



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

A report on

Borthyn V.C. Primary School

**Denbigh Road
Ruthin
LL15 1NT**

Date of inspection: October 2022

by

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

About Borthyn V.C. Primary School

Name of provider	Borthyn V.C. Primary School
Local authority	Denbighshire County Council
Language of the provider	English
Type of school	Primary
Religious character	Voluntary Controlled Church in Wales
Number of pupils on roll	95
Pupils of statutory school age	90
Number in nursery classes	5
Percentage of pupils eligible for free school meals over a three-year average (The national percentage of pupils eligible for free school meals over a three-year average in Primary is 23.0%)	35%
Percentage of pupils identified as having additional learning needs (a) (The national percentage of pupils identified as having an additional learning need in Primary is 16.1%)	37.9%
Percentage of pupils who speak Welsh at home	3.9%
Percentage of pupils with English as an additional language	7.4%
Date of headteacher appointment	01/09/2015
Date of previous Estyn inspection (if applicable)	01/03/2014
Start date of inspection	03/10/2022

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

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

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

Overview

Borthyn VC Primary School is a happy, hardworking school where leaders and staff have cultivated strong relationships with the community to support pupils to become aspirational and ambitious learners. As a result, most pupils, including those with additional learning needs, make strong progress across the curriculum.

Leaders, staff, and governors have worked together to create a clear vision for the school. Pupils understand the 'Borthyn BATS' ethos and use it to support them in their learning. This is evident in the positive attitudes they show when approaching challenge. Nearly all pupils behave well across the school and demonstrate good manners, humour and kindness to each other and adults.

Staff work diligently to listen to pupils and use their ideas to improve the school. Most pupils take part in a class 'Senedd' and many have regular opportunities to influence what and how they learn.

Teachers know their pupils well, and during lessons, give useful support, guidance and feedback to help them improve their work. They plan carefully for pupils' learning and have clear expectations for the progress they want their pupils to make. In a minority of instances, pupils do not have enough opportunity to develop their problem-solving skills in maths and the overuse of worksheets sometimes restricts their creative thinking.

Staff are working well together to develop and refine their approaches to the Curriculum for Wales. They place the four purposes at the heart of their curriculum planning and developing their approaches to effective teaching. Leaders ensure that nearly all staff collaborate well to influence the school's priorities for improvement and have relevant opportunities to improve their practice through engaging professional learning.

A particular strength of the school is the strong relationships with parents and the wider community. Parents feel well-supported by staff and are encouraged to be involved in the work that their children are doing. As a result, there is a shared commitment across the school community to support its children to be curious and excited by learning, to treat others well and endeavour to do the best that they can.

Recommendations

- R1 Reduce the over reliance on worksheets to provide pupils with better opportunities to present and redraft their work
- R2 Improve pupils' problem-solving skills in mathematics
- R3 Refine and embed approaches to teaching and assessment that are having the most impact on pupils' learning and share this good practice across the school.

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 its work in building effective links with parents for dissemination on Estyn's website.

Main evaluation

Learning

Most pupils at Borthyn VC Primary School are thriving. They engage positively in the wide range of experiences the school offers. Most pupils, including those with additional learning needs, make good progress from their starting points. Nearly all are developing confidence in their own abilities, proficient communication skills and the motivation to tackle any challenge.

Across the school, pupils are enthusiastic readers. They are happy to share their favourite books from a young age, for instance when talking animatedly about their class book and expressing opinions about the characters. Younger children are developing their phonic strategies well and they use these strategies effectively to decode words and develop fluency in their reading.

By the time they reach Year 6, most read a good range of texts adeptly, including stories, poetry, instructions, and websites. They extract information and use it in their writing, for example when creating information leaflets about the local area, or to read instructions when carrying out independent challenge tasks. Older pupils know their favourite authors and explain how they identify with the characters. Pupils who require more support with their reading receive valuable additional help to build up a sight vocabulary and develop their decoding skills. As a result, they make sound progress from their starting points.

