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

A report on

Ysgol Gynradd Gymraeg Aberdâr

Laburnum Drive
Cwmdare
Aberdare
Rhondda Cynon Taf
CF44 8RT

Date of inspection: September 2022

by

Estyn, His Majesty's Inspectorate for Education

and Training in Wales

This report is also available in Welsh.

About Ysgol Gynradd Gymraeg Aberdâr

Name of provider	Ysgol Gynradd Gymraeg Aberdâr
Local authority	Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council
Language of the provider	Welsh
Type of school	Primary
Religious character	
Number of pupils on roll	424
Pupils of statutory school age	306
Number in nursery classes (if applicable)	60
Number in the sixth form	
Percentage of statutory school age 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 the primary sector is 21.3%)*	15.4%
Percentage of statutory school age pupils identified as having additional learning needs (a) (*The national percentage of pupils identified as having an additional learning need in the primary sector is 22.2%*)	21.2%
Percentage of statutory school age pupils who speak Welsh at home	21.6%
Percentage of statutory school age pupils with English as an additional language	
Date of headteacher appointment	January 2014
Date of previous Estyn inspection (if applicable)	10/05/2016

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 Gymraeg Aberdâr is a caring, happy and homely school where pupils treat each other, staff and visitors with respect. Nearly all pupils are exceptionally well behaved and behave positively and maturely towards others. They feel proud of their school and its community. All staff have an effective working relationship with pupils, which promotes good attitudes to learning and well-being, in addition to fostering a supportive and inclusive environment. They know the pupils well and respond purposefully to their emotional and social needs. Provision for pupils with additional learning needs (ALN) is also effective and meets their needs well.

Welsh is new to many pupils on entry to the school. Overall, the youngest children make appropriate progress in their oral skills during their first years at the school. With encouragement from adults, many develop their skills to communicate with increasing confidence in Welsh and English and develop their numeracy and digital skills purposefully by the end of their time at the school. However, teachers do not always ensure that all pupils are challenged fully or provide beneficial opportunities for them to apply and build on their skills effectively enough across the school.

The school has an appropriate supply of leaders who support teachers and assistants robustly. They make a valuable contribution towards establishing a strong team ethos and a sense of belonging among the staff. Members of the governing body are supportive of the headteacher and staff. However, leaders do not always identify beneficial opportunities to share good practice across the school or to arrange support to ensure consistency in, and improve, teaching and provision. They also do not always act strategically enough to improve their understanding of what has had a positive effect on outcomes and what needs to continue to improve. Overall, the school's safeguarding arrangements are not coherent or robust enough.

Recommendations

R1 Improve and strengthen child protection and safeguarding arrangements

R2 Strengthen the ability of leaders to act more strategically in evaluating the quality of provision and implementing the necessary improvements

R3 Ensure that teaching sets high expectations for all pupils to achieve to the best of their ability

R4 Provide regular opportunities for pupils to develop and apply their skills across the areas of learning

What happens next

The school will draw up an action plan to address the recommendations from the inspection. Estyn will review the school's progress.

Main findings

Learning

During their time at the school, many pupils, including those with additional learning needs (ALN) and those who are eligible for free school meals, make consistent progress from their starting points. In general, they develop their knowledge and understanding of different areas appropriately in contexts that encourage them to enjoy learning. With encouragement from adults, many develop their skills to communicate with increasing confidence in Welsh and English and develop their numeracy and digital skills purposefully by the end of their time at the school.

Across the school, most pupils listen well to the contributions of their peers and adults. Many of the youngest pupils acquire the Welsh language purposefully and strive to speak it while enjoying their learning, for example as they re-tell a story by following a specific structure. As pupils move through the school, a majority strive to speak Welsh when undertaking their work and develop their vocabulary and patterns suitably. With consistent support from adults, they develop their Welsh and English speaking skills successfully and try to improve the standard of what they say by speaking with increasing accuracy. On the whole, a minority of pupils do not speak Welsh consistently enough in formal and informal situations, which hinders their confidence in speaking with increasing fluency.

Many pupils' reading skills develop effectively as they move through the school. The youngest pupils develop their knowledge of letter sounds skilfully and, by Year 2, they use a good range of reading techniques. For example, they immerse themselves fully when listening to, reading and re-telling the story of the Three Little Pigs. Many of the oldest pupils develop their skills well and enjoy reading a relevant range of books and digital texts. By Year 6, they develop their higher order reading skills beneficially, for example when gathering information about Charles Darwin as part of their work on world adventurers.

Many pupils develop their writing skills appropriately as they move through the school. The youngest pupils make large marks skilfully, for example when writing about 'Mr Dail'. As their skills develop, a majority use adjectives and similes with increasing accuracy. For example, Year 4 pupils select words creatively when writing the diary of Little Red Riding Hood. By Year 6, a majority write increasingly at length and take advantage of regular opportunities to refine and improve the standard of their work, for example when writing a newspaper article about Guto Nyth Brân's last race. However, a minority of teachers across the school do not provide purposeful enough opportunities for pupils to extend their written work consistently across the areas of learning. As a result, pupils, especially those who are more able, do not build on their writing skills well enough over time.

