



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

**A report on**

**Penycae Community Primary School**

**Copperas Hill  
Penycae  
Wrexham  
LL14 2SD**

**Date of inspection: May 2024**

**by**

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

## About Penycae Community Primary School

Name of provider	Penycae Community Primary School
Local authority	Wrexham County Borough Council
Language of the provider	English
Type of school	Primary
Religious character	None
Number of pupils on roll	187
Pupils of statutory school age	166
Number in nursery classes	18
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 23.7%)	40.6%
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 13.2%)	24.6%
Percentage of pupils who speak Welsh at home	0.5%
Percentage of pupils with English as an additional language	5.0%
Date of headteacher appointment	01/09/2008
Date of previous Estyn inspection (if applicable)	01/07/2016
Start date of inspection	20/05/2024

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](https://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

Penycae Community School is a happy and caring community. Leaders have created a clear vision and work purposefully to ensure a safe and inclusive environment where pupils feel valued and supported. Staff know their pupils very well and understand their needs. This allows pupils to thrive in the school's inclusive environment. Pupils know that adults in the school care for them and that they can turn to them when they face challenges or have difficulties. Support for pupils' emotional well-being is highly effective. This is particularly evident in the positive encouragement staff provide for pupils with additional learning needs (ALN). Most pupils behave well and show positive attitudes to learning. They are welcoming and polite, show respect to adults and are caring towards their peers.

The school's curriculum is broad and balanced and underpinned by the school's strong values and ethos. Teachers and support staff plan engaging learning experiences that help to ensure most pupils make good progress with their skills during lessons and over time. They listen carefully to what pupils want to learn and weave their ideas into well-planned sequences of lessons that build systematically on pupils' knowledge and understanding. Classrooms and outdoor spaces are productive, active learning environments. This ensures that most pupils focus well during lessons and demonstrate interest in their learning. Most teaching is purposeful and enables pupils to develop their skills well. However, the provision to develop pupils' Welsh language skills and numeracy across the curriculum is less well developed.

School leaders have high expectations of themselves and others and aspire for the best learning experiences for all. They are ably supported by a committed team of dedicated and caring staff who strive to ensure that pupils' well-being and progress are paramount. Leaders know the school well and are open and honest about its strengths and areas for improvement. For example, the school recognises the need to provide more opportunities for pupils to develop their independence and the skills to improve their own learning. The governors support the school with wisdom and integrity and have a strong understanding of their duties and obligations.

## Recommendations

- R1 Provide opportunities for pupils to develop their independent learning skills, including how they organise and present their work
- R2 Ensure that the quality of teachers' feedback targets the next steps in pupils' learning effectively and the time to act upon it
- R3 Further develop the curriculum to ensure that the school provides a systematic whole school approach to the development of pupils' Welsh language skills and their use of numeracy skills across the curriculum

## What happens next

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

## Main evaluation

### Learning

Most pupils, including those eligible for free school meals (FSM), make good progress in their learning during their time in school. Pupils with additional learning needs (ALN) progress well from their individual starting points and achieve well against their personal targets.

Younger pupils develop their listening and speaking skills well. They talk confidently about their 'learning powers' and why being resilient is important. As they progress through the school, nearly all pupils make sound progress in their oracy, developing a varied and interesting spoken vocabulary. Older pupils confidently discuss how they take part in a wide range of activities in the outdoor area.

At an early stage, most pupils begin to understand the importance of books and develop an enthusiasm for reading. The youngest pupils learn to blend sounds efficiently and attempt unfamiliar words using a variety of phonic strategies purposefully. They apply their reading skills effectively to support their learning in different areas of the curriculum, for example when researching the formation of volcanoes.

As they progress through the school, nearly all pupils make sound progress in developing their writing skills. Younger pupils progress from early mark making to writing simple sentences effectively. By Year 2, most pupils write stories that have interest and include a suitable range of vocabulary, for example to describe their experiences tasting Indian food. Older pupils choose language appropriately for effect and adapt their writing style to different genres, for example when writing an imaginative diary entry where they are the leading goal scorer in a cup final. By Year 6, many write effectively across a wide range of genres, for example when creating fact files about their topic on rollercoasters.

