



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

A report on

Maes Ebbw School

**Maesglas Road
Maesglas
NP20 3DG**

Date of inspection: June 2024

by

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

About Maes Ebbw School

Name of provider	Maes Ebbw School
Local authority	Newport City Council
Language of the provider	English
Type of school	Maintained Special
Religious character	
Number of pupils on roll	159
Pupils of statutory school age	125
Number in nursery classes	3
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 Maintained Special is 46.8%)	41.2%
Percentage of pupils identified as having additional learning needs (a) (The national percentage of pupils identified as having an additional learning need in Maintained Special is 100.0%)	100.0%
Percentage of pupils who speak Welsh at home	0%
Percentage of pupils with English as an additional language	27%
Date of headteacher appointment	01/09/2017
Date of previous Estyn inspection (if applicable)	14/03/2016
Start date of inspection	03/06/2024
<p>Maes Ebbw School is a local authority maintained special school in Newport. The school has two sites across Newport. Maes Ebbw is the main site and Maes Ebbw Bach is the smaller second site, mainly for older pupils.</p>	

Maes Ebbw School in Newport opened in 2001, following the amalgamation of two special schools. All current pupils all have a statement of special educational needs (SEN) or an individual development plan (IDP).

The school currently provides for 159 pupils aged between 3 and 19 years.

All pupils have a range of complex additional learning needs (ALN). These needs include severe learning difficulties (SLD), physical and medical difficulties, profound and multiple learning difficulties (PMLD), and autistic spectrum condition (ASC).

Nearly all pupils come from Newport, with very few living close to the school.

Just under half of pupils are eligible for free school meals.

English is the predominant language of many pupils. Around a quarter of pupils speak English as an additional language. Around a quarter come from ethnic minority backgrounds.

A very few pupils are in the care of the local authority.

The headteacher has been in post since 2017.

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

Maes Ebbw is a happy community where pupils feel valued and safe. Staff place pupils at the heart of everything they do. They have an extensive knowledge of the pupils and build strong relationships underpinned by care and respect.

Teaching is a notable strength in the school. As a result, nearly all pupils make strong progress and develop a range of important skills that supports their learning and well-being effectively.

Staff consistently use a range of communication strategies to meet the wide range of pupils' needs. As a result, pupils' communication needs are well met, and they are able to share their thoughts and feelings as well as engage in their learning.

Pupils at Maes Ebbw benefit from a bespoke curriculum with a clear focus on individual development. The curriculum at the school is broad and well balanced, thoughtfully and skilfully adapted to meet the needs of all pupils. The provision for both pupils' communication and physical skills development is a notable strength.

The school supports the spiritual, moral and cultural development of all pupils very well, planning rich opportunities for pupils to learn about diversity and different cultures. As a result, in line with their abilities, many pupils develop a strong understanding of other cultures and faiths, as well as their place in Wales.

The headteacher provides robust leadership, which directs the school successfully and systematically on its improvement journey. They have created a strong sense of community and mutual endeavour. Senior leaders work in collaboration, and together they have secured and embedded the vision; 'all are challenged to grow and succeed'. They create high-quality learning environments, which further strengthen the ethos of the school, and support and celebrate pupils' learning and achievements.

Recommendations

- R1 Further develop the role of middle leaders to increase capacity across the school.
- R2 Continue to improve the attendance of the few pupils who do not attend regularly

What happens next

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

Estyn will invite the school to prepare a case study on its work in relation to developing a bespoke curriculum to meet the needs of pupils with ALN.

Main evaluation

Learning

From their many starting points, nearly all pupils at Maes Ebbw School make very strong progress in all aspects of their learning.

Nearly all pupils make strong progress in relation to their individual development plans (IDPs). Over time, nearly all pupils meet or exceed expectations against their targets in all curriculum areas of learning experience, including literacy and numeracy. This represents very strong progress from individual pupils' starting points.

Throughout the school, nearly all pupils make strong progress with their active listening skills. For example, younger pupils follow instructions when making playdough. Older pupils with complex needs listen attentively to readings of stories and participate actively in creative responses, including dressing up as characters from the Wizard of Oz and re-enacting scenes from the book.