Most pupils make good progress with their writing. The youngest children enjoy practising their mark making using pens, pencils, brushes, and paints. As they progress through the school, pupils use a wide vocabulary across a good range of writing genres. They write with increasing confidence for a range of audiences, for example when writing fantasy stories or filling in job applications. Older pupils often apply their writing skills to engage thoughtfully with challenging contexts, for example when detailing their ambitions for the future.

Most pupils have good speaking and listening skills, they are attentive in class and often respond thoughtfully and clearly to questions. Younger pupils listen carefully to stories and join in enthusiastically with songs and rhymes. They talk confidently about their work and use engaging language, for example when describing the autumn soup they had made. Older pupils use a wide range of vocabulary when talking about their work and share their ideas confidently. Across the school, pupils talk easily to adults and their peers and communicate effectively with each other in class.

Nearly all pupils develop beneficial creative skills. They produce artwork influenced by their local environment, taking inspiration from local painters and landscape artists. Younger pupils investigate colour, shape, and texture in their autumn collages, while older pupils participate in local drama workshops and engage in traditional dance from around the world. As they move through the school, pupils begin to think creatively and solve problems. For example, Reception pupils use logs to design a way to get across a crocodile infested lake and Year 5 and Year 6 pupils

experiment with electrical circuits and materials to investigate the best way of making an effective air raid siren.

In the younger classes, pupils build a useful range of mathematical skills and enjoy maths challenges, undertaking counting games and matching activities enthusiastically. By the time they reach Year 2, many have a secure grasp of number facts to 100, they recognise shapes, use money in their play and are developing confidence in telling the time. Older pupils sustain this progress and apply their mathematical skills well, particularly when calculating using larger numbers. The oldest pupils are developing a secure understanding of mathematical skills, including symmetry, data handling and fractions. They are beginning to use their mathematical knowledge well across the curriculum, for example to create good-quality graphs as part of their investigative work in science. However, while pupils have good numeracy skills, they do not always apply them to an appropriate level to solve problems in more challenging contexts.

Across the school, pupils learn to apply their digital skills to support learning in other subjects. Younger pupils use tablet computers independently to take photographs and to record and save their work. They are beginning to use digital tools to search for information and make simple graphs and bar charts. As they get older, pupils become competent in using digital tools to enhance their work. They create videos, using a 'green screen' effect to perform their poetry and the oldest pupils are beginning to develop their coding skills. Programming robots in coding workshops has encouraged their interest in this area of the curriculum.

There is a strong focus in the nursery and reception class to develop fine motor skills, where the youngest pupils use a pestle and mortar to crush chalks, make their own powder colours and mix and use paint. Older pupils' physical skills are supported through a wider range of sports such as badminton and lacrosse.

Use of the Welsh language is developing appropriately. As pupils develop their early language skills, they are beginning to respond to questions about their name, the weather, colours, and days of the week. Later on, they use language patterns purposefully to convey information about themselves and find out information about others. However, while pupils respond well to questions in their Welsh lessons, they are less confident in using the language outside of the classroom environment.

Well-being and attitudes to learning

Pupils' positive attitudes to school life and their care and support for each other reflect the ethos and aims of the school. Nearly all pupils feel safe, respected, and listened to. They believe they are treated fairly, are polite towards each other and show instinctive good manners towards staff and visitors.

Many pupils are confident that adults in the school listen to their views and take their views into account when making decisions that affect them. Most pupils are actively involved in improving their school through their class Senedd and take pride in explaining how they have made things better. An example of this is the reflection areas created in each classroom, introduced after pupils wrote to the Chair of Governors explaining how these will support a willingness to face challenges confidently.

Most pupils have positive attitudes to their learning. They talk enthusiastically about their work and engage positively with the class topics. Pupils in Years 5 and 6, for example, talk exuberantly about their Titanic topic and reception pupils are highly motivated to practise their number recognition using bikes on the yard.

Most pupils are confident, they contribute to class and group discussions willingly and engage positively with unfamiliar adults. They challenge themselves when choosing tasks and regularly remind one another of the school vision in lessons. The 'Borthyn BATS' motto, (Believe, Aspire, Try, Succeed) is embedded into school life and is highly successful in motivating pupils to develop positive attitudes to their learning.

