



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

A report on
Ysgol Tanycastell

Harlech
Gwynedd
LL46 2SW

Date of inspection: May 2022

by

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

This report is also available in Welsh.

About Ysgol Tanycastell

Name of provider	Ysgol Tanycastell
Local authority	Gwynedd Council
Language of the provider	Welsh-medium
Type of school	Primary
Religious character	
Number of pupils on roll	83
Pupils of statutory school age	66
Number in nursery classes (if applicable)	8
Percentage of statutory school age pupils eligible for free school meals over a three-year average <i>(The national percentage of pupils eligible for free school meals over a three-year average in the primary sector is 21.3%)</i>	6.5%
Percentage of statutory school age pupils identified as having additional learning needs (a) <i>(The national percentage of pupils identified as having an additional learning need in the primary sector is 20.6%)</i>	19%
Percentage of statutory school age pupils who speak Welsh at home	13.3%
Percentage of statutory school age pupils with English as an additional language	0
Date of headteacher appointment	01/09/2009
Date of previous Estyn inspection (if applicable)	01/02/2013
Additional information	

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

Ysgol Gynradd Tanycastell is a happy and homely school. All staff work together effectively to create a welcoming and inclusive environment that fosters a supportive and hard-working learning ethos where staff and pupils care naturally for each other. Pupils are happy to attend, behave well, develop positive attitudes to learning and make sound progress. Despite the obvious challenges that the school has faced as a result of the pandemic, the sense of a close-knit community among parents, staff and pupils has meant that it has faced these challenges with obvious resilience.

The school has a strong Welsh ethos and a clear emphasis on providing a range of valuable experiences that reflect the nature and context of the school successfully. As a result, pupils show pride in their school and a clear appreciation of the culture and history of the local area. Following the lockdown periods, teachers have identified a decline in pupils' Welsh literacy skills and have given a clear priority to ensuring that they regain their oracy skills quickly since returning to the school.

Teachers provide rich and stimulating learning experiences that engage most pupils' interest. This enables them to develop the skills that they need to access the whole curriculum. Pupils enjoy the opportunities they are given to influence what they would like to learn within the term's theme, which ensures that they are eager to learn and show an interest and pride in their work. However, pupils are only just beginning to evaluate and improve their own work independently.

The headteacher provides effectively leadership, which provides a clear direction for the school. She receives strong support from the dedicated staff, who work well together as a team. They show a strong commitment to promoting continuous and sustainable improvements. Governors have a good understanding of the school's work and support the school effectively.

Recommendations

- R1 Strengthen provision to develop pupils' reading and extended writing skills in Welsh across the school
- R2 Ensure regular opportunities for pupils to evaluate and improve their own work independently

What happens next

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

Main findings

Learning

Most pupils make sound progress in their learning during their time at the school. This includes those with additional learning needs and those from disadvantaged homes. The pandemic has slowed the progress of a minority of pupils, particularly in terms of their Welsh oral, reading and extended writing skills across the curriculum.

Most develop the communication skills that they need to engage successfully in the classroom with teachers and other pupils. Nearly all pupils listen well during teachers' presentations and the contributions of their peers. Those pupils who do not come from Welsh-speaking homes are quickly regaining their confidence with the language. Despite the challenges that pupils have faced during the pandemic, since returning to school, many of their spoken Welsh skills are developing well.

In the nursery and reception classes, many speak intelligibly about things from experience and contribute authentically to class activities. Pupils in the reception class develop their oral skills effectively by role-playing in the veterinary surgery. By Year 2, many discuss their work confidently and show an interest and enthusiasm when recalling the story of '*Y Fwch Wnaeth Ddodwy Wŷ*' ('The Cow that Laid an Egg'). They role-play energetically and convey the meaning of phrases such as '*wrth ei bodd*' ('delighted'), '*sobor o falch*' ('as pleased as Punch'), '*mewn sioc*' ('shocked') and '*torri ei chalon*' ('heartbroken') enthusiastically. Most of the older pupils build appropriately on this firm foundation. They speak Welsh with increasing confidence and use purposeful vocabulary, for example when discussing what a plant needs to grow. At the top of the school, many develop as confident bilingual learners and express themselves maturely in Welsh and English, for example when creating an argument for and against opening a new zoo as part of their work on the class book, '*Sŵ Sarah Mai*'. However, a minority have a tendency to turn to English when discussing their work.