Nearly all pupils develop their communication skills appropriately over their time at the school. Most pupils communicate with adults and their peers confidently using their preferred methods, conveying their feelings, opinions and desires successfully. Pupils who communicate verbally make strong progress in developing their oracy. A few older pupils engage in detailed and meaningful conversation with enthusiasm and fluency. Nearly all pupils using non-verbal communication, including symbols, signing and assistive technologies, make strong progress in developing their related skills as they move through the school.

Nearly all pupils make very strong progress with their social skills during their time at the school. A few younger pupils wait patiently to take turns and to ask questions of staff who are helping others. Across the school, pupils are warm, generous and helpful toward their peers and staff, and many are welcoming and accepting of visitors. This is a strength of the school.

Many pupils develop their reading skills in line with their abilities. Pupils with more complex needs recognise and identify words linked to visual prompts. Many younger pupils make strong progress with their letter and word recognition, whilst many older pupils develop their reading skills successfully to follow instructions such as when using recipes.

Throughout the school, many pupils develop writing skills appropriate to their needs. Many younger pupils with complex needs use tracing guides to form letters, with a few going on to write simple words. Over time, a few pupils use their independent writing skills effectively to produce extended pieces of writing. For example, they craft clear, correctly punctuated paragraphs summarising the plot of 'The BFG'.

In line with their needs, nearly all pupils make strong progress with their mathematical skills during their time in the school. Pupils with complex needs can recognise comparative magnitudes and quantities, while many younger pupils count

sets of objects accurately. Many pupils are also able to count in single digits in Welsh.

Many pupils make strong progress in applying their numeracy skills both to problem solving and real-life situations. For example, nearly all of the school's older pupils are adept at using money to pay for goods and services, and a few pupils use their numeracy skills effectively to weigh and measure ingredients for Welsh cakes.

From their diverse starting points, nearly all pupils make strong, sustained, life-enhancing progress with their physical and movement skills. Many pupils with complex needs become increasingly independent with regard to mobility and self-care.

Over time, nearly all the school's oldest pupils develop their independent living skills successfully. For example, they are able to keep domestic spaces tidy and clean, launder and dry clothes, and are aware of how to keep themselves safe when moving through public spaces.

In line with their needs, many pupils make effective use of their digital skills. A few pupils use digital resources and facilities with competence and independence. For example, they use software to compose and share melodies, or use internet search engines to obtain pictures for a research project on birds.

Nearly all pupils make strong progress with their creative skills. For example, they study artists such as Mondrian, Picasso and Kandinsky to explore and experiment with a variety of artistic techniques, using painting and collage independently to add colour and texture to images. A few pupils demonstrate their artistic and communication skills in tandem by performing enthusiastically with the school's Makaton choir, signing and singing 'You've got a friend in me.'

Nearly all older pupils at the Maes Ebbw Bach site develop their problem-solving skills effectively. They apply a wide range of their skills successfully in authentic contexts, mirroring adult life and the world of work. For example, a few pupils create a mobile planter on wheels. They plan collaboratively; measure, mark and cut workpieces; and construct the final product using appropriate tools. They react constructively to unforeseen problems, for example, using rasps to tidy up rough edges.

Over time, nearly all pupils who leave the school do so with externally accredited qualifications which prepare and equip them very well for their next steps and future pathways.

Well-being and attitudes to learning

Nearly all pupils at Maes Ebbw enjoy coming to school and benefit from the valuable relationships and support provided by staff. They arrive at school calm, happy and ready to start their day. Nearly all pupils feel safe as a result of their strong working relationships with staff and the school's inclusive and caring ethos.

Nearly all pupils behave well in lessons and actively engage with their learning. Most pupils respond well to a range of valuable reward strategies such as celebration assemblies, certificates and visits to a local café.

Nearly all pupils are proud to share their work and achievements and display great pride in their community. They are very positive about their experiences at school. For example, many pupils on the Maes Ebbw Bach site describe their learning with confidence and enthusiasm, including with visitors.

Over their time at the school, nearly all pupils develop their confidence and self-esteem successfully and make considerable progress from their starting points. Many pupils respond positively to feedback and use this to move their learning forward. In line with their abilities, many pupils know how to improve their work.

