



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

A report on

Northop Hall C.P. School

**Llys Ben
Northop Hall
Nr.Mold
Flintshire
CH7 6HS**

Date of inspection: May 2022

by

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

About Northop Hall C.P. School

Name of provider	Northop Hall
Local authority	Flintshire
Language of the provider	English Medium
Type of school	Primary
Religious character	
Number of pupils on roll	201
Pupils of statutory school age	157
Number in nursery classes (if applicable)	21
Percentage of statutory school age pupils eligible for free school meals over a three-year average <i>(The national percentage of pupils eligible for free school meals over a three-year average in the primary sector is 21.3%)</i>	16.2%
Percentage of statutory school age pupils identified as having additional learning needs (a) <i>(The national percentage of pupils identified as having an additional learning need in the primary sector is 20.6%)</i>	7.6%
Percentage of statutory school age pupils who speak Welsh at home	*
Percentage of statutory school age pupils with English as an additional language	*
Date of headteacher appointment	
Date of previous Estyn inspection (if applicable)	04/06/2013
Start date of inspection	
Additional information	

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

Northop Hall Primary School is a happy and nurturing learning community. The headteacher and staff take great care of their pupils. Most pupils behave well, are well mannered and respectful of others. From a young age, pupils are outgoing and very much enjoy chatting with adults. Most talk happily about their learning and the activities that motivate and challenge them in school, particularly in mathematics, where many make rapid progress. Because of the way the school has developed its approach to teaching and learning, by the time pupils reach Year 6, they recognise the value of working independently and persevering to achieve. They are proud of their ability to solve problems, support one another and take responsibility for their learning. Most pupils, including those with additional learning needs, achieve well.

The headteacher and governing body provide strong leadership for the school. They work together effectively, providing support and guidance to staff and parents through a time of great change and challenge in schools. There is a strong culture of trust within the school community. Staff know that leaders and governors make decisions in the best interests of pupils and parents have confidence in what the school is trying to achieve. Everyone is encouraged to try new ideas, but also expected to reflect on their progress. This means that the school keeps a clear focus on how well pupils are doing and whether the changes they are making are the right ones. The current leadership team is fairly new, but has already identified important areas of the school's work that it wants to improve, including provision to develop pupils' skills in Welsh and English, how pupils apply their numeracy skills in their topic work, and ensuring that all pupils know their next steps in learning.

The inspection team identified one issue relating to the security of the school site. Leaders and governors are working with the local authority to address this.

Recommendations

- R1 Improve provision for the development of pupils' Welsh language skills and numeracy across the curriculum
- R2 Ensure that all teachers provide high-quality verbal feedback to pupils to support them to understand their next steps in learning
- R3 Address the site security issue raised during the inspection

What happens next

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

Main evaluation

Learning

During their time at Northop Hall, most pupils, including those with additional learning needs, make good progress in their learning from their starting points. Following the disruption of the pandemic, pupils are working hard with their teachers to improve their skills, and the rapid progress many have made in mathematics is particularly noteworthy.

Most pupils demonstrate good listening skills, take turns to speak and show respect for the views of others. Although a few pupils start school with lower than expected communication skills, many nursery pupils learn to talk purposefully during activities and play sessions. They are keen to show and talk about what they are doing. For example after examining stick insects through a magnifying lens, they count them and describe how the insects' legs move. From Year 2 onwards, most pupils express their ideas well and speak with enthusiasm about their topics. Most older pupils are confident and articulate speakers, who share suggestions well and use a good range of vocabulary when discussing, for example, whether internal flights should be banned as part of a debate about sustainability.

With encouragement from staff, pupils in nursery and reception soon develop an interest in books. They enjoy listening to stories and many retell them eagerly to friends and visitors. They recognise and name a range of sounds and use this knowledge to start to read simple, stage-appropriate texts. In Year 2, many pupils read with appropriate accuracy and understanding. When they reach Year 6, many have developed a secure range of strategies to read fluently and independently, applying their reading skills effectively to support their learning in other subjects. A minority are avid readers, who understand how reading for pleasure supports their well-being. In general, older pupils' advanced reading skills, such as learning to appreciate an author's style and explaining the impact of this on the reader, are less well honed.

