

A report on
Penyrheol Comprehensive School
Pontarddulais Road
Gorseinon
SA4 4FG

Date of inspection: May 2026

by

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

About Penyrheol Comprehensive School

Name of provider	Penyrheol Comprehensive School
Local authority	City and County of Swansea
Language of the provider	English
School category according to Welsh-medium provision	
Type of school	Secondary
Religious character	None
Number of pupils on roll	860
Pupils of statutory school age	859
Number in sixth form	No sixth form
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 Secondary is 20.3%)	21.7%
Percentage of pupils identified as having additional learning needs (a) (The national percentage of pupils identified as having an additional learning need in Secondary is 9.0%)	6.5%
Percentage of pupils who speak Welsh at home	1.6%
Percentage of pupils with English as an additional language	*
Lead partner for Initial teacher education	No
Date of headteacher appointment	01/09/2021

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Date of previous Estyn inspection (if applicable)	22/10/2018
Start date of inspection	05/05/2026

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.

Summary

Penyrheol Comprehensive School provides a caring and inclusive environment where many pupils feel well supported and develop a strong sense of belonging. The school's values of 'respect, aspire, thrive and belong' are increasingly evident in its culture and practice. Staff know pupils well and provide valuable emotional and well-being support through a range of targeted provision and effective partnerships with external agencies. Safeguarding arrangements are robust and leaders respond diligently to concerns. Provision for pupils with additional learning needs (ALN), including within the Specialist Teaching Facility (STF), is a notable strength. Staff create highly nurturing and inclusive environments where pupils make good progress from their starting points and participate confidently in school life.

In many instances, teaching is effective and helps pupils to develop positive attitudes to learning and make secure progress in their knowledge, understanding and skills. Many teachers establish calm and purposeful learning environments, plan learning carefully and provide clear explanations that build appropriately on pupils' prior learning. Many pupils behave well, engage positively in lessons and persevere with their work. In a few examples of highly effective practice, teachers use skilful questioning, assessment and individualised feedback to deepen pupils' thinking and support strong progress.

The school is developing an appropriate whole-school approach to developing pupils' literacy and numeracy skills. Many pupils apply their reading, writing and number skills suitably across the curriculum and develop digital and wider skills through a range of practical experiences. However, a minority need too much support when tackling more challenging mathematical work. In addition, the opportunities to develop pupils' Welsh language skills, both in Welsh lessons and outside lessons are limited.

The school has developed a clear curriculum vision and provides a broad range of academic and vocational opportunities that support pupils' progression well. Beneficial personal and social education provision supports pupils' understanding of diversity, equality and well-being effectively. A wide range of enrichment opportunities broadens pupils' experiences successfully.

The headteacher is deeply committed to the school and its community. Supported by the senior leadership team, they have established a clear strategic vision based on the school's core values. Leaders have strengthened behaviour and self-evaluation processes in recent years. Governors support and challenge the school appropriately and leaders use professional learning purposefully to support improvement. Although self-evaluation and improvement planning processes are generally appropriate, improvement plans contain too many priorities at times and success criteria are not always precise enough.

Attendance remains well below that of similar schools, particularly for pupils eligible for free school meals and pupils in Year 11. While leaders have implemented suitable strategies to improve attendance, these have not secured sustained improvements.

Recommendations

We have made four recommendations to help the school continue to improve:

- R1 Improve attendance
- R2 Strengthen the school's strategies to develop pupils' numeracy skills
- R3 Sharpen improvement planning
- R4 Improve the use of Welsh outside the Welsh classroom to further develop pupils' language skills.

What happens next

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

Main findings

Teaching and learning

In many instances, teaching is effective in ensuring that pupils develop positive attitudes to learning and make secure progress in their knowledge, understanding and skills. Where this is the case, teachers foster positive working relationships with pupils and have established routines which help to successfully create a calm and purposeful learning environment. Many pupils behave well and are courteous and respectful towards each other and their teachers. They arrive promptly and engage readily in starter activities, showing interest in their work. Many pupils persevere and remain focused throughout lessons.