Most pupils, relative to their abilities, make strong progress in learning to identify and manage their emotions. For example, where appropriate, many pupils are able to use colour zones to indicate how they are feeling. This has helped pupils to empathise with each other and has reduced incidences of disputes between peers.

Many pupils access an appropriate range of extracurricular clubs during break times which enriches their experiences. For example, pupils enjoy building robots in IT club. In addition, groups of pupils engage in appropriate adult led lunchtime activities such as making bubbles. At lunchtime, where appropriate, pupils sit in groups with members of staff and many engage positively and respectfully with each other.

Pupil voice plays an integral role in the work of the school. On a daily basis, nearly all pupils make decisions about the tasks that they engage in. Where pupils face communication difficulties, they use communication aids to express their opinions and make choices about their daily activities. This supports their independence and decision making well.

The school council plays an active and effective role in moving the school forward. Members of the council are proud of the work they have done in developing the playgrounds and outside learning environments. They take it in turns to present their thoughts and then build on each other's points.

Pupils across the school engage enthusiastically in a range of worthwhile leadership roles. As a result, they are fully involved in the life of the school. For example, older pupils collect recyclable waste and deliver milk to pupils across the school. They solve money problems when selling the morning breakfast and manage the logistics of setting up the hall each day for lunch and assemblies. This develops their leadership, thinking and problem-solving skills effectively.

Pupils in all classes have detailed individual targets relating to their movement and nearly all make sustained improvement in relation to their needs and starting points. Nearly all pupils engage in a wide range of activities that develop their physical skills successfully, appropriate to their needs, for example in swimming sessions in the hydrotherapy pool, tennis sessions at a local tennis club and in sessions in the gymnasium.

Most pupils understand the importance of eating and drinking healthily and participate in a range of activities that effectively support this. For example, younger pupils make healthy smoothies and pupils in older classes pupils cook healthy meals for each other.

Over time and in line with their abilities, nearly all pupils develop a strong understanding of how to keep themselves safe. For example, younger pupils or those with more complex needs develop an awareness of safe touch. Many older pupils develop a strong understanding of the need to be careful when using the internet. For example, they understand that they should not share passwords and should be mindful of when they are engaging with others online.

Nearly all pupils of all ages develop an important awareness of sustainability and caring for their environment. For example, they participate in litter picking walks and discuss why it is important to throw rubbish away. Older pupils take the lead in ensuring the recycling of materials around the school.

Many pupils attend school regularly. However, the attendance of a few is impacted by their medical needs. A few pupils have not attended regularly since before the pandemic. The level of exclusions at the school remains very low.

Teaching and learning experiences

Maes Ebbw School has a highly effective broad and stimulating pupil centred curriculum, designed in collaboration with the whole staff team, pupils and parents. There is a strong understanding of the purpose of the curriculum across the school and its construction meets the needs of pupils extremely well.

Teaching at the school is a notable strength. Well-established curriculum planning enables nearly all pupils to acquire important skills and extend their knowledge and understanding effectively. Teachers across the school plan skilfully to ensure comprehensive coverage of all areas of learning, including for literacy, numeracy and digital skills across the curriculum. Planning for the development of pupils' communication and physical skills is a particular strength of the school.

Teachers and support staff develop valuable and caring working relationships with pupils. They effectively use praise and encouragement to build positive relationships ensuring pupils feel settled and secure in class and during transitions. This approach fosters a consistent, calm learning environment across the school.

In nearly all lessons, staff have high expectations of pupils' progress. Staff make good use of and learn from the informative support from a range of specialist staff. This has enabled staff, for example, to provide an inclusive communication approach, enabling nearly all pupils to engage in learning. This includes the use of communication boards, visual timetables, physical support and signing.

Nearly all teachers and teaching assistants use a wide range of strategies and resources skilfully to engage and support pupils to achieve. Classroom practice across the school is highly successful in engaging pupils and developing their skills, knowledge, understanding and experiences. Nearly all staff use questioning and feedback effectively, tailored to the needs of each pupil. This is a strength of the school. As a result, nearly all pupils make strong progress from their starting points.