From a young age, many pupils show enthusiasm for writing when experimenting with mark making, for example when writing a letter to invite friends to afternoon tea as part of the Queen's Platinum Jubilee celebrations. By Year 2, they write an increasing range of sentences effectively, and develop their ideas creatively and imaginatively. Older pupils develop a good understanding of the characteristics of different genres. By Year 6, when given the opportunity, many pupils plan, draft and improve their work to produce high quality, well-structured writing. They use success criteria very well to support them in their work and evaluate this accurately as a result.

The school's focus on improving the teaching of mathematics has led to most pupils making strong progress in this aspect of their learning, as they move through the school. Effective early language development supports pupils in nursery and reception to grasp mathematical concepts, such as direction, position, number, size and sequence. By Year 2, many build on these skills well, for example to develop a secure understanding of place value in two-digit numbers and how to add and subtract numbers. More able pupils use their problem-solving skills successfully.

From a set of challenging instructions, they work out how to play a card game to practise multiplication and keep a running total of their scores. As they progress through the school, most pupils develop very strong reasoning and problem-solving skills. In Years 5 and 6, they describe their thinking and reasoning exceptionally well, with more able pupils questioning each other about their calculations and challenging one another to explain how they have reached their conclusions. Despite these highly developed skills, generally, pupils do not apply their mathematical ability at a similar level in other areas of the curriculum.

Many pupils have a positive attitude to developing their Welsh language skills but have been hampered by the pandemic. By Year 2, many use simple greetings and phrases and in Welsh lessons, older pupils communicate personal information appropriately. However, their Welsh language skills are not as advanced as might be expected for their age. Consequently, pupils are not confident to speak Welsh when learning in other areas of the curriculum or in their interactions with others around the school.

During lockdown, teachers used a range of technologies well to support pupils' home learning. This helped to develop pupils' digital skills. Pupils now apply these skills in a range of creative contexts to support their wider learning. As they move through the school, many pupils use their digital skills well to support independent research and present their findings through multimedia presentations. By Year 6, many pupils create and use databases and spreadsheets successfully, for example using real-life data from Airbus to support their inquiries during a topic on flight.

Pupils enjoy using their creative and artistic skills. Younger pupils experiment with tuned percussion instruments to create rhythmic music and create simple dance routines, which they perform well. Older pupils use willow to create imaginative sculptures and learn to handle tools, such as saws and drills safely, when making a suncatcher out of natural material. Through the regular opportunities provided for outdoor learning, younger pupils enjoy creating an obstacle course out of boxes that helps them to develop their problem-solving and physical skills. Older pupils use their problem-solving skills effectively to design and build an aeroplane, following a workshop where they learn to control a drone.

Well-being and attitudes to learning

Nearly all pupils have settled back into school life well following periods of home learning during the pandemic. Most are considerate, respectful, and relate well to each other and to adults. They behave well in lessons and during break times, when playing games and socialising. Many have a clear understanding of the need for rules and the concept of fairness. They have the confidence to resolve friendship issues independently before needing to approach an adult for support. Pupils' opportunities to take on leadership roles have been curtailed by the restrictions imposed during the pandemic, but older pupils are proud of their contribution as lunchtime playleaders. They take an active role in promoting a positive ethos at the school.

Nearly all pupils feel safe and secure at the school. Even very young pupils in the nursery are aware that visitors wear 'special labels' and check that they do so. They know that staff look after them because they want them to be safe and happy in

school. Older pupils feel well supported, know where to turn if they need help and are confident that staff will listen and deal sensitively with any concerns they have. Pupils appreciate the range of well-being opportunities available, such as small group sessions to help them manage their feelings and develop resilience. They understand how to keep themselves safe online and how to make healthy choices. Many pupils participate enthusiastically in a wide range of physical activity, including sessions run by coaches from the local football club. This has a positive effect on their confidence, their ability to work with others, their fitness and emotional well-being.

