lesson introductions. For example, Year 1 pupils describe different aspects of their day and their likes and dislikes. In Year 4, pupils use their prior literacy knowledge to confidently describe their recipe for their pet dragon.

Most younger pupils in the English-medium stream classes make effective progress in developing their incidental Welsh skills, particularly during their morning welcome sessions. However, as pupils progress through school, the standard of their Welsh speaking skills are varied and less developed. Many of the youngest pupils in the Welsh-medium stream acquire Welsh appropriately, for example as they re-tell a story while following a specific structure. As pupils move through school, the majority strive to speak Welsh while carrying out their work. However, a minority of pupils do not speak Welsh consistently enough in formal and informal situations which hinders their confidence to speak with increasing fluency.

Many younger pupils reading skills generally develop appropriately as they acquire a sound knowledge of phonics and the spelling of key words. However, as pupils progress through the school the standard of their reading in both Welsh and English is variable. For example, a minority of pupils in the Welsh-medium stream struggle to read unfamiliar words and do not recognise when they have made errors that affect the meaning of the text.

Many pupils develop their writing skills appropriately as they gain confidence in recording their work. Many reception pupils begin to record their ideas through mark making and forming legible letters. By Year 2, most pupils write simple sentences accurately and use capital letters and full stops correctly. However, as most pupils progress in both streams, their writing skills are under developed and the pupils do not consolidate their writing independently and consistently across the curriculum.

Many pupils' information and communication technology (ICT) skills develop appropriately as they move through the school. They use ICT to support their learning in other subjects regularly. Many of the younger pupils have good access to QR codes to access their topic work. Almost all older pupils use computer programs competently to create a visual record of the area's most prominent attractions. They

confidently and effectively add photographs, audio clips and hyperlinks to other websites within their work and presentations.

Many pupils make sound progress in their mathematical skills as they progress through the school. In reception, pupils use simple data handling skills and collect information in tally charts when looking for different types of plants in the outdoor area. In Year 2, most pupils can recognise the difference between a half and a quarter and identify these on different shapes. They use their previous knowledge around their understanding of time, such as half past and quarter past, to further support their work with fractions. Through using practical equipment in their play, pupils develop their understanding of mathematical concepts such as when describing the capacity of containers being full, half full and empty. Most older pupils have a sound understanding of a suitable range of mathematical concepts. For example, in the Year 3, 4, 5 and 6 classes across both language streams, many have a sound grasp of the relationship between addition and subtraction and can calculate the difference between totals confidently. The pupils who are provided with real life scenarios, such as calculating the difference in the cost of toys in a shopping list, display a stronger recall of their learning than those who were engaged in similar activities without a meaningful context. When given the opportunity, therefore, most pupils consolidate their numeracy skills suitably in other areas of the curriculum.

Pupils creative skills develop well throughout the school. Most use a variety of materials and skills to produce a variety of artwork, for example, Year 5 and 6 pupils make impressive drawings and paintings based on the work of a local artist. Year 1 and 2 pupils use leaves and resources from the school grounds to create interesting collages. Most pupils benefited from participating in the creative 'Cynefin' project that concentrated on the Elan Valley area. As part of the project pupils created multicultural dances and songs to further understand their heritage and issues such as the importance of anti-racism and nurturing tolerance. This had a positive effect on developing pupils' creativity skills and their enjoyment of the outdoors.

Most pupils benefit emotionally and physically from lessons provided inside and outside the school building. The extensive forest school area provides an exciting environment where all pupils develop sound cross curricular skills. For example, pupils in Year 3 and 4 prepare and cook soup from vegetables grown on site, and pupils in Year 5 and 6 develop their technology skills creatively by carving wooden characters from resources from the forest area. Many pupils also develop their communication and team building skills beneficially while building dens and shelters. They enjoy the experience of being outdoors and this promotes their well-being effectively.

Well-being and attitudes to learning

A strong feature of the school is the positive and caring working relationship that exists amongst pupils, and between staff and pupils. Pupils feel happy and safe at the school. They are polite and courteous and interact confidently with both their peers and adults. Many pupils are co-operative and helpful and develop high levels of trust and appreciation for teachers and support staff and are mature and thoughtful for their age and stage of development. They help one another to manage their feelings by talking and by using strategies to calm and relax themselves, such as listening to music or spending time with animals. They behave well in class and when

moving around the building and at break times. Overall, they understand and respond well to the school's procedures to encourage positive behaviour, although on some occasions a few pupils lose concentration and do not engage fully in their learning.

Nearly all pupils are eager to attend school and enjoy the wide variety of learning experiences provided for them. They understand their role in caring for each other, such as when being on hand to help a friend that is feeling upset. Generally, pupils start the day feeling understood and cared for due to the well-established routines of staff welcoming them into school. For example, younger pupils play constructively with dough and listen to music to ease their transition to the school day.