Across the school, staff create stimulating and engaging environments in which all groups of pupils, including those with complex needs, learn successfully. They ensure creative approaches to learning, where activities are well-matched to the

interests and individual needs of all pupils. For example, in drama lessons staff use music to create atmosphere and provide sensory stimulation, using ribbons, water spray, a coloured parachute and lights. These approaches engage pupils and enable them to experience and demonstrate curiosity and responsiveness to environmental sounds and actions.

The curriculum broadens as pupils progress through the school. In classes for older pupils teachers provide authentic and engaging learning experiences that inspire pupils to raise their aspirations around future careers, developing them as ambitious and capable learners. Nearly all older pupils gain purposeful accreditation in a range of courses such as vocational pathways and independent living skills.

Teachers are highly effective in developing pupils' independence and life skills successfully. For example, through activities such as gardening, enterprise projects creating crafts, and cooking jacket potatoes, cakes and snacks to sell in the café or at school events. Staff also develop older pupils' independent living skills successfully, for example using the valuable space at the 'Bach' site to teach pupils how to do laundry, make beds and vacuum.

Teaching assistants know and understand the needs of pupils extremely well and provide invaluable support. They skilfully manage potentially challenging situations with their expertise. For instance, in some lessons, they incorporate sensory breaks to support the pupils' learning experience effectively. All staff adapt their approaches well to ensure that nearly all pupils fully access the curriculum.

The school offers a beneficial range of work experiences including community radio broadcasting, catering, and working on a farm. These experiences are carefully linked to pupils' skills and interests, for example developing motor skills when driving a digger on a farm.

The school enriches pupils' understanding and appreciation of global diversity by incorporating valuable events, activities and resources that celebrate a range of cultures and faiths. Teachers plan worthwhile experiences such as making Diwali lamps and Eid cards which provide pupils with 'hands on' learning opportunities. Additionally, the school shares pupils' work on cultural diversity with parents through the weekly coffee mornings. As a result, the curriculum reflects the school's unique context while embracing the diverse nature of Wales and the wider world.

The school has improved its provision for teaching Welsh appropriate to pupils' needs. Staff model Welsh phrases and sentences effectively to give praise, instructions or ask simple questions. Teachers provide opportunities to celebrate Welsh language and culture through events such as the Eisteddfod, 'Shwmae Day' or making clay models of Welsh women wearing traditional dress.

The school's processes for assessing the needs of pupils are highly successful. Across the school, staff use assessment information skilfully to ensure that teaching builds on previous learning and takes account of pupils' individual targets. They make detailed observations of individual pupils' progress over time and track assessment information robustly. Through collaboration and moderation, teachers develop a shared understanding of progression to ensure that their assessments are valid, accurate and reliable and suited to the needs of the pupil. Further, leaders

meet regularly with the class teams as part of 'pit-stops' to discuss the progress of pupils against their individual targets, including their well-being, which is a high priority across the school. As a result, nearly all pupils make very good progress in all areas of learning. This is a significant strength of the school.

Care, support and guidance

Maes Ebbw School provides a very nurturing and caring environment where staff know the pupils' individual needs and interests well. Working relationships between staff and pupils are very positive and the caring ethos ensures that pupils feel happy at school and many attend regularly. The quality of the care, support and guidance across the school is a significant strength.

The school believes that 'every child has a voice, and every child has a right to be heard' and this ethos permeates the school. The school council meets regularly and consists of pupils who are able to express their views verbally. Further, staff work tirelessly to enable all pupils to have a voice, using methods appropriate to their needs. For example, pupils with profound and multiple learning difficulties (PMLD) use eye gaze technology to indicate their choice of snack and pupils use communication aids to explain their views as part of pupil voice activities.

The school provides useful personal plans for all pupils which are shared with relevant staff and parents. These include individual education plans (IEPs), one-page profiles, communication and movement plans, or curriculum vitae for older pupils. Staff work closely with external agencies such as physiotherapists and occupational therapists to enhance and extend provision and guide practice in the school. Consequently, staff have a clear understanding of how to support pupils effectively in their learning and development.

