



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

A report on

The Court Special School

**96a Station Road
Llanishen
CF14 5UX**

Date of inspection: June 2024

by

Estyn, His Majesty's Inspectorate for Education

and Training in Wales

About The Court Special School

| | |
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| Name of provider | The Court Special School |
| Local authority | Cardiff Council |
| Language of the provider | English |
| Type of school | Maintained Special |
| Religious character | * |
| Number of pupils on roll | 41 |
| Pupils of statutory school age | 41 |
| Number in nursery classes | 0 |
| 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%) | 82.4% |
| 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 | 2.4% |
| Date of headteacher appointment | 01/09/2016 |
| Date of previous Estyn inspection (if applicable) | 09/06/2014 |
| Start date of inspection | 17/06/2024 |
| <p>The Court School is a special school maintained by Cardiff City Council. The school supports primary aged pupils from 7 to 11 years of age with behavioural, emotional and social difficulties (BESD). Many of the pupils who attend have additional barriers to learning, including attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), autistic spectrum condition (ASC) and emotional and mental health difficulties.</p> | |

All pupils have a statement of special educational needs (SEN) or an individual development plan (IDP).

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

Many of the pupils are eligible for free school meals.

English is the predominant language of nearly all pupils. No pupils speak Welsh at home. Very few pupils speak English as an additional language. Very few come from ethnic minority backgrounds.

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

The headteacher has been in post since September 2016.

Data reported is sourced from the latest available Pupil Level Annual School Census. These figures may be slightly different to those observed during the inspection.

Further information is available from the Welsh Government My Local School website: mylocalschool.gov.wales

a. The term 'additional learning needs' is being used to describe those pupils on the SEN/ALN register of the school

Overview

The Court School 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.

Many pupils have experienced the breakdown of placements with previous providers. This has adversely affected their confidence and self-esteem. At the Court School, pupils benefit from an individualised education programme with a clear focus on the development of pupils' emotional well-being. Staff across the school build trust with pupils successfully and know pupils' needs and interests well. This is a notable strength of the school. Over time, nearly all pupils make significant progress in improving their attitudes to learning and enjoy school.

Staff consistently embed a range of strategies across the school to improve pupils' health and well-being. As a result, over time, most pupils develop their understanding of healthy lifestyles well, helping them to become healthy, confident individuals.

The curriculum has recently been developed to encompass pupils' needs and interests well. Pupils enjoy learning about topics, such as astronomy and sporting heroes. Many pupils make good progress in developing their reading and numeracy skills. However, pupils' writing skills are less well-developed. The development of pupils' physical skills is a strength.

The school supports the 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 sensitive and compassionate leadership, creating a highly inclusive ethos and a strong sense of community. Senior leaders work in collaboration. Together, they have secured and embedded the vision; 'keep calm and keep learning'. They create highly supportive learning environments, where pupils thrive and begin to believe in themselves.

Recommendations

- R1 Refine self-evaluation processes so that leaders at all levels collect and analyse data and other important information systematically to identify strategic priorities accurately
- R2 Strengthen assessment processes to take account of pupils' progress in all areas of their learning

What happens next

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

Main evaluation

Learning

Due to their complex learning and behavioural needs, the ability range of pupils across the school varies considerably. In lessons and over time, many pupils make appropriate progress against targets in their personal plans. Nearly all pupils eligible for free school meals and with English as an additional language make at least suitable progress from their individual starting points.

Most pupils communicate their wishes and needs well due to the school's supportive, nurturing approach. They speak with increasing levels of confidence and articulation about a range of subjects, using resources such as picture cues to support their thinking and communication. As they move through the school, many pupils listen carefully and ask appropriate questions to clarify meaning.

Many pupils develop enthusiasm for learning Welsh responding well to the school's Welsh phrase of the week and other opportunities that the school offers. When prompted, a minority of pupils use simple Welsh words and phrases on a regular basis. They use greetings in Welsh appropriately and discuss how they feel.

Overall, many pupils make strong progress in their reading, often from low starting points. Through the wide range of books and reading materials on offer, many pupils develop enjoyment in reading. They discuss their favourite types of books, and a minority of pupils choose to read during unstructured times. Many pupils develop an appropriate understanding of letter sounds and apply these skills well to decode unfamiliar words. As they move through the school, pupils show a suitable understanding of the text and respond appropriately to related questions.

Overall, pupils' writing skills are less well developed than their reading and oracy skills. The majority of pupils develop their fine motor skills and improve their letter formation and handwriting. They begin to develop an understanding of the key features of different text such as when identifying what a good news report needs to include. When given the opportunity, pupils develop their ability to write independently such as when writing a poem about spring.