Many pupils have a positive attitude to learning Welsh and respond to teachers' instructions well. Many children in the Nursery class respond well to instructions by the teacher and sing songs in Welsh enthusiastically. By Year 2, many pupils use simple greetings and respond appropriately to questions about their likes and dislikes. As pupils progress through the school, many show an appropriate understanding of spoken language in familiar situations. They answer with basic responses during discussions with teachers and each other, for example when sharing personal information. However, they do not use their oral Welsh language skills confidently enough in other areas of the curriculum and around the school.

Many pupils develop their mathematical skills well. 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. Older pupils work well with the four rules of number, shape and measure, and develop sound data handling skills. By Year 6, many pupils use a wide range of methods competently to calculate in their heads and on paper when solving problems. They describe their thinking and reasoning well and explain how they have reached conclusions. Generally, however, pupils do not use their numeracy skills at a similar level in other areas of the curriculum.

Most pupils develop their digital skills well. Younger pupils complete simple matching games independently. By Year 2, pupils use a range of programs effectively to produce and edit text. As pupils progress through the school, they develop a wider range of skills in data handling, create spreadsheets and develop basic programming skills well. Older pupils use their digital skills effectively to support their learning in other areas, for example to support their topic on fairgrounds.

Most pupils enjoy using their creative and artistic skills. Many demonstrate effective fine motor skills, using scissors, glue and paint brushes confidently. Many younger pupils demonstrate good creative skills, for example when creating minibeasts using natural materials. Older pupils work creatively with a wide range of materials, for example when emulating the work of a famous Welsh artist or creating bracelets in the outdoors. Many develop a good sense of rhythm and pitch by playing musical instruments during song writing and music workshops.

Many pupils participate enthusiastically and energetically in a wide range of physical activity. Younger pupils develop their skills effectively through a range of purposeful activities using a variety of equipment including an agility course. Older pupils build on these skills well during a variety of physical education activities such as rounders and other team games. This has a positive effect on their confidence, their ability to work together, and their fitness and well-being.

### **Well-being and attitudes to learning**

Most pupils are happy and friendly. They feel safe at school and know whom to approach if they have any concerns. They show respect to adults and are caring towards their peers. Most pupils talk proudly about the school and are very aware of the care they receive from staff. They have a clear understanding of the school's expectations of behaviour and, as a result, most behave well and are courteous and polite to staff and visitors. Many pupils have developed effective strategies to keep calm and to help themselves refocus on their learning successfully when they experience difficulties.

Most pupils settle quickly in lessons and are developing as capable and aspirational learners. Many contribute their ideas to the planning of topics knowing that teachers follow these up when planning learning experiences. As a result, most pupils engage well in their learning and participate appropriately in lessons and remain focused for extended periods of time. They enjoy working in pairs and groups, sharing ideas and happily taking turns. When given the opportunity, for example in the forest area,

many pupils plan and carry out tasks with limited support. However, generally, pupils are over-reliant on teacher direction and do not make enough decisions about how they organise and present their work. This limits opportunities for pupils to think for themselves and to develop as independent learners. Although the majority of pupils are beginning to reflect and improve their own work during class lessons, generally, their input into improving their own work is at an early stage of development.

Most pupils demonstrate an appropriate understanding of children's rights and discuss how it affects them and children in other countries. Most pupils demonstrate a broad understanding of cultural diversity through their study of different faiths. This leads to respect for the beliefs of others and an understanding that society is multi-cultural. Most pupils develop as ethical and knowledgeable citizens and show a strong awareness of what it is to be a good friend and how to help others. Such positive attitudes increase the pupils' awareness of their actions towards creating a caring, tolerant society. Pupils enjoy celebrating their own culture and language and have an appropriate understanding of what it is like to live in modern day Wales.