A few pupils with positions of responsibility across the school show pride in their roles and take their duties seriously. The school pupil voice committee meets regularly and shares its ideas and actions with other pupils. Members of the 'Cryw Cymraeg' encourage the use of Welsh around the school and organise fundraising events successfully. For example, pupils wrote to a Welsh pop star and arranged a concert at the school to raise money. However, the role that pupils have in influencing the life and work of the school is underdeveloped.

Nearly all pupils understand the importance of making choices that effect their health. Most value the opportunity to take part in physical exercise, for example whilst using the extensive play areas during break times and during forest school activities. Most pupils understand the dangers that may arise in their everyday lives and know what steps to take to stay safe within their community. Nearly all pupils understand the importance of staying safe online. For instance, Year 6 pupils outline the dangers that may arise as a result of unsuitable use of the internet.

When given the opportunity, many pupils respond suitably to verbal feedback from staff and their peers to improve their work and develop their skills further. Pupils are beginning to consider how well they are progressing with their learning and on occasions, to think for themselves what their next steps should be.

Teaching and learning experiences

Staff work skilfully to develop very strong working relationships with pupils. They encourage pupils to be respectful and courteous, which leads to the supportive ethos that permeates the school. Pupils are treated fairly and are listened to by their teachers. They reflect thoughtfully on their responsibilities towards other people. For example, during lessons, nearly all pupils allow others to share ideas and show respect when others have a different opinion to their own. This establishes a good inclusive environment for learning.

Provision for outdoor learning is a strength of the school. The well planned, purposeful enriched activities in the outdoor area provide a wide variety of high-quality experiences for nearly all pupils on a consistent basis. In the best examples, the learning experiences are varied and interesting providing pupils with opportunities to develop a range of skills whilst having fun, for example through creating sensory games using the natural environment.

In most cases, teachers and support staff use various questioning techniques to help pupils extend their knowledge and skills, and to allow them to explain their understanding of the learning. This supports pupils to gain confidence in their speaking skills. Most teachers explain new concepts well and provide clear guidance that enable pupils to undertake their work appropriately. The majority of teachers carefully plan and tailor activities thoughtfully to engage pupils in their learning. However, across the school, provision does not meet the needs of a few pupils to make strong progress. For example, problem-solving and writing activities are not always challenging enough.

Opportunities for pupils to assess and reflect on their own progress and that of other pupils are developing appropriately. Many teachers give pupils useful feedback as they work, and prompt them to extend and further develop their responses, to gain an indication of their understanding. Staff use verbal feedback purposefully to praise and celebrate successes and often to guide them to the next steps in their learning during lessons. In pupils' workbooks, teachers also provide feedback on the accuracy of their work, and occasionally on the quality of the content. However, this does not always help pupils to understand how to improve their work further.

The school is making sound progress towards implementing a curriculum that embeds the principles and culture of the Curriculum for Wales. Leaders and staff have worked with pupils, parents and governors to form a vision and to design and develop a curriculum that is relevant to the community of Rhayader. Pupils across the school are given beneficial opportunities to set the learning themes within their classes. The school welcomes visitors and organises educational visits effectively to enrich and extend pupils' understanding of important aspects of their learning. For example, they took part in a 'Cynefin' project, which involved researching the legacy of migrant workers and their families who moved into the Rhayader area to build the Elan Dam. This enriches pupils' knowledge and understanding of their history and the local area.

Pupils have appropriate opportunities to learn about the history and culture of Wales, for example by studying the local area and performing in an annual Eisteddfod, and arranging a Welsh music festival. Across the school, staff reinforce and develop pupils' understanding and the use of the Welsh language effectively from their various starting points during informal sessions. In the English-medium stream, there are opportunities for pupils to read simple texts with staff and to write in Welsh, with support. However, across the school, staff's expectations and the provision for developing pupils' Welsh language skills in more formal situations are inconsistent and vary in quality. For example, there are not enough opportunities for pupils to practise and use their Welsh oracy skills in class and beyond. As a result, many pupils do not recall and use basic phrases and sentences well and do not speak confidently enough. The provision for pupils to develop their reading and writing skills in the Welsh-medium stream, and generally in the English-medium stream is underdeveloped, particularly for older pupils.

Reports to parents are clear and informative, giving useful information about their child's progress and social skills along with improvement targets for the future.

Care, support and guidance

The school is a caring community where staff know their pupils, their backgrounds and the local community very well. They contribute purposefully to promoting a caring ethos where there is a strong focus on improving pupil well-being.

Leaders and staff place a high priority on the main principle of the school that 'everyone matters'. This ethos is consistently reinforced with pupils during all aspects of school life, for example through regular 'check-ins' where pupils are invited to let staff know how they are feeling. There are specific areas of the school that promote opportunities for pupils to speak with individual members of staff and share their feelings. For example, staff provide valuable emotional well-being support and guidance for pupils in the 'Nyth Fach'. This valuable nurture resource for vulnerable pupils is overseen by the pastoral manager, and in a relatively short period of time, has had a very positive impact on pupil's well-being. There is a clear structure and progression for pupils which allows them to fully integrate with their peers as well as receive the support and care that they need on a daily basis.