Many teachers have sound subject knowledge and are good language models who focus well on developing pupils' subject vocabulary. These teachers consider carefully what they want pupils to learn and plan a sequence of activities that build suitably on one another and challenge pupils appropriately. They provide clear instructions and their effective explanations help pupils understand new learning and how it connects with their prior knowledge. These teachers use helpful resources to support pupils' learning and ensure that the pace of the lesson well matched to the pace of pupils' learning. Many teachers use suitable questioning techniques to check pupils' knowledge and whether they have understood what is expected of them. They monitor pupils' engagement and progress closely when circulating the classroom. They provide pupils with encouragement and further explanations or examples where gaps in learning are identified. However, a few teachers do not use questioning well enough to probe pupils' thinking and extend their verbal responses. In a majority of instances, teachers provide pupils with useful and actionable feedback on what they are doing well and what they need to do to improve. They plan carefully how best to deliver feedback to impact on progress and ensure that pupils have suitable opportunities to respond to their advice. Many pupils respond well to written feedback, completing improvement tasks thoughtfully. However, in a minority of cases, feedback is not individualised enough to help pupils improve their work.

In a few instances, teaching is highly effective and results in pupils making strong progress. In these lessons, teachers:

- have a passion for their subject and use their expert subject knowledge to plan meticulously for pupils' learning
- break down learning into manageable steps and prepare pupils to tackle challenging activities independently and successfully
- create meaningful opportunities for pupils to develop their skills alongside their subject knowledge and understanding

- carefully monitor pupils' progress and adjust the level of challenge and pace of teaching skilfully according to their findings
- provide individualised feedback which helps pupils reflect on their learning and make progress in their understanding and skills
- use questioning techniques to deepen pupils' thinking and develop their verbal responses

In a few instances, pupils make more limited progress due to shortcomings in teaching. In these lessons, teachers:

- do not have sufficiently high expectations of what pupils can achieve and do not challenge pupils well enough
- do not consider well enough what they want pupils to learn
- do not monitor progress and adapt their teaching accordingly
- do not manage pupils' behaviour and engagement well enough.

As a result of these shortcomings, pupils become passive and, in a few instances, disrupt the learning of other pupils.

Literacy

The school is developing a consistent whole-school approach to developing pupils' literacy skills through the effective use of agreed strategies, including disciplinary reading, choral reading, and purposeful writing for different audiences. These are beginning to support pupils to develop their literacy skills progressively across the curriculum.

Many pupils demonstrate appropriate reading skills across a range of subjects and contexts. Many locate relevant information successfully from a variety of texts to answer short questions, and a majority annotate texts effectively to support their understanding. A majority summarise information well and around half synthesise information suitably from a range of sources. For example, when they explore the reasons for voyages of discovery in history. In English lessons, many pupils use skimming and scanning strategies effectively to identify precise quotations and develop inference skills. For example, in Year 9, many pupils annotate the poems of Carol Ann Duffy thoughtfully and sensitively. However, a minority of pupils rely too heavily on support when analysing and evaluating texts and make overly simplistic observations. A few copy directly from texts rather than using their own understanding when completing guided reading tasks.

Many pupils listen carefully and respectfully to their teachers and peers. When asked, many pupils answer questions suitably. Many explain their viewpoints clearly and sensibly,

and a majority use appropriate subject-specific vocabulary accurately. During paired discussion activities, many pupils engage independently and purposefully with the tasks set. A few pupils provide more developed and thoughtful responses when supported by their teachers' follow-up questions. However, in a minority of cases, pupils' verbal responses are brief and lack depth.