Most older pupils understand how to challenge themselves to be in the 'learning zone' and independently adjust the difficulty of their activities to achieve this. Many pupils are resilient and recognise that they learn from their mistakes. This means that many pupils across the school show appropriate levels of endeavour to complete tasks and challenges. In one instance, younger pupils refused to give up, persevering in their task as their construction of a house for the 'colour monster' kept falling down.

Most pupils understand the purpose of rules, rewards, and sanctions and why these are important. They understand what is expected of them in different areas of school, such as the classroom, cloakroom or yard. Nearly all pupils behave well, show courtesy and kindness towards one another and are calm and responsible when moving around the school.

Most pupils are developing as ethical, informed citizens. Year 5 and 6 pupils are aware of the United Nations rights of the child and how these apply to their own lives. They have a good understanding of sustainability issues locally and globally. This is exemplified by their work in the community to find ways to reduce the carbon footprint of their school and town.

Most pupils know how to make healthy choices and keep fit. Most are physically active at playtimes, and all take part in the daily mile. They enjoy more physically challenging play using the school's trim trail and older pupils explain the importance of correctly 'warming up' to avoid being injured. Most pupils understand how to eat healthily. For example, through their 'food, glorious food' topic, pupils in Year 2 confidently describe foods that can be eaten in moderation as part of a healthy diet. Across the school, pupils choose from a variety of fruit to eat at breaktimes.

Most pupils successfully sustain concentration, avoid distractions, and focus on their learning. They engage well with classroom tasks, work sensibly with classmates and show respect for the contributions of others. They work well with their talking partners, responding to feedback positively, particularly from the teacher. They use this feedback throughout lessons purposefully to improve their work. In a few instances, pupils use feedback from previous lessons to deepen learning, such as re-drafting emails in Welsh. However, on a very few occasions, where there is too much 'teacher talk', pupils sometimes become more passive in their learning.

Teaching and learning experiences

Nearly all teachers and support staff foster very effective working relationships with pupils based on a respectful and supportive ethos where pupils feel valued and listened to. All staff have high expectations for pupils and take every opportunity to reinforce positive attitudes to learning. A particular strength of the school is the impact teaching has on developing pupils' positive mindset when approaching challenge. As a result, many pupils talk confidently about the importance of being in the 'learning zone' and relish the opportunity to make mistakes and learn from them.

The school is making good progress towards developing and refining approaches to the Curriculum for Wales. Teachers work well together to plan learning experiences that reflect the school's ethos and develop a shared understanding of progression across the areas of learning and experience. They collaborate effectively to identify how they expect pupils to make progress across the curriculum and the learning they want their pupils to achieve. They place the four purposes of the Curriculum for Wales at the heart of the teaching and learning experiences they provide. The well-developed links between literacy, numeracy and digital skills are a strong feature of curriculum planning. As a result, most teachers have a secure knowledge of the subjects they are teaching. Teachers plan genuine opportunities for pupils to influence what they learn. They involve pupils in curriculum design, for example pupils complete concept maps to explore ideas for topics and provide suggestions for independent learning tasks.

Teachers provide good opportunities for pupils to learn about the culture and heritage of Wales and the distinctive nature of Ruthin. Pupils learn about the benefits of healthy eating by visiting local farm shops, for example, investigate local crafts such as spinning wool. Overall, staff promote the advantages of learning Welsh effectively.

Teachers ensure that activities build progressively on pupils' skills and many create meaningful opportunities for pupils to revisit their prior learning before moving onto the next task. Most teachers provide clear and effective explanations to pupils that enable them to undertake their work confidently. In the majority of cases, teachers model effective approaches to learning and help pupils to recognise the features of a good piece of work. Pupils talk enthusiastically about how useful they find these good examples including 'What a good one looks like' (Wagoll) and 'What a bad one looks like' (Waboll). In a minority of lessons, teachers over-scaffold pupils' learning by using too many worksheets, which limits pupils' choices about how to present and improve their work.

Most teachers and support staff know their pupils well and adjust their teaching effectively to meet the needs of learners in lessons and over time. Nearly all staff use questioning skilfully to check for understanding, address misconceptions and deepen pupils thinking. They monitor the progress of pupils carefully during lessons and provide 'in the moment' feedback, which challenges pupils successfully to improve their own work. While most lessons are well paced, in a very few cases, teachers spend too long introducing activities and, in these instances, a very few pupils become disengaged with their learning.