The whole school assemblies provide beneficial opportunities to develop pupils' moral and spiritual understanding, this is reinforced by morning classroom discussions where the school has developed specific approaches to ensure that all pupils are settled and ready to engage effectively. Over time, the school offers numerous activities to develop pupils personal and social education skills well. Through visits and presentations by experts at the school, many pupils have a clear understanding of issues relating to substance misuse and the impact of anti-social behaviour.

Staff encourage pupils to engage with the creative arts successfully through their learning activities in the inside and outside classrooms, and through educational visits. The choir provides opportunities for pupils to promote their Welsh language skills by performing in a variety of community-based performances. Welsh heritage is positively promoted through local and national visits.

Leaders have ensured that there are robust procedures to identify pupils' additional needs and monitor the impact of regular interventions thoroughly. There is swift identification and support for pupils with ALN and tailored provision to meet their individual needs both within the classroom and in support groups. Staff work successfully with a range of external agencies to address the needs of the pupils and parents, for example through a 'cuppa and a chat' in the community to encourage discussion about, for example, dyslexia and autism conditions.

The school provides many worthwhile opportunities for pupils to be active during the school day and make healthy lifestyle choices. As a result, pupils eat healthy snacks and take part in the daily mile. The school communicates effectively with parents through letters and meetings to ensure appropriate levels of attendance.

Staff ensure that pupils' well-being and safety is an integral part of school life and it is at the forefront of their daily responsibilities. As a result, the safeguarding culture is robust, and all staff understand their roles and responsibilities in contributing to pupils' safety and well-being. Leaders place an appropriate focus on evaluating the

robustness of their safeguarding procedures on a regular basis and consider carefully what aspects could be improved even further.

Leadership and management

The headteacher is instrumental in creating and sustaining a welcoming and inclusive community with pupil well-being at its heart. Leaders and staff have a strong understanding of the needs of the pupils and the local community. They work passionately and with commitment to meet these needs. As a result, the school is a vibrant learning community. The caring and supportive culture ensures that pupils feel a secure sense of belonging and develop the confidence and skills to engage positively with learning experiences. This is expressed well within the school's motto of 'everyone matters'.

The school's governing body bring a wide range of relevant skills and expertise to their roles. They have a good understanding of the school's strengths and areas for development and, along with the school leadership team, contribute well to the strategic direction of the school and its priorities for further improvement. Governors hold the school to account, challenge performance and provide support when required.

The headteacher and governing body monitor the budget carefully and allocate resources to address their identified priorities within the school development plan. This includes making appropriate use of resources and grants to support groups of pupils, such as those eligible for free school meals. The school uses its pupil development grant funding effectively to ensure worthwhile support for disadvantaged pupils. A notable strength of how the school uses its resources is how the outside learning areas have been developed successfully to create an exciting learning environment for pupils. This makes a significant contribution to strengthening pupils' engagement with their learning and is used well by practitioners to provide learning activities of high quality in the outdoor environment.

Governors have a suitable appreciation of the requirements to promote healthy eating and drinking at the school.

Leaders have established a culture at the school of collecting a wide range of first-hand evidence to help identify the strengths and areas for improvement. As a result, leaders know their school well, particularly the headteacher. Normally, the information leaders gather from self-evaluation informs their improvement planning well, and they have a good track record of creating and delivering on identified priorities. However, the COVID-19 pandemic reduced the amount and variation of self-evaluation methods that leaders used during the period, such as pausing observations of teaching and learning and reducing the opportunities for learning walks. As a result, leaders have a less secure understanding of the variation in teaching than they normally would have. They are aware of the need to restart these to get a better appreciation of the quality of teaching across the school.

Leaders ensure that there is an appropriate focus on providing staff with relevant professional learning that is suitably linked to priorities in the school development plan. As a result, most staff have opportunities to strengthen their professional knowledge and practice, such as in preparation for the new curriculum. This, for

example, contributes well to classroom practice and to support groups of pupils, such as specific training to strengthen the support for pupils with the autism condition. Most staff participate effectively in professional learning experiences, appraisal and performance management. A minority of teaching assistants express that they would benefit from more opportunities for development and discussions around their performance and the wider initiatives developed within the school.

The school addresses national priorities well, including ALN reform and recovery following the pandemic. Worthwhile progress in curriculum design has enabled the school to make sound progress in its development of the Curriculum for Wales. However, the school's work to improve the quality of pupils' Welsh language skills across the school is less well developed.

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 going to press. Any enquiries or comments regarding this document/publication should be addressed to:

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