Many pupils use appropriate strategies to help them structure and plan their written work. Many pupils plan and develop their extended writing skills well across a range of tasks, and a majority write with suitable clarity and accuracy. For example, Year 9 pupils develop their narrative writing techniques successfully when writing an account about a time they showed courage in English. In many cases across the curriculum, pupils are provided with suitable opportunities to write for audiences and purposes which are appropriate to the subject. However, a minority of pupils continue to make repeated basic spelling and punctuation errors, particularly in their use of capital letters. In a few instances, tasks are overly constrained by worksheets which limit pupils' opportunities to write at length.

Numeracy

Within mathematics and numeracy rich subjects across the curriculum, there is a generally suitable range of worthwhile opportunities for pupils to develop their numeracy skills. However, the provision and teaching of numeracy do not always develop pupils' reasoning and problem-solving skills well enough. When given the opportunity to solve more open-ended numerical problems, the majority of pupils develop both their numeracy and thinking skills well. However, a minority of pupils show a lack of resilience and give up too easily when faced with challenging mathematics and numeracy problems.

The majority of pupils have suitable basic number skills. They can calculate using the four rules and work fluently with percentages, decimals and fractions. A minority of pupils do not have a strong enough grasp of number. They have gaps in their knowledge, which limits their ability to apply their numeracy skills in context and identify the mathematics required to solve problems. A majority of pupils have a suitable understanding of concepts related to shapes and measures. For example, in mathematics they calculate the area of compound shapes and volumes and the surface areas of three-dimensional shapes. A similar proportion have suitable data handling skills. They calculate and interpret measures of average and spread and plot graphs accurately. When given the opportunity, they analyse graphical data suitably, such as when they match climate graphs to the different biomes in geography.

Digital skills

Pupils use digital technology effectively in ICT lessons and across a suitable range of subjects. For example, they use software to edit films in drama and compositions in music.

The school has recently strengthened the coordination of pupils' digital competence skills across the curriculum. Improvements include provision for online collaboration, computational thinking and digital research. Staff receive suitable guidance and professional learning to support the development of pupils' digital skills.

Cymraeg

In Welsh lessons, most pupils demonstrate a sound understanding when listening and respond appropriately by providing basic answers to class questions. Many pupils translate questions and phrases effectively and many pronounce Welsh words clearly and correctly. Many pupils read short, basic texts suitably and gather information from these successfully. In addition, many pupils write short pieces independently with a fairly good standard of accuracy. In general, pupils are over-reliant on sentence structures provided by teachers when responding orally and in writing. Pupils generally have a positive attitude towards learning Welsh, however, a minority of pupils are not entered for a Welsh GCSE qualification at the end of Year 11. Although the 'Ciw Cymraeg' occasionally promotes the Welsh language and Welsh heritage and culture outside Welsh lessons, most pupils lack confidence in speaking Welsh due to limited opportunities to practise the language. Pupils benefit from appropriate opportunities to develop their appreciation of Welsh heritage and culture in subjects such as music and drama.

Curriculum

The school has a clear and well-articulated vision for its curriculum that is based on providing inspiration and support for all pupils. Leaders have taken a systematic approach to developing their 'Progression Curriculum' and have worked appropriately with partner primary schools to ensure that it builds suitably on pupils' prior learning and experiences. Leaders use pupil feedback suitably to refine the curriculum.

Pupils in Year 10 and 11 benefit from a broad range of general and vocational courses, such as construction and hospitality and catering. Pupils and parents receive clear guidance to help them make informed option choices. The curriculum is adapted effectively for pupils who require support and access the school's alternative provision, enabling them to pursue GCSE and vocational qualifications where appropriate.

The school prepares pupils well for their future pathways, including through engagement with the local college and targeted information sessions for parents and pupils. Year 10 pupils undertake beneficial work experience placements with the support of local businesses. The school provides additional career related learning experiences, such as visits from guest speakers from the performing arts sector. These broaden pupils' understanding of future opportunities and the importance of achieving well at school.