Most pupils in the nursery and reception class are developing a good understanding of the relationship between letters, sounds and words. By Year 2, many read with increasing understanding and use their phonic skills appropriately to read unfamiliar words. Many older pupils read correctly with clear intonation in Welsh and English. More able pupils read with fluency and confidence in both languages. On the whole, most older pupils show a knowledgeable understanding of context. They use their reading skills effectively to gather information from books and various texts, for example when reading news programmes on the internet. However, overall, pupils' higher-order reading skills are not developed sufficiently to be able to interpret and understand meaning effectively when finding information.

As pupils move through the school, many of their writing skills develop well. In the nursery and reception classes, most show enthusiasm towards writing when experimenting with mark-making. By Year 2, most form letters correctly and use intelligible handwriting, for example when writing an imaginative story about dinosaurs. Most pupils in Years 3 – 6 use their Welsh and English writing skills in a variety of genres. Many succeed in conveying ideas and feelings by using suitable, relevant vocabulary and punctuating correctly. They work effectively with a

discussion partner when thinking about nouns, adjectives, adverbs and similes to enrich their work, for example when writing a newspaper article about the history of Skara Brae. At the top of the school, most pupils write appropriately for different purposes and various audiences. More able pupils use rich vocabulary in both language and organise their work sensibly by using paragraphs correctly, for example when writing the diary of Seithennyn based on the story of Cantre'r Gwaelod. However, there are very few examples of pupils applying their extended Welsh writing skills across the curriculum and re-drafting and improving their work independently.

Most pupils in the reception class, Year 1 and Year 2 develop a sound understanding of number strategies and use them confidently when undertaking their activities in the classroom, for example when discovering how many ways six coloured eggs can be placed in a box. By Year 2, they recognise number value in two- and three-digit numbers and multiply numbers up to 10 by 2, 5 and 10. They have an appropriate understanding of money and are able to solve problems and handle data successfully. Most older pupils build effectively on previous learning. They discuss their number work with increasing confidence and use relevant mathematical terminology in line with their age and ability. At the top of the school, most pupils recall previous learning well when calculating perimeter and area and use it, for example, to plan an extension to the zoo or when comparing the temperature in Iceland and Wales. However, only a minority decide for themselves which strategies to use and only a few check their own answers independently.

Most pupils' digital skills develop well during their time at the school. Most pupils in the reception class give a series of correct instructions to a digital toy to find Inc Tafod Pink, the lost kitten. By Year 2, most pupils use an electronic tablet confidently to record their work and develop their oral skills. Most older pupils log in to their personal digital account confidently and use a variety of suitable programs to gather and present information, for example when celebrating Snowdonia National Park's 70th anniversary. They make creative use of a range of digital programs, for example to create and present a video to display their creative work on an imaginary bat called Serenola. This has a positive effect on developing their oral Welsh skills. At the top of the school, most pupils use a digital program skilfully, alongside suitable scientific equipment, when researching the different parts of a plant.

Well-being and attitudes to learning

Most pupils enjoy the school's life and work and feel completely safe within its caring, inclusive and supportive ethos. They know who to approach for advice if anything is worrying them and are confident that staff respond to any concerns they may have. Most pupils have a sound understanding of the importance of staying safe online and visits from the community police officer reinforce this.

Following the lockdown periods as a result of the pandemic, most pupils have engaged with the school's activities and arrangements consistently well and have shown positive attitudes to learning. They behave well in lessons, while moving around the school and during leisure time. They are kind, polite and respectful towards adults and other pupils. Most are caring towards each other and treat others with respect in lessons, in the dining hall and on the school playground. They feel that challenging behaviour is resolved promptly and suitably.

Most pupils are developing as ethical, knowledgeable citizens. They respect their own rights and the rights of others. They have a strong sense of fairness and equality towards their friends and adults and of their responsibility to respect their environment. School assemblies contribute soundly towards developing pupils' knowledge and understanding of different religions and their moral and spiritual development. Pupils are proud of their contribution towards fundraising activities, for example by raising money to help people from Ukraine. This has a positive effect on most pupils' awareness of the needs of others in their community and the wider world and contributes well to their moral development.