Most pupils play well together and interact well with adults at break and lunchtimes. Pupils enjoy learning in the outdoor areas. This supports their well-being and social development effectively. They develop their problem-solving skills well. For example, younger pupils build bridges to help teddy cross the river, while older pupils design and construct fences made of pallets around the newly dug pond.

Many pupils enthusiastically take on suitable leadership roles, for example as members of the pupil voice groups, including the school council, 'Criw Cymraeg' and the eco council. The school council members are elected by their peers and immensely proud of their role and the difference they make. They are beginning to be actively involved in school-wide decision making. For example, the buddy bench and recruitment campaign for bench buddies recognises the need for companionship during break and lunch time and clearly demonstrates the empathy and respect pupils have for each other. The eco council are committed to making the world a better place, to keeping the school litter free, and encouraging everyone to save electricity. Nearly all pupils respect the environment and understand how their decisions and choices affect it. For example, most pupils agree on the need to save energy.

Most pupils across the school have a sound knowledge and have positive attitudes towards living healthy lives. They understand the importance of eating a balanced diet, drinking water, and leading an active lifestyle. They appreciate the need to take regular exercise, involving themselves actively in a range of physical activities such as football, swimming and after school clubs. Older pupils explain how emotional health strategies, such as the zones of regulation, are extremely important to help them balance their lifestyle. Most have a sound awareness of how to keep themselves and others safe online. They are aware of the importance of regular and punctual attendance at school, which contributes effectively to improving the recent attendance rates.

### **Teaching and learning experiences**

The school has a clear, shared vision for learning that reflects the principles and culture of Curriculum for Wales. The school's vision reflects the context of the school

well. Leaders and staff work closely with pupils, parents, and governors to develop a purposeful curriculum based on the school's core values that reflects the local area. Teachers plan worthwhile opportunities to inspire pupils to raise their aspiration for the future. For example, younger pupils investigate careers within the community and older pupils explore careers and the skills needed to achieve their goals in life.

Teachers work together productively to plan interesting cross-curriculum topics, which are relevant to pupils' interests and engage them well. They ensure that pupils contribute their ideas and suggestions in the planning process. This provides pupils with a sense of ownership in their learning. They create attractive and engaging learning areas including working walls and accessible resources. The colourful displays in and around the school celebrate pupils work and, as a result, pupils take great pride in each other's work, demonstrating a respectful, encouraging, and caring attitude. Staff use the school's extensive outdoor learning areas effectively to offer authentic learning experiences to pupils, including in the forest school. For example, older pupils learn how to saw wood and make nettle and dandelion tea. This enables pupils to develop independence as well as learning to care about living things and the environment and to engage with each other and adults confidently.

Teachers identify valuable opportunities for pupils to build on previous learning and provide opportunities for pupils to apply their developing literacy and digital skills in engaging contexts across the curriculum. However, whole-school systematic planning to develop pupils' Welsh oracy skills and numeracy skills across the curriculum is at an early stage of development.

Most teachers use basic Welsh vocabulary appropriately in the classroom, such as while giving instructions to pupils. They provide regular 'Helpwr Heddiw' sessions to develop pupils' vocabulary and sentence patterns. Generally, however, staff do not make the most of opportunities to extend language patterns or encourage the pupils to speak and ask and answer questions in Welsh outside formal Welsh sessions. As a result, pupils' knowledge and understanding of Welsh vocabulary is at a basic level, which hampers their confidence to speak the language in other areas of the curriculum.

All staff have warm relationships with pupils that support the nurturing, caring ethos that permeates the school. They consistently manage pupil behaviour positively and foster a supportive environment for learning. They know their pupils well, encourage them to participate and praise their efforts while they are working and interacting with their peers. Teachers create a purposeful atmosphere where pupils feel safe to make mistakes and ask for help. Skilled support staff work effectively with teachers to provide high quality support for pupils' learning and well-being. A notable feature is the effective nurture provision, which enables learners with specific needs to engage in and benefit from the opportunity to access small group activities.