In many classes, teachers use success criteria thoughtfully to support pupils learning and help them to understand their own strengths and areas for improvement. Where

this is particularly effective, they are created alongside pupils, who use them naturally as an integral part of their learning, to remind them how to go about their work or make it better. Pupils are beginning to use success criteria to reflect upon the work of their peers and understand how to give good feedback to their friends.

Most teachers and support staff design their classroom environments thoughtfully to support pupils' independent learning skills. For example, the forest school area is used well to support pupils' immersion in the natural world. Teachers ensure that pupils contribute their ideas and influence their learning. Pupils across the school choose from a carefully selected range of interesting independent challenge activities which allow them to practise their skills and deepen their understanding. As a result, most pupils are motivated to choose activities that challenge them and are developing as ambitious and capable learners.

Care, support and guidance

The provision for pupils' well-being at Borthyn Primary is exemplary. A caring ethos permeates school life, creating an inclusive environment where all pupils and adults are valued and supported to become ambitious learners.

Positive relationships across the school community contribute significantly to pupils' happiness and well-being. Staff know the pupils well and are committed to meeting their individual needs. Staff 'check in' with pupils' feelings regularly and provide targeted support for those that need it, carefully selecting a range of interventions. The 'breakfast nurture group', for example, provides meaningful opportunities for pupils to talk about topics that matter to them and take part in mindfulness activities. This ensures that they are relaxed and ready to learn at the start of the school day.

Provision for pupils with additional learning needs is a strong feature of the school. Teachers are well supported by the Additional Learning Needs Co-ordinator and, as a result, they identify those pupils that need additional support effectively. All pupils in the school have a one page profile that they and their parents are involved in writing. These outline their interests, how they like to be supported to learn and their targets for improvement. These profiles strengthen the school's understanding of each pupil and help staff support learning and well-being.

Staff provide a suitable range of interventions that support pupils' academic and emotional needs well, including art-based sessions and phonics support that accelerates reading progress. Staff monitor pupils' learning carefully, and all staff work together diligently to ensure that most pupils make good progress from their starting points. Occasionally, intervention groups are not organised carefully enough to ensure that all pupils engage at the appropriate level in learning activities.

The school liaises well with outside agencies to seek training and advice for staff and direct support for pupils. A recent example is the training staff received from the local authority behaviour team to support them to understand and teach pupils who have experienced trauma.

A strength of the school is in ensuring that its involvement of nearly all pupils in making decisions about how to improve their school. Each class Senedd is given responsibility for an area of the curriculum and work alongside staff to contribute to

decision making across the school. Examples include the Y5/6 class 'Well-being Senedd' improving the levels of recycling carried out around the school and measuring local UV levels to provide advice to their classmates on how long it was safe to stay out in the sun.

The school provides relevant opportunities to develop pupils' moral, ethical and spiritual understanding through whole school and class assemblies and within lessons. There are regular planned opportunities for pupils to explore principles that help them to distinguish between right and wrong and reflect on fundamental questions and on their own beliefs or values. These opportunities are often led by pupils, for example where Year 5 and 6 pupils share, a video they created on the theme of generosity.

The school provides valuable opportunities for pupils to develop their curiosity and aspirations for the future. All pupils take part in an annual careers fair where parents and members of the local community talk to them about the world of work. Staff then work with pupils to investigate their choices for the future and help them become ambitious towards their future roles in society.

Staff ensure there are regular opportunities for pupils to explore their identity, heritage, and culture. They use the locality well to enhance their curriculum, such as exploring farming, taking part in drama workshops at Ruthin Castle and working with local artists. Staff are beginning to promote an understanding of equality, diversity and inclusion through their teaching, for example by celebrating the life of Martin Luther King. However, opportunities to help pupils understand the diverse nature of Wales and the World are limited.

The school establishes positive relationships with parents and families. Parents are regular visitors to the school and are often invited to take part in learning activities alongside their children. They are consulted on issues that help them to support their children's learning at home, for example when seeking feedback on the impact of homework provision. Staff regularly communicate with parents online to share their children's learning and to celebrate success and identify areas for discussion and support at home.