Most pupils are happy and proud of their school and show very positive attitudes to their learning. From an early age, pupils settle quickly into their morning routine of choosing tasks in different areas of provision. They move around the school sensibly and purposefully, collaborating well with their peers and helping staff to organise equipment. Across the school, most pupils engage well with their tasks, work effectively with their learning partners and support each other successfully in small groups. They listen carefully to what their friends and teachers say, and respond to their ideas thoughtfully. At times, a few pupils, lack concentration and this means they do not always engage well enough with their tasks.

Older pupils, in particular, love talking to visitors about their experiences in school. They see value in taking time to think about the knowledge and skills they have developed, and how they might apply these in their adult lives. For example, during 'national takeover day', pupils in Year 6 have an opportunity to become staff for the day, taking on different roles in the school. They plan and lead lessons for younger pupils and communicate with parents through email and on the telephone. This provides them with valuable insight into how the school is run and helps develop their ambition and confidence.

Nearly all pupils take part in planning their termly topics. This contributes to pupils displaying high levels of interest and engagement in their work. They often identify precise lines of inquiry when exploring a topic of interest and are keen to express their opinions about what they are learning. From Years 3 to 6, all pupils enjoy presenting their learning to an audience at the end of their inquiry topics.

Pupils, from an early age, are encouraged to reflect on their learning and think for themselves. By Year 6, many pupils are confident, independent learners, able to plan and carry out tasks with limited support. They persevere well with tasks and seek alternative solutions when their first attempt is not successful. When provided with the opportunity, many pupils respond well to feedback from adults and their peers to improve their work and develop their skills further. This improves their self-confidence and supports their progress as they move through the school. However, on occasions, pupils do not have a clear enough understanding of what their next steps in learning are.

Owing to the coronavirus pandemic, inspectors will not report pupils' rates of attendance during the academic years 2020-2021 and 2021-2022. Inspectors will, however, consider the school's provision for monitoring and improving attendance as part of inspection area 4.

Teaching and learning experiences

The school is developing a stimulating and purposeful curriculum, focused on supporting pupils to become inquisitive, independent learners. Overall, this builds pupils' skills and understanding systematically and coherently. The 'inquiry' approach to learning in Years 3 to 6 ensures that pupils develop a solid body of knowledge that they then use to help them decide what and how to learn next. This results in high levels of engagement. Teachers plan a wide range of interesting contexts for learning, drawing on pupils' thoughts and ideas, often responding to local and global issues. For example, during their topic on flight, they link what they see in nature to scientific invention and the technology used at the nearby Airbus engineering plant. They learn from its employees and consider how they can create investigations to help them discover more about how things fly.

Teachers develop thorough plans for improving pupils' literacy skills through a broad range of contexts. They select high-quality fiction texts as a stimulus for pupils' literacy learning and this helps to foster a culture of reading. However, at times, teachers do not provide sufficient depth of opportunity for pupils to embed their literacy skills. There are too few opportunities for pupils to explore and discuss the development of their reading and writing with their teachers. This limits progress for a minority of pupils, particularly in their work across the curriculum. The newly introduced approach to teaching mathematical skills successfully enables pupils to talk about their understanding of concepts in depth. Less well developed is provision for pupils to apply their numeracy skills at an appropriately high level in contexts across the curriculum.

Teachers and learning support assistants develop strong working relationships with pupils and create a warm, purposeful and supportive learning environment. In most cases, there is a clear focus for pupils' learning, teachers have good subject knowledge and this helps them to explain concepts clearly. Throughout the school, staff provide pupils with concrete materials and well-designed resources to support their learning successfully. Teachers use a range of approaches, including play-based learning, direct teaching and opportunities for pupils to work with learning partners, to engage and challenge pupils to achieve well. Where teaching is most effective, high-quality questioning supports pupils to make particularly good progress.