Most pupils show positive attitudes to learning. Many are hard-working and enthusiastic learners who work together harmoniously and stay diligently on task for extended periods. They show good levels of motivation, interest and pride in their work. This contributes successfully to the ethos of effective learning within the school and has a positive effect on many pupils' standards. Nearly all pupils in the younger classes engage willingly with provision in the outdoor classroom and make choices independently, for example when role-playing or building with blocks. Most show a sound understanding of classroom organisation and move around the various areas confidently and independently. They are always ready to learn and concentrate well. They are beginning to influence and share their ideas when responding to the variety of interesting activities in the learning areas.

Many older pupils speak enthusiastically about their learning and respond positively to the opportunities they are given to influence what they would like to learn within the term's theme. A good example of this is the way in which pupils at the top of the school use a digital program to summarise and present their ideas as a basis for their theme on animals. These pupils have expressed that they are keen for tasks in the Science and Technology Area of Learning and Expertise to be more hands-on and would like to invite more visitors to talk about the area and continue to use the outdoor area when learning about science. This leads to good ownership of their learning and increases their commitment to their work. Many pupils respond well to oral feedback that is given by their teachers. A majority use this to help to progress their learning appropriately. However, their ability to consider their own learning and that of their peers and identify where things could be improved is only just beginning to develop.

Most pupils have a sound understanding of the importance of eating and drinking healthily and understand the effect of physical exercise on their health. They participate enthusiastically in a range of physical activities both inside and outside the school, which has a positive effect on their well-being and fitness.

Due to the coronavirus pandemic, inspectors will not be reporting on pupil attendance rates during the 2020-2021 and 2021-2022 academic years. However, inspectors will consider the school's provision for monitoring and improving attendance as part of inspection area 4 (care, support and guidance).

Teaching and learning experiences

Staff develop a close working relationship with pupils, which fosters a positive and supportive environment for learning. They know the pupils well, encourage their

participation and praise their efforts while they work and interact with their peers consistently. This has a positive effect on pupils' standards and well-being.

The school provides a range of practical and rich learning experiences for its pupils. It presents practical and interesting cross-curricular themes and programmes of work that extend most pupils' knowledge and understanding and strengthen their commitment to their work effectively. An example of this is the opportunity for younger pupils to raise chicks in the classroom and use their imagination when creating a fox trap in the outdoor area. Across the school, teachers use a variety of effective teaching methods that motivate pupils to learn. They have good subject knowledge and use this knowledge skilfully when planning interesting learning experiences for their pupils, which meet most of their needs successfully. Purposeful co-operation between teachers and assistants provides beneficial support to enable pupils to complete their tasks and benefit from them.

The principles of the foundation phase have been embedded successfully. There is a clear emphasis on fostering independence and developing pupils' skills by providing practical and stimulating experiences. As a result, nearly all pupils undertake their activities enthusiastically and work and play together happily. Staff make appropriate use of the outdoor learning areas to support learning. Teachers in the Year 3 to 6 classes plan thoroughly to ensure an appropriate level of challenge for pupils of different abilities. Overall, there is a good balance in these classes between experiences that are led by adults and opportunities for pupils to work independently. However, there is a tendency at times for teachers to over-direct activities and this limits opportunities for pupils to take responsibility for their own learning.

There are suitable arrangements in place to revise the curriculum based on the four purposes to meet the principles of the Curriculum for Wales. Teachers plan thoughtfully to ensure learning experiences that reflect the context and ethos of the school, for example when studying the history of the local castle or learning about legends, such as the sad story of Branwen. This promotes pupils' awareness of their heritage successfully and contributes to a sense of pride among pupils towards their area and culture. Teachers include pupils when devising the termly themes and pay thorough attention to their questions and ideas when starting a unit of work. Visitors are invited to the school regularly to share their experiences. For example, a local vet and owl keepers came to the school to promote pupils' interest in their theme on animals. This leads to good ownership of their learning and increases pupils' commitment towards their work.