A well-planned programme of personal and social education (PSE) supports pupils' social and emotional development. Leaders ensure that the curriculum content is responsive to pupils need, drawing on survey findings and feedback from pupil progress and well-being meetings. The school supports pupils' spiritual, moral and cultural development and promotes equality and diversity appropriately. For example, the pupil-led 'Progress, Rights, Individuality, Diversity and Equality' (PRIDE) group contributes meaningfully to their sense of identity and belonging. The PSE curriculum builds pupils' understanding of society and diversity progressively from Year 7 to Year 11, and leaders collaborate effectively across subjects to ensure coherent coverage of themes such as protected characteristics and online safety.

Provision for more able and talented pupils through the 'Aspire programme' is strong and includes parental engagement events and curricular opportunities, such as the Year 9 'Super Curricular Challenge'. This contributes positively to outcomes for this group of pupils.

The school offers a diverse range of extra-curricular activities, including creative, sporting and cultural opportunities. For example, the annual school production supports pupils' artistic development. A wide variety of educational visits, including theatre visits, and local and international trips enrich pupils' experiences.

Spotlight: Personalised provision in the Specialist Teaching Facility (STF)

Teaching and learning within the Specialist Teaching Facility (STF) is highly effective and supports good progress for nearly all pupils accessing this provision. The well-established, broad curriculum offers highly personalised learning for all pupils, underpinned by strong assessment and tracking systems. Staff have high expectations of pupils and build strong relationships that promote engagement and positive behaviour effectively. Teaching is well-planned, inclusive, and matched closely to pupils' needs. Staff use a wide range of engaging resources to support pupils to make secure progress from their starting points. Pupils are encouraged to access relevant qualifications to meet their needs. As a result, nearly all pupils in the STF make good progress towards their individual development plans, including success in a range of accredited courses.

Well-being, care, support and guidance

Staff at Penyrheol Comprehensive School have created a caring, inclusive and supportive environment, underpinned by the school's core values of 'respect, aspire, thrive and belong'. Pupils are friendly and courteous and engage maturely with visitors, reflecting the school's ethos. Staff know their pupils well and provide valuable support for their emotional, social and well-being needs. For example, through the 'Penyrheol Attendance and Well-being Base' (PAWB) and 'Hive'. The school also works effectively with a range of

external agencies to support pupils' needs. Most pupils feel well supported and demonstrate a strong sense of pride and belonging within the school community.

Pupils benefit from a broad range of worthwhile enrichment activities, such as 'Meditation Monday' and a knitting club. These opportunities are promoted well by staff and pupils through the work of 'Tîm Bore'. The school also supports pupils effectively at key transition points, for example through a well-planned transition programme that helps pupils to settle well into Year 7.

Leaders and staff have a sound understanding of their responsibility for safeguarding pupils and respond to concerns promptly and diligently. They complete useful and regular training to help them understand and fulfil their role in keeping pupils safe, including how to identify any pupils at risk of radicalisation. Leaders work closely with the Local Authority and a wide range of external agencies, which contributes positively to the school's wider culture of safeguarding. Many pupils feel safe in school and develop a suitable understanding of how to keep themselves safe. The school investigates allegations of bullying and racist incidents appropriately, in line with its anti-bullying policy.

The school has established a clear and helpful behaviour framework and policy which have contributed to a notable improvement in behaviour over time. Staff have been supported by leaders to apply useful strategies, such as micro-scripting, to promote positive behaviours. The culture of reward and recognition is well embedded, with most pupils responding positively to incentives such as achievement points and the rewards shop. Targeted provision, offered by 'Thrive' and 'Tŷ Cynnydd', provide valuable support for pupils with more complex behavioural needs.

Spotlight: Nurturing support to enable pupils with ALN to become confident learners

Staff demonstrate a strong commitment to supporting pupils with additional learning needs (ALN). The ALN team passionately promote equity for pupils who experience barriers to learning and have established a highly nurturing and caring environment. As a result, pupils with ALN participate confidently and actively in the life of the school. Leaders work purposefully with partner primary schools to develop an early understanding of pupils' needs and ensure they benefit from enhanced transition arrangements. This ensures these pupils build confidence and settle well into secondary school.