In most instances, teachers provide clear success criteria and, from an early age, pupils use these independently to reflect upon their work. However, in a few classes, pupils do not always have regular enough opportunities to discuss their progress with their teachers. As a result, they do not have a secure enough understanding of the steps they need to take to improve their work. In a few cases, not knowing securely what pupils can and cannot do means that teachers plan activities that are too easy or too difficult.

For all ages, teachers plan regular, interesting opportunities for pupils to enjoy learning in the school's extensive grounds. For example, all pupils benefit from weekly sessions in the forest school and they take part in a wide range of physical activities. Through topics and whole-school projects, the school provides engaging curriculum opportunities for pupils to develop their creative skills well. For instance, older pupils create high-quality images, in charcoal and pastels, of a mysterious creature based on their class novel.

While pupils learn about the history and culture of Wales through special days, teachers do not always make the most of opportunities to model the Welsh language or encourage pupils to speak, ask and answer questions in Welsh. As a result, pupils' knowledge of the language and communication skills are underdeveloped. The oldest pupils learn about diversity through their topic work, for example the treatment of Jews during the second world war, and compare the situation with the war in Ukraine. They write moving letters to the Home Secretary about the plight of refugees. In general, across the school, provision to develop pupils' understanding of the diverse nature of Wales and the wider world is at an early stage.

Care, support and guidance

Everyone involved with the school works hard to ensure that it is a caring, nurturing environment and, as a result, nearly all pupils feel happy, safe and secure. All staff know the pupils well and there are high levels of mutual trust and respect. Staff support the emotional and social needs of pupils effectively. For instance, visits from a therapy dog have helped pupils to develop valuable strategies to overcome anxiety and build their confidence following the pandemic. Learning support assistants provide effective individual and small group sessions for identified pupils that are closely tailored to their needs. These help them to manage their emotions by becoming more aware of others' feelings. Most do this successfully when working with their learning partners and in mixed attainment groups.

Provision to support pupils with additional learning needs is strong and there are effective, inclusive strategies to support pupils in all classes. The school places the child at the heart of the planning process and staff, parents and pupils all work together to identify appropriate, individualised support. Through regular meetings, they review how well each pupil is progressing, discuss ways forward and identify precise next steps for pupils' learning and well-being. Experienced support staff, who know the pupils well, use carefully chosen resources to meet their needs and motivate them. They focus on helping pupils to develop their independence and closely monitor how well pupils apply their personal strategies and the skills they have been developing, when working in their classes.

The school provides good opportunities for pupils to direct their own learning during inquiry work, where they follow their own interests and ask questions they would like to find the answers to. For instance, during cross-curricular work, a group of pupils explore the concept of flight by designing and building a prototype hummingbird flying machine. This approach engages pupils' imagination and provides them with good opportunities to influence what and how they learn.

The daily acts of collective worship, where pupils and staff have time for reflection together, support pupils' spiritual development well. Pupils celebrate important days for themselves, their families and their community, including Remembrance Day and religious festivals. This contributes to deepening their sense of empathy, understanding and compassion for others. Increasingly, teachers provide real-life contexts for learning, and this helps to foster shared values, such as sustainability. For instance, pupils write to Manchester United Football Club to query its use of short-haul flights and explain convincingly the impact of this practice on the environment.

The school provides valuable opportunities for pupils to participate in a range of arts experiences across the year, which develop their confidence and ability to engage with a wider audience. These include plays performed for parents and celebrations of Welsh culture during the Eisteddfod on St David's Day. However, the school's provision for developing pupils' broader understanding of their heritage and culture, as well as the diversity of society, locally and in the wider world, is at an early stage.

The school has re-started residential visits to an outdoor education centre following the pandemic. The exciting activities during the residential visits have impacted positively on pupils' team-working and physical skills, while giving them a valuable opportunity to enjoy being in each other's company again. Coaches from Wrexham Football Club visit the school regularly and help pupils to develop their skills through a variety of games, as part of the school's extra-curricular provision.