Staff plan regular opportunities for pupils to use their imagination and engage with the creative arts. As part of the lead creative schools project, for example, younger pupils worked with a professional artist as part of their farming topic and displayed their work in the local craft centre. Pupils use their creative skills regularly to perform to audiences, for example the school choir takes part in the Eisteddfod and the local Ruthin Festival. While opportunities for pupils to participate in extra-curricular sports clubs are currently limited, these are beginning to be re-established following the pandemic.

Leaders and staff monitor the attendance of pupils and ensure appropriate provision is put in place to encourage good attendance. As a result, pupils are attending school more regularly this year compared to last year, when the COVID-19 pandemic had a negative impact nationally on school attendance. A particular strength of the school is the high attendance of those pupils eligible for free school meals.

The school has a strong culture of safeguarding embedded in its daily routines and practice and arrangements for safeguarding give no cause for concern.

Leadership and management

The headteacher, governors and staff share a clear vision for the school that places pupils' well-being and aspirations at the heart of its work. Leaders are strong role models for pupils and staff. They know their school community well and work with dedication to ensure that all families, including those who are disadvantaged by poverty, are supported well. These strong and effective links with parents are a particular strength of the school. They secure commitment across the whole community to improve pupils' learning and support their well-being.

Governors are an active part of school life; they are proud of the community they serve and work well together to support the headteacher and staff. Leaders ensure that they have a clear understanding of national priorities, including the purpose driven nature of the curriculum for Wales and the school's commitment to improving pupils use of the Welsh language.

The headteacher, supported by senior leaders, has created an effective culture of collective responsibility for self-evaluation and school improvement. Staff work closely together to set priorities for improvement and monitor progress. All teachers take on leadership roles and have a direct influence over the direction of the school and its improvement priorities.

Leaders use a wide range of information to make secure judgements about the school's strengths and areas for improvement and monitor progress carefully. They use feedback gathered from learning walks, work scrutiny and the opinions of learners to inform their work. They engage productively with advice from outside of the school, including support visits from the school improvement adviser and from a professional collaboration project with cluster schools. As a result, plans for improvement identify the school's priorities accurately and ensure local and national priorities are addressed.

Leaders ensure that governors are well-informed about the school's priorities for improvement. They monitor the school's finances carefully to make sure that expenditure directly benefits pupils and the pupil development grant is used appropriately to help address the impact of poverty on educational attainment. They receive regular updates from staff, and from time-to-time pupils, about progress towards areas for development. These clear lines of communication ensure that governors understand why these priorities have been identified and help them challenge and support leaders appropriately to move the school forward. Governors ensure that there are suitable arrangements for healthy eating and drinking and leaders and governors work effectively to maintain a strong safeguarding culture at the school.

Although the recent COVID pandemic reduced the opportunities for governors to be fully involved in school self-evaluation, they are beginning to re-establish their roles and support the school in examining first hand evidence to support improvement. In a few recent examples, governors share thoughtful observations about what they have learned during their visits to school. They make useful suggestions about how to

enhance the school's provision, such as pupils displaying their work for the community in the Old Court House.

Leaders have developed a strong culture of learning and personal development across the school. Professional learning links closely to whole school improvement priorities and encourages staff to seek out opportunities for professional development that inspire them. As a result, professional learning is often effective in improving teachers' skills. For example, the 'communication friendly spaces' project has had a positive impact on the school's approach to foundation phase learning. The success of other projects linked to the new curriculum have also been shared more widely by the local consortium to support improvements across schools. Following the pandemic, leaders are beginning to re-establish useful opportunities for collaboration with other schools to share expertise and to support the development of common priorities across the cluster.

While the impact of professional learning on school priorities is monitored carefully by leaders, opportunities for staff to share good practice and reflect upon the impact of their work alongside colleagues are less frequent since the pandemic. This means that staff do not always learn from each other and maximise the effectiveness of the high-quality professional learning that takes place in the school.

Evidence base of the report

Before an inspection, inspectors:

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

During an inspection, inspectors normally:

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

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

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

Copies of the report

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

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

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

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