Teachers have good up to date subject knowledge and use a variety of effective teaching methods to stimulate and encourage pupils to learn. In most classes, teachers use questioning effectively to move pupils' learning on and support understanding according to the needs of pupils, ensuring that pupils are appropriately challenged. However, generally staff tend to over-direct pupils' learning and do not provide enough opportunities for pupils to make independent choices about how they approach and present their work.

Teachers use summative assessments well to track pupil progress in key areas such as literacy and numeracy. They use this information effectively to inform planning and identify pupils in need of additional support or intervention. Most teachers provide purposeful feedback during lessons that encourages pupils to remain on task and, in the best examples, encourage pupils to reflect on aspects of their work such as spelling and grammar. However, overall, the quality of feedback is variable, and teachers do not provide enough opportunities for pupils to respond to feedback and to review and make improvements to their work.

### **Care, support and guidance**

The school is a happy caring and inclusive community, which has a positive impact on the development of pupils' learning, social and emotional skills. Leaders prioritise and foster a shared approach to well-being, ensuring an atmosphere of respect between staff and pupils. This leads to pupils feeling safe and cared for within a trusting setting. The readiness of staff to listen to pupils' concerns contributes significantly to promoting the positive relationships that exist between staff and pupils and the nurturing ethos that pervades the school.

Staff know their pupils, their backgrounds and the local community very well. Procedures for managing challenging behaviour are effective. Staff respond effectively to pupils' needs and promptly address any emotional difficulties. They utilise a range of strategies successfully in line with the school's positive focus for supporting pupils. As a result, purposeful interventions have a beneficial effect on pupils' well-being. A notable feature is the way many pupils develop the necessary skills to manage their emotions successfully when facing difficulties.

The school has an inclusive ethos and offers effective provision to support pupils with ALN. The additional learning needs co-ordinator (ALNCo) has a thorough understanding of the individual needs of the pupils. Arrangements for identifying and responding to the needs of specific pupils are rigorous. Staff involve pupils, parents and the views of outside agencies to plan interventions and evaluate their impact. Consequently, most pupils with ALN receive well-planned support programmes and engaging activities, which enable them to make good progress from their individual starting points. Specific sessions that focus on pupils' well-being and self-esteem are effective and enable pupils to participate in lessons successfully. This supports pupils' positive attitudes to learning, improves their social skills and encourages them to share their feelings openly with one another and adults. Teachers and support staff skilfully deliver literacy and numeracy interventions for specific groups of pupils. These make a positive impact on their well-being and progress. Leaders work closely with local partners to enhance the learning and support for pupils. For example, they work closely with the local high school to provide opportunities for pupils with additional needs, to engage in extended transition sessions. This enables them to gain confidence before they move to the next stage in their education.

The school's environment and collective worship promote pupils' spiritual, personal, moral and ethical development well. Staff share with pupils the opportunities to reflect on the community, their thoughts, and their roles within the school community. This provides pupils with valuable opportunities to consider the concept of 'right and wrong' and the importance of forgiveness, tolerance and caring. Staff enable pupils to explore issues of equality, diversity and inclusion from around the world. These



include exploring different traditions from other cultures and different religions, including Judaism and the Mexican 'Night of the dead'. Opportunities to consider the consequences of prejudice and discrimination help pupils to understand the importance of fairness, equality and inclusion within their daily lives. Staff provide purposeful opportunities for pupils to learn about the global effect of climate change on the environment and to consider how they can help to lessen the impact.

The school makes appropriate provision to promote Welsh heritage and culture. This raises pupils' awareness of their history and heritage, for example through their study of the locality of Wrexham, and modern-day Wales. Through valuable learning experiences, the pupils develop a strong understanding of what it means to be Welsh. Teachers provide a range of stimulating visits, for example to the local church, a local zoo as well as residential trips to an outdoor centre. Staff provide purposeful opportunities for pupils to participate in musical events such as the school eisteddfod and the local 'jambori'. These activities have a positive effect on most pupils' ability to work together and develop their perseverance and resilience. In addition, the school provides valuable opportunities during physical education sessions, including swimming, and a range of after-school clubs, which enable pupils to engage in physical activity. These successfully enhance pupils' physical development and enjoyment in an active lifestyle.