Teachers plan purposefully to develop pupils' literacy, numeracy and digital skills across the curriculum. Following the lockdown periods, teachers have identified a decline in pupils' Welsh literacy skills. As a result, they have prioritised the development of pupils' oral skills and have implemented a number of appropriate strategies that are quickly helping pupils to regain their oracy skills consistently since their return to school. Staff take advantage of every opportunity to enrich pupils' language, which contributes successfully to strengthening their oral skills. A good example of this is the daily language drilling games on the playground. Teachers use digital programs to record themselves reading Welsh stories for parents to share with their children to ensure that the youngest pupils hear the language at home. Arrangements were made for a Welsh author to talk to pupils online to promote their curiosity about Welsh books. By adopting the "*Ein llais ni*" project, teachers provide a

variety of interesting digital tasks that are an effective means of increasing pupils' enthusiasm towards the language. Teachers have identified the importance of ensuring an audience for pupils to develop and apply their oral skills. A good example of this is the work of older pupils using a multimedia program to write and present the story of Cantre'r Gwaelod to younger pupils. This promotes the older pupils' translanguaging skills effectively and develops them as competent and confident bilingual learners. However, provision to develop pupils' Welsh reading skills and extended writing skills has not been developed to the same extent.

Teachers provide pupils with purposeful oral feedback and intervene thoughtfully to support them at appropriate times during the lesson and to encourage them to persevere. However, opportunities for pupils to evaluate their own and other pupils' work are limited. As a result, their ability to improve their own work independently is in the early stages of development.

Care, support and guidance

An excellent feature of the school is its welcoming and familial ethos. Staff create a happy, caring and inclusive ethos at the school in which everyone is respected and valued. There is a strong culture of safeguarding across the school. All staff are aware of the child protection arrangements and create a safe, happy and caring community that nurtures pupils' personal and social skills successfully. Through "Swigod Sgwrs", pupils are given an opportunity to talk about any concerns with a member of staff. Leaders conduct detailed risk assessments within school activities and before going on external trips. The school's arrangements for safeguarding pupils meet requirements and are not a cause for concern.

There are effective systems for tracking and monitoring pupils' progress and arrangements for identifying and responding to the needs of pupils with additional learning needs are thorough. Teachers use a variety of appropriate methods to identify pupils at an early stage and take suitable steps to meet the needs of those who need support in the classroom. Staff's dedication to providing jointly with external agencies provides valuable opportunities for pupils to improve aspects of their well-being, in addition to relevant training for staff, which strengthens provision. The school has responded positively to reforms to the Additional Learning Needs Act. Teachers create appropriate individual education plans for all pupils with additional learning needs. They review these plans regularly with parents and their children, in addition to relevant agencies, to plan appropriately for the next steps in their learning.

The school promotes pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development successfully. Valuable collective worship periods create an ethos that provides valuable opportunities for pupils to reflect on values such as fairness, friendship and kindness. Teachers provide valuable opportunities for pupils to discuss emotions and feelings, for example by discussing the story 'Sŵ Sara Mai' and poems that describe different emotions. They develop pupils' awareness of sustainability by discussing aspects of fair trade and the effect of climate change on the polar bear's habitat.

Although opportunities to shoulder responsibilities through pupil voice groups, such as the school council, have been limited due to the pandemic, pupils respond enthusiastically to the opportunities that are provided for them, for example by undertaking responsibilities in the classroom and caring for younger pupils at

lunchtime. Pupils are given regular opportunities to contribute as a team, for example through the 'Llwybr Llafar' project, which motivates pupils to work together by collecting beads towards a whole-school prize. Beneficial opportunities are provided for pupils to broaden their understanding of the world of work and raise their aspirations by contributing to entrepreneurial projects.

There is a clear emphasis on developing pupils' creative skills. Teachers provide regular opportunities for younger pupils to work creatively with a variety of materials, for example to create an imaginary animal or emulate the work of famous artists from Wales and further afield. Teachers in these classes extend pupils' creative skills skilfully, for example by emulating primitive patterns from Australia and the tradition of the 'willow pattern plate' and making creative pictures of garden birds.

Teachers provide valuable opportunities for pupils to develop their physical skills. Teachers motivate younger pupils to move confidently around the indoor and outdoor classrooms. As a result, they develop good co-ordination, for example when responding to Welsh music. As they move through the school, teachers provide effectively to develop these skills further through a good range of activities based on play and sports clubs. Older pupils take advantage of a visit to a local outdoor pursuits centre enthusiastically to develop their physical skills further. This develops their confidence and fitness, in addition to their ability to work together.