Pupils' mathematical skills are generally developed in line with their ability and many pupils make sound progress as they move through the school. They compare and order numbers accurately and partition numbers appropriately when solving questions with larger amounts. Pupils use a range of practical resources well to support them in their calculations such as number lines and hoops. They learn how to tell the time and develop their understanding of probability through a range of mathematical investigations.

Most pupils develop their digital skills well across a range of contexts. They create their own movies and code digital devices successfully to perform a specific task such as the creation of a logo design. Pupils use their digital skills well to research specific topics, such as astronomy. They use digital maps to plan their route to school.

Due to the school's work on relationships and behaviour, over time, most pupils develop appropriate social skills. They learn to co-operate with their peers and take turns during games. Over time, many pupils learn the importance of active listening and negotiation. They learn to share attention and resources and develop confidence to work with a partner or in small groups. Across the school, pupils develop a number of worthwhile life skills including the ability to cook. For example, they follow recipes successfully when making healthy snacks.

A few pupils begin to develop independence in their learning. This is particularly successful where teachers ensure that class resources are easily accessible and where routines are well established. However, across the school, too few pupils develop independence in their learning.

Most pupils develop their creative skills effectively during their time at the school. For example, they explore the use of paint to represent emotions and feelings and produce their own pictures based on the work of Welsh artist Kyffin Williams.

Well-being and attitudes to learning

Nearly all pupils develop strong and trusting relationships with staff. This supports them well in knowing who to turn to for support and guidance. They are happy to speak to a member of staff if they need support. This is a strength of the school.

Across the school, most pupils are polite and courteous. Many pupils are warm and welcoming and keen to talk to visitors about their experiences. Overall, pupils listen well to staff and to each other.

Most pupils feel safe in school and say they are free from bullying. In line with their needs, most pupils behave well during lessons and around the school. They are respectful to each other, members of staff, and visitors to the school. A very few pupils become dysregulated during transition times across the school day. They value the support they receive, and generally respond positively to guidance and care from trusted members of staff. As a result, this supports pupils well to re-engage in learning.

Many pupils attend school regularly. During their time at the school, most pupils make strong progress in improving their attendance.

Over time, most pupils develop their social skills well. They settle quickly in lessons and display positive attitudes to their peers and staff, and towards their learning. Most pupils are making strong progress in working well together in pairs and small groups.

A few pupils value the opportunities for them to develop their leadership skills and make a difference to the life of the school, for example as a member of the Criw Cymraeg, who monitor the amount of Welsh spoken by others. Members of the

School Council make useful suggestions which bring about improvements to the school. For example, they help staff to choose the events for sports day.

Most pupils participate in a range of beneficial enrichment activities enthusiastically, which contributes effectively to their engagement, well-being and social skills. For example, during a recent health and well-being immersion week, pupils enjoyed taking part in circus skills, den building and free running.

During their time at the school, most pupils make strong progress in developing their physical skills. For example, in daily 'active time' many pupils choose to play football, basketball and tennis. Many pupils enjoy participating in exciting activities such as open water swimming, kayaking and paddleboarding at the local reservoir. The wide range of sporting activities enables pupils to develop their motor skills, balance and co-ordination well.

Pupils participate in a range of useful opportunities to improve their understanding of healthy eating. This includes making healthy snacks, such as muffins sweetened with ripe bananas. Pupils enjoy eating fresh fruit each day. They benefit from opportunities to taste test new foods, such as Shinko pears and kiwi fruit. As a result, over time, most pupils develop their understanding of healthy lifestyles well, helping them to become healthy, confident individuals.

Teaching and learning experiences

The school's work to develop its curriculum in line with Curriculum for Wales is developing well. Leaders have worked well in collaboration with all stakeholders to establish a clear curriculum vision where everyone strives to provide learning that is 'inclusive, creative, and flexible' with the child at the centre. Recently, teachers have begun to plan via a whole school topic approach. This enables staff to take good account of pupils' views, interests and needs as they plan teaching and learning activities. As a result, activities are more authentic, and pupils are motivated to learn. For example, following suggestions from pupils, a class visited Cardiff City Stadium as part of their work on sporting heroes. This motivated pupils to learn about mathematical probability through the context of football scores.

Leaders have worked with staff to develop curriculum skill maps. These documents support teachers effectively to plan for the progressive development of skills. For example, provision for the development of pupils' mathematical skills is robust and teachers provide worthwhile opportunities for pupils to apply their skills in a range of real-life situations. The school provides appropriate learning experiences to develop pupils' reading and communication skills. However, provision for writing is less consistent and teachers plan too few opportunities for pupils to develop their independent writing.