The safeguarding culture is robust, and all staff understand their roles and responsibilities in contributing to pupils' safety and well-being. There is effective provision to support pupils to keep themselves safe when working online. The school has sound strategies in place to promote good pupil attendance including daily monitoring, regular communication with parents and follow-up work supported by the local authority. These have led to a steady improvement in pupil attendance over the past three years. The school's arrangements for keeping pupils safe meet requirements and give no cause for concern.

## **Leadership and management**

The headteacher provides effective and thoughtful leadership, which ensures that the school has a clear strategic direction. He is well supported by a strong leadership team. They are knowledgeable and passionate about how the school can make a difference in the community it serves. They put staff and pupil well-being at the heart of school life. Together they model professional values and behaviour that contribute purposefully to effective collaboration amongst staff. This results in a strong team ethic where dedicated, hardworking staff collaborate effectively.

Leaders embrace a clear vision based on 'Respect people, Value things and Aim high' and convey it effectively to staff, pupils, governors, and parents. They know their community well and work with dedication to create a happy, caring, and close-knit school where pupils work and play together confidently. They have created a positive safeguarding culture, where pupils and staff feel safe and valued. One of the school's strengths is the clear emphasis on well-being strategies to support pupils' emotional needs, particularly for vulnerable pupils.

Among leaders and staff there is a strong awareness and commitment to address local and national priorities. They are aspirational for pupils' futures and pursue opportunities to influence pupils' lives positively, for example by making Curriculum

for Wales a reality for pupils and ensuring that ALN reforms are addressed successfully. The deputy headteacher leads on curriculum design. She works collaboratively with staff, governors, pupils and parents to create a clear rationale for the school's curriculum. As a result, they share a clear vision for their curriculum which reflects the school's context well.

Leaders and staff establish effective links with parents. There is regular communication using digital platforms and family learning programmes. For example, the Welsh Coffee and Bingo sessions provide parents with valuable opportunities to work alongside their children and support their children's learning at home.

Leaders work effectively with staff to develop a collective responsibility for self-evaluation. They enable staff to work together co-operatively in small groups to develop and monitor specific aspects of teaching and learning to inform school improvement. Activities are robust and inform leaders of the school's strengths and areas for improvement well. For example, they have correctly identified the need to provide pupils with more opportunities to take greater responsibility for their own learning and to ensure greater consistency in aspects of teaching and assessment. Recent monitoring has identified the need to strengthen provision to develop pupils' Welsh language skills and to extend opportunities for pupils to apply their numeracy skills across the curriculum.

Leaders create a strong culture of professional learning across the school. Professional development links well to the needs of individual teachers, local or national priorities and areas identified in the school improvement plan. They ensure that all staff have purposeful opportunities to engage in professional learning, which impacts positively on their own development, the direction of the school and the outcomes for pupils. There is clear emphasis on improving support for pupils' emotional well-being. This has a positive effect on improving pupils' resilience and attendance. Staff welcome the regular opportunities to share their experiences with colleagues from local schools, for example to gain a better understanding of continuity and progression in pupils' learning.

The governing body is well informed, effective, and committed to supporting the school. Members understand the school's context, its strengths, and priorities for improvement well. They receive regular updates from school leaders regarding progress towards identified areas for improvement and individual members visit school, for example, to carry out learning walks, listen to learners and scrutinise pupils' work. This enables them to challenge sensibly as critical friends and hold the school to account for its performance effectively. They ensure that there are appropriate arrangements to promote healthy eating and drinking.

School leaders and governors manage their school budget well and careful financial planning ensures that the school has sufficient funds to deliver plans in the coming year. Leaders allocate and monitor the pupil development grant and other additional funding carefully, ensuring a range of valuable support programmes to help the emotional and social development of vulnerable pupils.

## 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](http://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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