Many pupils also have detailed individual behaviour plans (IBPs) that outline suitable strategies to enable staff to manage behaviour proactively and support pupils to self-regulate. As a result, over their time at the school, many pupils show a reduction in incidents of challenging behaviours.

Staff receive regular training on supporting pupils' well-being. For example, all staff have received basic training on a trauma-informed approach to improving children's mental health and well-being. However, this approach is not yet fully embedded across the school.

The school tracks and monitors pupils' attendance effectively. The work of the newly established family engagement team is beginning to have a positive impact on improving attendance and has further strengthened the working relationships between the school and families. However, attendance has not yet returned to pre-pandemic levels.

The school supports the spiritual, moral and cultural development of all pupils very well, using weekly themes in addition to the well-considered curriculum. Staff promote cultural awareness amongst all pupils successfully. They plan rich opportunities for pupils to learn about diversity and different cultures. For example, through studying important festivals and celebrations such as Ramadan, Diwali, Vesak and St David's Day. As a result, in line with their abilities, many pupils develop

a strong understanding of other cultures and religions as well as their place in Wales, developing them into ethical and informed citizens.

The school places a strong emphasis on the development of pupils' physical skills. For example, a few pupils take part in an activity-based programme which helps them to gain independent movement. Further, the school has a range of equipment that the wider group of pupils can use to develop their physical skills, for example a sunken trampoline, a range of climbing equipment and a hydrotherapy pool. Over time, many pupils develop their independent mobility skills well. In addition, much of this provision has a beneficial effect in supporting pupils to regulate their emotions.

The school offers an appropriate range of extra-curricular activities that help pupils to develop existing and new interests, for example dance, robotics and art clubs. The school also offers regular opportunities for pupils to meet and socialise with each other as part of school discos and events such as the Christmas Fair. These opportunities for family engagement and socialising with peers supports pupils to develop well as healthy, confident individuals in a safe environment.

The school prepares pupils well in their transition to adult life. Close links with social services, Careers Wales and local colleges enrich the provision in this area. In addition, staff are highly effective in helping pupils develop important life skills such as social communication, preparing meals and how to travel safely. As a result, pupils are well supported to access future learning and work-related experiences.

The school has robust procedures for ensuring that annual reviews of pupils' individual development plans (IDPs) take place in a timely manner. Staff use person centred practice well and effectively involve pupils, parents and the views of others. Where needed, interpreters are used to enable parents to play an active role in the review of their child's progress.

Staff recognise and value the importance of strong relationships with families and communicate with them very effectively. They support families well to identify and practise communication strategies that are beneficial to pupils both at school and at home. For example, parents and carers are given information on signs and symbols which can be of use in the home.

The school also supports families well in understanding the support available to them from both the school and the wider community, for example completing paperwork with Heddlu Gwent to register their child's ALN in case of accidents or emergencies as part of the Trinity Protocol.

The school has a strong culture of safeguarding. The school's safeguarding and child protection arrangements are well understood by the whole school community. The school has thorough safer recruitment practices and provides a safe and nurturing environment for its pupils.

Leadership and management

The headteacher provides robust leadership, which directs the school successfully and systematically on its improvement journey, creating a strong sense of community and mutual endeavour. They articulate clear expectations and ambition, which leads

to significant improvement in securing the provision, well-being and outcomes for pupils. For example, the school has made very good progress since the last inspection in improving the progress that pupils make in all aspects of their learning. This is a notable strength of the school.

Senior leaders have developed and shared a secure vision for the school. This is captured by 'all are challenged to grow and succeed'. They model high expectations and aspirations successfully and work effectively together, creating a culture of respect, support and collaboration. Leaders at all levels provide sensitive support to ensure the well-being of all staff. As a result, staff across the school feel well supported by senior leaders.

Leaders have established a strong safeguarding culture across the school. Staff and governors are clear about their responsibilities in safeguarding pupils and demonstrate a robust understanding of the processes in place to keep pupils safe.

Leaders' work in addressing national priorities is effective. The school's planning for Curriculum for Wales is embedded and the whole-school approach to developing pupils' skills is having a substantial positive impact. In addition, leaders are addressing the transition to the new legislation for ALN with confidence.