The school has appropriate strategies in place to promote good attendance, including awards for pupils, daily monitoring, regular communication with parents and follow-up work supported by the local authority. In nearly all instances, arrangements to safeguard pupils meet requirements. However, an issue related to site security was brought to the attention of school leaders during the inspection.

Leadership and management

Leaders at Northop Hall Primary School have worked successfully with the school community to develop a clear shared vision for the learning and well-being of its pupils. This is focused on providing a nurturing learning environment in which all are challenged and inspired, and thrive as independent learners. The headteacher, in partnership with the governing body, provides thoughtful, strategic leadership. She has consistently high expectations of herself, staff and pupils. The senior leadership team effectively model and promote important values and behaviours, such as kindness and empathy in their daily interactions with pupils, staff and parents. Consequently, there is considerable professional respect among the staff team and morale is high. Staff and parents appreciate leaders' support, care and reassurance throughout the challenges of the past two years.

A notable strength of the school is its well-established culture of reflection that supports the effective management of change. Leaders encourage staff to step back and look at their collective achievements and challenges, sharing their thoughts and ideas with each other. As a result, leaders have developed an effective and engaged team of practitioners who collaborate successfully and are confident to try new ideas, knowing their feedback will influence what happens next.

Leaders know the school well. Arrangements to monitor and evaluate the school's work through the use of first-hand evidence are well embedded and allow leaders to identify clearly aspects of the school's work that are most in need of improvement. They share their observations from monitoring activities and pose key questions for staff to discuss in 'improvement workshops'. These are effective in helping all staff to understand why specific aspects of the school's work need to improve. This is, for example, leading to planned improvements in aspects of the school's provision for literacy. The information they collect, whether it be about pupils' standards or attitudes to learning, also helps leaders and governors to evaluate whether any changes the school is making benefit pupils as intended.

Thoughtful and well-considered planning ensures that the school addresses both local and national priorities successfully. This includes the Curriculum for Wales, additional learning needs reform and supporting pupils' well-being as a result of the pandemic. Short-term and longer-term goals are realistic and focus precisely on pupil outcomes. Most recently, the school has been successful in improving pupils' learning in mathematics. In particular, older pupils have made substantial progress in developing their numerical reasoning skills. A workshop for parents has helped them to understand the school's new approaches to teaching this subject and this enables them to support their children's learning more effectively.

There has been a measured and thoughtful approach to curriculum development, which has prioritised improvements to teaching and pupils' behaviours for learning. All staff have a strong understanding of the principles of a purpose-driven curriculum and this has provided a solid foundation upon which to trial and evaluate new approaches to teaching and learning. With support from Bangor and Glyndwr Universities, leaders and staff have used research successfully to review and adapt their practice to better meet the needs of all learners.

Mindful of staff well-being during this difficult period of the pandemic, leaders tailor their support to individual staff sensitively, helping them to develop the capacity to improve aspects of their teaching. Leaders provide rich professional learning opportunities for staff at all levels and stages of their career to develop their skills and knowledge, for example through coaching, peer observation and external programmes, such as the Welsh sabbatical scheme.

The governing body is well informed, holds leaders to account effectively and contributes much to the wider life of the school, including leading assemblies, volunteering at lunchtimes and delivering science lessons. Governors understand well the school's strengths and priorities for improvement, together with their legal responsibilities in respect of promoting pupils' healthy eating and drinking. Their diligent involvement in observing teaching and talking to learners enables them to be effective critical friends of the school.

Leaders and governors monitor the expenditure and the impact of the school's resources prudently. This includes pupil development grant funding, which is used to provide appropriate learning and well-being support for disadvantaged pupils. The use of this grant also ensures that identified pupils have the opportunity to take part in valuable learning experiences, such as residential visits to activity centres. Overall, leaders and governors establish and maintain a strong safeguarding culture at the school.

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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