Staff promote the importance of eating healthily and encourage physical fitness through a range of physical educational lessons and fitness activities, in addition to after-school sports clubs. This promotes pupils' understanding successfully of how to make healthy lifestyle choices and the importance of keeping fit.

The school has appropriate arrangements to promote good attendance. This includes daily monitoring and maintaining close links with parents, in addition to the local authority's welfare officer. The school addresses any persistent absence consistently.

Leadership and management

The headteacher provides effective leadership which ensures a clear direction for the school and promotes a close-knit, inclusive and happy community. She has a robust vision that is communicated and embraced effectively by the school's stakeholders. The headteacher and staff know the school well and work together successfully to develop an effective team of teachers and support staff. This is reflected successfully by the positive attitudes of most pupils towards the school's life and work. Nearly all behave well and show respect and maturity when interacting with peers, staff and visitors.

Promoting the Welsh language and Welshness is a priority and is central to the school's vision and all of its work. The headteacher works successfully with staff, pupils, governors, parents and members of the wider community to implement this vision. Staff work closely with schools in the catchment area to realise this ambition. A good example of this positive co-operation is the involvement of all schools in the clusters in the '*Ein Llais Ni*' project, which places a clear focus on improving pupils' spoken Welsh skills.

Robust self-evaluation procedures are at the heart of the school's life and work. The process is based on a wide range of evidence, which includes lesson observations, scrutiny of pupils' work and conducting learning walks. The headteacher ensures that all staff have an active role in the process. This ensures that they are aware of the school's strengths and areas for improvement. The headteacher and school leaders use the findings of the self evaluation process, in addition to local and national priorities, to set a clear strategic direction which focuses on improving pupils' outcomes and well-being. Although the recent pandemic has affected the school's usual self-evaluation timetable and processes, leaders have resumed their role of monitoring performance purposefully.

Leaders create a positive culture and ethos that promotes and supports the professional learning of all staff. The expertise and experience of individual staff are used effectively when allocating curricular responsibilities and promoting professional learning. A programme of valuable training is provided that corresponds to the school's current priorities and the school works very successfully with other partners to meet national priorities, such as realising the Curriculum for Wales and reforms to the Additional Learning Needs Act. A good example of this is the proactive co-operation between local schools to improve science and technology provision.

The school establishes productive relationships with parents. Effective communication methods ensure that parents are able to raise any issues that may have an effect on their child's learning and well-being in a timely manner. During the lockdown periods, pupils were provided with valuable support by joining in with live lessons to develop a better link between the school and learners. As a result, pupils and their parents had a better understanding of the requirements of tasks, which led to a higher level of engagement and better quality work.

Members of the governing body are highly supportive of the school and know it well. For example, they have a sound understanding of the nature of teaching and the support that the school provided for pupils and their families during the lockdown periods, including the effect of the pandemic on pupils' achievement and progress. The governing body understands its duties and discharges them effectively. Members have a sound understanding of the school's priorities and the rationale behind them. Governors make a beneficial contribution to monitoring activity and this helps them to ensure that they have up-to-date knowledge of the school's progress in implementing improvements. They ensure that the school has appropriate arrangements to promote eating and drinking healthily.

The headteacher and governors manage funding carefully and review expenditure appropriately. They ensure that decisions about expenditure and financial planning link purposefully with strategic priorities for improvement. A variety of grants are used purposefully to support provision and promote pupils' well-being. The school uses its pupil development grant effectively to ensure high levels of support for disadvantaged pupils and to provide experiences for them that they might not have otherwise. The school benefits from valuable contributions from the parents' association, which has invested a significant amount to purchase digital equipment to support digital competence provision.

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/members of the management committee 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, middle leaders, 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
- visit a broad sample of lessons, including learning support groups and the specialist resource base (where appropriate), 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 (where appropriate) and in outdoor areas
- visit the specialist resource base within the school to see pupils' learning (where appropriate)
- observe and speak to pupils at lunch and break times and at a sample of after-school clubs
- 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 (<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 going to press. Any enquiries or comments regarding this document/publication should be addressed to:

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