Teachers provide valuable opportunities for pupils to develop their digital skills through effective use of the school's digital skill framework. This includes lessons that teach pupils how to code a message and to input data on premier league football teams to create a graph.

The school promotes Welsh heritage and culture effectively through a wide range of curricular work and through enrichment visits to places of local interest. Through this,

pupils gain a good understanding of what it means to be a citizen of Wales and the wider world. For example, pupils learn about local Welsh heroes such as Cardiff headteacher, Betty Campbell and pupils plan their own video programmes in Welsh following support from a national Welsh television network. Provision to promote spoken Welsh is at an early stage.

The school enhances the curriculum appropriately with worthwhile visits to the local area. This includes the opportunity to develop cycling proficiency and personal fitness levels. These opportunities support pupils to gain confidence and develop good social skills.

Nearly all staff build nurturing relationships with pupils using a trauma informed approach to promote positive connections. They take into consideration pupils' barriers to learning and tailor support effectively to help pupils to manage their emotions well. This promotes a caring, inclusive ethos across the school where pupils feel listened to and valued.

Across the school, many teachers demonstrate robust subject knowledge and model expected outcomes well through engaging activities. This engages and motivates pupils in their learning. Many teachers use questioning effectively to build on prior learning and determine pupil understanding. In these lessons, there are clear learning intentions and the pace of teaching supports pupils well. However, in a few lessons, the learning intentions are not always clear and pupils do not make the progress of which they are capable. Many teachers use practical resources effectively to support pupils' learning and to enable them to fully access the curriculum. As a result, across the school, many pupils are focused and make suitable progress in their learning. Where lessons are highly effective, there are clear boundaries and learning is bespoke to the individual needs and interests of the pupils. As a result, a few pupils make very strong progress from their starting points.

The committed team of support staff provide beneficial support for pupils and lead learning activities effectively. They work closely with class teachers to support pupils to engage in their learning successfully and work towards their individual targets.

Nearly all teachers monitor the progress pupils make carefully in terms of their well-being and behaviour. They are reflective practitioners and adapt their strategies successfully to meet the needs of pupils. Teachers meet with senior leaders on a termly basis to discuss pupil progress. This includes discussion about individual pupils' barriers to learning and progress against both academic and well-being targets. Currently, teachers use a digital platform to assess and monitor pupil progress. However, whole-school processes to assess and evaluate pupils' progress across the full range of learning are underdeveloped.

Care, support and guidance

The school provides a safe and nurturing learning environment where pupils are happy and feel safe, despite the challenges staff face in their present accommodation. Staff working relationships with pupils are a strength of the school. Staff are skilled in managing pupil behaviour and have a thorough understanding of their needs. They interact sensitively to these needs underpinned by trauma informed

approaches. As a result, nearly all pupils thrive in their emotional and behavioural development during their time at the school.

The school's safeguarding culture is robust. Staff have relevant training and understand their roles and responsibilities well. School governors are well informed and view safeguarding as a priority. This reflects the school's core values for the safety of all pupils and staff. Safeguarding at the school gives no cause for concern.

Staff celebrate pupils' achievements and provide a wide range of learning experiences. These extend and strengthen pupils' confidence and trust with staff to try new and unfamiliar experiences. For example, pupils enjoy exciting activities such as orienteering and skating.

The school has well-established and purposeful processes to seek pupils' views. As a result, pupils have a range of opportunities to formally attend regular pupil led meetings where they offer their opinions on subjects such as choosing outdoor visits and organising events for sports day. In addition, a few pupils have the opportunity to develop their leadership roles well, for example undertaking weekly health and safety checks of the school playground.

On admission to the school, many pupils display extremely negative attitudes to themselves as learners. However, staff quickly establish a strong understanding of each pupil's needs. This includes where pupils' underlying additional learning needs are barriers to their learning. They use this information well to develop pupils' one-page profiles and individual development plans (IDP). Currently the individual progress pupils make against their IDP targets is reviewed termly with senior leaders. A whole-school approach to evaluate the effectiveness of the IDP target setting process is at the initial stages of development.

During their time at the school nearly all pupils make effective progress in their development of emotional, health and social needs and a few pupils make strong progress. All pupils have detailed behaviour plans. These outline suitable targets for improvement relative to the needs of each pupil. Over time, many pupils show a reduction in the number of both behavioural and physical intervention incidents. Detailed analysis of whole-school trends in pupil behaviour are at the early stage of development.

The school tracks and monitors pupil attendance appropriately. Regular meetings with the education welfare service are in place where pupils' attendance causes concern. Recently pupil attendance rates are showing improvement. However, they have not yet returned to pre-pandemic levels.

Provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social, and cultural development is strong. A wide range of opportunities as part of the curriculum supports pupils to celebrate diversity and differences that reflect their levels of understanding well. Pupils tackle issues such as bullying and poverty. The school holds weekly celebration assemblies for pupils and daily opportunities for reflection are in place. This provides pupils with valuable opportunities to consider their own successes and what can be improved each day. However, the structure and focus of these sessions are inconsistent across the school.

The school helps pupils to understand issues relating to equality, diversity and inclusion and develop shared values such as respect for each other, for example through a range of activities that broaden their experiences and understanding of celebrations such as a Pride, and Holi. Many pupils develop the skills of empathy and compassion in line with their ability, for example through caring for the school's guinea pigs and tortoise.

The provision for relationships and sex education and personal and social education for individual pupils is effective. Whole-school curriculum mapping across these areas is at the early stages of development.

The school works effectively with a wide range of partners who are a valuable resource for the school. Well-established links with children's services and health professionals are in place. Linked to the curriculum offer an appropriate range of external agencies provide input and visits to the school. These include the fire service and local artists.

There is a suitable range of extra-curricular activities available for all pupils. There are a range of lunchtime clubs that target pupils' interests, for example construction activities, art, and electronic games. In addition, the school football team enjoys playing with other local school teams. This provides pupils with valuable opportunities to develop important social skills.

The school supports families well. Communication with parents and carers is a strength. Parents and carers feel valued and receive helpful support and advice from school staff. This is further supported through the work of the school psychotherapist. Together with staff, the psychotherapist arranges half-termly parents' meetings. These can have a specific focus, such as understanding causes of sleep difficulties, or be an important opportunity for families to share information and feel part of the school community. This skilled support by staff provides parents with high levels of reassurance and information.

Arrangements for pupils' transition into the school are effective. However, procedures for the school to successfully support pupils' transition to their next provision at the end of Year 6 are severely impacted when these are not identified by the local authority in a timely manner. As a result, this increases the anxiety of pupils and their families about the next steps in their education.

Leadership and management

The headteacher is highly committed to the school and provides compassionate and sensitive leadership. Leaders and staff have developed and shared a secure vision for the school, which is captured in the school's motto, where everyone is encouraged to 'keep calm and keep learning'. There is an inclusive ethos that permeates the school, keeping all pupils at the heart of the school's work.

Leaders provide valuable support to ensure the well-being of all staff. As a result, staff across the school feel very well supported by senior leaders.

The leadership team works well together. They model positive behaviours effectively. This has led to a strong team ethos. There is a culture of mutual support and

collaboration, and staff work diligently to ensure that all pupils are supported. A notable strength is the way in which leaders at all levels actively promote pupils' well-being.

There are clear lines of accountability and line management arrangements, which focus well on support and development. Performance management processes are firmly established.

Leaders ensure a range of useful professional learning opportunities for all staff, which supports the school well in driving improvements. For example, many staff have participated in training to develop trauma informed approaches to minimising the impact of adverse childhood experiences on pupils' well-being and learning. The range and quality of professional learning have led to the improved well-being of nearly all pupils. Staff across the school also benefit from collaboration with a range of other schools, including mainstream and special schools. This has supported staff at all levels, for example in developing the school ethos and improving the provision for pupils with autism.

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, for example, full lesson observations, learning walks, listening to learners and scrutiny of pupils' work. However, leaders at all levels do not analyse whole-school data well enough to evaluate the impact of their work on pupils' learning. As a result, leaders cannot always be assured that priority areas for development are accurate.

Leaders have been successful in securing significant improvements at the school. For example, the school has developed a consistent approach to supporting pupils in regulating their emotions, which has led to improved behaviour across the school. In addition, the school has made strong progress since the last inspection in improving the pupils' numeracy skills.

The school has strong and effective relationships with a range of partners, for example local authority officers, and children's services. These are used to good effect to support the additional learning and safeguarding needs of pupils.

Leaders create a strong sense of trust and mutual respect with parents and carers. They appreciate the regular and effective communication from the school and are well informed about their child's progress. Parents and carers are overwhelmingly positive about the school and the beneficial impact it has on their child.

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.

Governors share the headteacher's vision for an inclusive, nurturing school that prioritises the individual needs of every pupil. Over the last few years, the governing body capacity has been strengthened, and governors take on areas of responsibility with care, such as safeguarding and health and safety.

Governors are involved appropriately in the school's self-evaluation processes. For example, they undertake learning walks, book scrutiny and listening to learners. As a

result, governors know the school well. This supports them successfully in holding the school to account in their role as a 'critical friend'.

The headteacher and governing body monitor the school's finances well to ensure that all spending is closely aligned with its development priorities. Grant funding, including the Pupil Development Grant, 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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