Across the school, senior leaders nurture, support and develop staff at all levels. This has resulted in a successful staff team who work effectively together. Many staff are keen to enhance their leadership skills and are enthusiastic about assuming additional responsibilities. The school has identified improving the role of middle leaders in driving school improvement and increasing leadership capacity. This is at an early stage of development.

There are clear lines of accountability and line management arrangements, which focus on support and development well. Performance management processes are embedded and make a significant contribution to the school's progress towards addressing the school improvement priorities.

Leaders ensure a range of useful professional learning opportunities which are well attended by all staff. This supports the school well in driving improvements. The range and quality of professional learning has led to the improved provision and outcomes for nearly all pupils.

The school has a clear and well-structured calendar of activities to gain first-hand evidence about the quality of teaching and learning. This includes full lesson observations, learning walks, listening to learners, scrutiny of pupils' work and canvassing pupils' and parents' opinions. Leaders have high expectations for quality in various key aspects, such as improving pupils' communication and physical skills, which are shared effectively with staff.

Leaders identify accurate priorities for development, for example improving attendance. Leaders have been successful in securing significant improvements, for example in improving engagement with parents and developing a purposeful, authentic curriculum, relevant to needs of all pupils at Maes Ebbw School.

Over time, the school has established a wide range of beneficial strategic partnerships. Leaders work successfully with an extensive range of professionals to provide valuable therapeutic and social and emotional support for pupils.

Leaders create a strong sense of trust and mutual respect with parents. This is a significant strength of the school's work. They provide valuable weekly information sessions and workshops with school staff and other visiting professionals. As a result of the strong communication, parents are well informed about their child's progress and better equipped to support their individual needs. Reports to parents are detailed and informative and give parents appropriate information on their child's progress and how they can make further progress in the future.

Governors are supportive of and knowledgeable about the school's work. Many governors visit the school regularly and participate in a suitable range of quality assurance activities. For example, learning walks, lesson observations, listening to learners and data evaluation. Governors contribute purposefully to the setting of the school's strategic priorities and have a clear understanding of the school's strengths and areas for development. The governing body provides an appropriate balance of support and challenge and holds senior leaders to account in its role as a 'critical friend'. Governors have robust arrangements to promote healthy eating and drinking.

The headteacher, bursar and governors monitor the school's finances rigorously to ensure that all spending is closely aligned with its development priorities. Grant funding, including the Pupil Development Grant (PDG), is used effectively to support the well-being and progress of pupils who are eligible for free school meals and those from low-income households.

Evidence base of the report

Before an inspection, inspectors:

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

During an inspection, inspectors normally:

- hold a meeting with parents/carers to hear their views on the school and its effectiveness
- meet the headteacher, governors, senior and middle leaders (where appropriate) and individual teachers to evaluate the impact of the school's work
- meet pupils to discuss their work, to listen to them read and to gain their views about various aspects of their school
- meet groups of pupils in leadership roles, such as representatives from the school council and eco-committee
- visit a broad sample of classes, including learning support groups and undertake a variety of learning walks to observe pupils learning and to see staff teaching in a range of settings, including classrooms, support groups and in outdoor areas
- where appropriate, visit the specialist resource base within the school to see pupils' learning
- observe and speak to pupils at lunch and break times and at a sample of after-school clubs, where appropriate
- attend assemblies and daily acts of collective worship
- look closely at the school's self-evaluation processes
- consider the school's improvement plan and look at evidence to show how well the school has taken forward planned improvements
- scrutinise a range of school documents, including information on pupil assessment and progress, records of meetings of staff and the governing body, information on pupils' well-being, including the safeguarding of pupils, and records of staff training and professional development

After the on-site inspection and before the publication of the report, Estyn:

- review the findings of the inspection alongside the supporting evidence from the inspection team in order to validate, moderate and ensure the quality of the inspection

Copies of the report

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

The report was produced in accordance with Section 28 of the Education Act 2005.

Every possible care has been taken to ensure that the information in this document is accurate at the time of publication. Any enquiries or comments regarding this document/publication should be addressed to:

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