The ALN team work productively with parents, external agencies and school colleagues when developing appropriate individual development plans (IDPs), which are supported well by useful One-Page Profiles. These provide staff with clear guidance and information about individual pupils, which strengthens planning and pedagogy in the classroom, ensuring that many pupils make adequate progress. Pupils with ALN also benefit from a range of worthwhile interventions to help develop their social and emotional, in addition

to improving their literacy skills. Leaders carefully monitor pupil progress and the impact of interventions and support against IDP targets, through person-centred review meetings. As a result, pupils with ALN feel well supported and make at least expected progress from their individual starting points.

Care, support and guidance are a strong feature of the STF provision. Detailed individual records, including IDPs, health-care plans, assessment and well-being information, underpin highly effective support. Leaders have embedded the Additional Learning Needs and Education Tribunal Act Code into their systems well. They work closely with a range of external agencies to meet pupils' complex needs. The inclusive practices across the three units enables pupils in the STF to participate with confidence in the life of the school. Strong partnerships with parents, effective transition arrangements, clear safeguarding processes and meaningful opportunities for pupils to express their views, ensure pupils feel safe, supported and well prepared to meet their IDP targets and their next steps.

A strong and inclusive culture of pupil leadership is embedded in the school. This includes the Penyrheol Parliament and Pupil Governors. These well-established structures provide meaningful opportunities for pupils to influence the life of the school. Pupils in these groups contribute effectively to decision-making, including influencing strategic priorities such as resource allocation and teaching methods. Representation across pupil leadership groups is highly inclusive, ensuring that the views of all groups of pupils are well-reflected.

The school recognises the need to improve attendance and this is prioritised in school improvement plans. A range of strategies to improve attendance has been implemented, including pastoral and well-being support. These approaches are generally appropriate but are at an early stage of implementation. The school demonstrates a sound understanding of broad attendance patterns. However, the school's evaluation of attendance lacks precision and leaders are not taking a sufficiently strategic approach to securing improvements. Overall, whole-school initiatives have not had a sustained impact on attendance. Pupils' attendance has been consistently well below that of similar schools and remains well below pre-pandemic levels. The attendance of pupils eligible for free school meals improved in 2024-25 but remains below that of similar schools. Although persistent absence decreased over the same period it remains higher than the average for similar schools. Unverified school data for this academic year indicates a decline in attendance. The attendance for pupils eligible for free school meals and those in Year 11 is of particular concern.

Leading and improving

The headteacher is a dedicated leader who is supported by a committed and capable senior leadership team. Together, they have established a clear strategic vision centred on the school's core values of 'Respect, Aspire, Thrive and Belong'. Leaders have developed

these values collaboratively with staff, pupils and parents, ensuring that they are well understood across the school community. These values are evident in the school's culture and practice. For example, over recent years leaders have secured improvements in pupils' behaviour and strengthened leadership and self-evaluation processes.

A strong moral purpose underpins the work of the headteacher and senior leaders, particularly in promoting inclusion and belonging for all pupils. Leadership of the STF is strong and well-integrated into whole school systems. This is reflected clearly in leaders' decision-making around provision, curriculum design and support for vulnerable pupils. The school ensures that pupils who attend the STF are fully included in the life and work of the school. Provision such as 'PAWB' and 'Tŷ Cynnydd' demonstrates the school's commitment to meeting the needs of pupils effectively and compassionately. Leaders have improved communication with parents through face-to-face parents' evenings, newsletters and clearer communication systems. This has had an impact on the numbers attending parents' evenings.

Senior leaders have a suitable focus on national priorities. For example, they have implemented a range of strategies to raise aspirations and reduce barriers to attainment for vulnerable pupils. Leaders consider carefully the impact of decisions on pupils at risk of adverse outcomes. The school has developed beneficial strategies to improve pupils' reading skills. Although leaders have a strong focus on improving attendance, this remains too low. In addition, pupils' use of Welsh outside of Welsh lessons is limited.

Line management arrangements are systematic and senior leaders provide middle leaders with valuable support and challenge and model leadership behaviours effectively. They carry out useful moderation activities and address underperformance robustly where necessary.

Progress and well-being leaders work well on operational matters and are well supported by the senior team. However, on occasion, operational matters limit their capacity to provide strategic oversight and direction to the work of progress and well-being leads.

Middle leader meetings are purposeful and well organised. They maintain an appropriate balance between strategic improvement priorities and operational matters. Professional development and review arrangements are generally suitable. Staff targets link to whole-school priorities, individual responsibilities and professional learning needs. These arrangements are supported by an appropriate review process that encourages professional growth.

Governors are experienced and committed to the school. They have a broad understanding of the school's strengths and areas for improvement. They support the school diligently while providing suitable levels of challenge to leaders. They receive

informative reports on all aspects of the school's work. Senior leaders, supported by the governing body, consider spending decisions carefully and maintain control over school finances.

Over the past year and a half, senior leaders have refined self-evaluation processes to focus more closely on the impact of teaching on pupils' learning. They use a broad range of self-evaluation activities, including lesson observations, work scrutiny, learning walks and canvassing pupils' views. Structured prompts, moderation activities and agreed approaches to feedback are helping to improve consistency in evaluation across the school. As a result, senior leaders and many middle leaders are developing a more precise understanding of the main strengths and areas for improvement in teaching and learning.

Leaders analyse a suitable range of first-hand evidence and performance information, including attendance data, assessment information and national datasets. Increasingly, they combine this information to identify patterns in pupils' progress and engagement. However, the precision of analysis varies amongst middle leaders and in a few cases, leaders do not use self-evaluation findings well enough to identify the causes of underperformance or to evaluate the impact of interventions.

Improvement planning is generally coherent and aligns suitably with whole-school priorities. Leaders identify appropriate actions and monitor progress suitably through line management meetings and quality assurance activities. They identify success criteria that are generally appropriate. However, leaders at all levels do not always focus on the most important areas for improvement and success criteria are not always measurable enough to help leaders evaluate the impact of their actions.

Leaders use professional learning and external collaboration purposefully to strengthen leadership capacity and support school improvement. Beneficial work with partner schools and the local authority has helped refine quality assurance processes. Leaders use findings from self-evaluation activities to shape professional learning priorities well. For example, they have identified and shared effective approaches to improving behaviour and classroom culture and pedagogy to improve pupil participation.

Leaders have taken appropriate steps to strengthen the school's approach to reducing the impact of poverty. They use the pupil development grant purposefully to support well-being, attendance, inclusion and targeted intervention. There is also a growing focus on improving teaching and curriculum to reduce the impact of poverty on pupils' attainment. However, the school's use of the pupil development grant is not evaluated well enough and as a result, its impact is limited. Over the last three year the performance of pupils eligible for free school meals has fluctuated but is below that of pupils eligible for free school meals in similar schools.

Additional information

The school's arrangements for safeguarding pupils do not give any cause for concern.

A site management concern was raised during the inspection, and the local authority has been notified.

The school has appropriate arrangements for promoting healthy eating and drinking.

Leaders and governors manage the school's finances appropriately, including the use of the pupil development grant.

Evidence base of the report

Before an inspection, inspectors:

- analyse the outcomes from the parent 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 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 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, where appropriate
- visit a broad sample of lessons, 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

Appendix 1: Numbers – quantities and proportions

The report makes references to different quantities and proportions e.g. '*most pupils...*' or '*very few pupils...*'. We use these terms to describe quantities and proportions as outlined in the table below:

nearly all =	with very few exceptions
most =	90% or more
many =	70% or more
a majority =	over 60%
half =	50%
around half =	close to 50%
a minority =	below 40%
few =	below 20%
very few =	less than 10%

Copies of the report

Copies of this report are available from the school and from the Estyn website (<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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