Many pupils are developing strong mathematical skills. On the whole, they apply their number skills consistently in relevant learning activities. In the reception class, many count confidently to 10 and deepen their understanding of place value skilfully, for example as they match natural objects to the correct number. By Year 2, they develop a good range of mathematical skills and make sound progress, for example when measuring the effect of heat on different foods every 30 seconds. As pupils

move through the school, they build on their skills beneficially. For example, many Year 3 and 4 pupils collect data about the interests of their peers and record them skilfully in a Venn diagram. By Year 6, many pupils collect data on body measurements and transfer this information to a pie chart. In the best practice, teachers provide regular opportunities for pupils to develop their numeracy skills constructively across the areas of learning.

Many pupils' information and communication technology (ICT) skills are developing appropriately in activities that promote language and mathematics skills, overall. Many of the youngest pupils use their digital communication skills to create an attractive invitation to a smoothie party. As their skills develop, they include pictures and text and present factual information skilfully, for example when describing the body's digestive system. By Year 6, many use relevant programs skilfully, for example as they measure the features of the body and present data systematically. However, across the school, pupils do not develop their skills constructively in a rich range of learning experiences across the curriculum.

Many pupils develop their creative skills beneficially and, when provision allows, enjoy presenting work in a variety of ways. Pupils across the school appreciate that their achievements are celebrated on murals in the classroom.

Well-being and attitudes to learning

Ysgol Gymraeg Aberdâr is a happy, friendly and caring community where pupils greet each other, staff and visitors politely and respectfully. This wonderful atmosphere is created by all staff and pupils. Across the school, nearly all pupils behave exceptionally well in lessons and while playing and moving around the school. All staff know their pupils well and this has a positive effect on their well-being.

Overall, most pupils know whom to approach for advice if anything is worrying them and are confident that the school's staff will respond immediately to any concerns they have. Pupils work together successfully across the school, for example when Year 6 pupils listen to Year 2 pupils read.

Nearly all pupils take pride in their school and feel safe there. Most have a good understanding of how to stay safe when using the internet. Regular visits by the community police officer to provide sessions on a range of themes, such as online safety, anti-social behaviour and the dangers of drugs, support pupils' knowledge of how to stay safe well.

Many pupils concentrate well in lessons, apply themselves to learning immediately and respond appropriately to questions from teachers and assistants. At the top end of the school, pupils are beginning to contribute ideas for their themes. However, this has not been developed fully across the school.

Following the pandemic, pupils take pride in recent opportunities to attend activities and clubs that promote their health and well-being. For example, pupils enjoy opportunities to attend an after-school netball club, in addition to taking part in workshops with a rugby support officer about a balanced diet and how to stay

healthy. Many pupils have an appropriate understanding of the importance of making healthy choices in terms of food and drink.

Many pupils are developing well as ethical and knowledgeable citizens and the school council has succeeded in promoting the four purposes of the Curriculum for Wales across the school. Most also develop a good awareness of what a good citizen looks like and the importance of children's rights. Pupils who are members of committees or councils contribute appropriately to the school's procedures, for example by giving input on the anti-bullying policy.

Although most pupils arrive at school punctually, a very few arrive late regularly. This has a negative effect on their learning and disrupts the daily routine for other pupils.

Teaching and learning experiences

The school has a suitable curriculum that develops pupils' skills appropriately. Overall, teachers provide suitable learning experiences across the areas of learning to engage and hold pupils' interest. They provide specific days at the beginning of each theme to engage pupils' interest in their learning, for example by visiting a local museum as part of the theme *'Trwy'r Oesoedd'* ('Through the Ages') in Year 3. Overall, learning experiences enable many pupils to acquire the necessary skills in specific sessions. However, teachers do not always provide purposeful opportunities for pupils to apply their skills fully across the areas of learning.

Teachers work appropriately with cluster schools to develop a curriculum that is based on the principles of the Curriculum for Wales to provide interesting and beneficial experiences for pupils. For example, the cluster's theme on Mexico allows pupils to develop Spanish skills as part of the Languages, Literacy and Communication area of learning and experience. However, the provision does not yet support pupils to make regular choices about what they learn.

Teachers plan a range of suitable activities and learning and play experiences. On the whole, they provide experiences that use the outdoor learning area appropriately as a means of supporting pupils to make progress in their skills. For example, the youngest pupils develop their numeracy skills by placing stones with numerals on them in order. However, across the school, pupils are not given enough varied opportunities to develop their ability to make choices about their learning with increasing independence.

The school's staff work together robustly to encourage pupils to speak the Welsh language when they begin at the school. On the whole, they support them to practise the language in their work and play to develop their fluency and skills. Although the school's curriculum provides appropriate opportunities for pupils to celebrate Welshness and Welsh traditions suitably, there are few opportunities based on the culture and history of the local area. On the whole, the school uses visitors and important events appropriately to support pupils' understanding of Welshness and Welsh culture, for example by inviting a poet and a musician to the school to work with pupils.

Teachers and assistants have an extremely positive working relationship with pupils and manage pupils' behaviour very effectively. They identify pupils' needs

appropriately and support them beneficially in a suitable range of activities. In the best practice, teachers have high expectations and challenge pupils to achieve to the best of their ability in activities that stimulate them to learn. However, overall, teachers do not provide enough opportunities that challenge a minority of pupils to achieve to the best of their ability.

Teachers and assistants use praise and oral feedback appropriately to celebrate pupils' successes and guide them to the next steps in their learning and development. They support pupils to use relevant strategies to reflect on and improve the standard of their work. For example, the school's oldest pupils take advantage of opportunities to improve their creative writing work through feedback from teachers. The aims of most lessons are clear and are shared with pupils regularly. In the best practice, teachers conduct regular progress reviews during lessons to encourage pupils to check their progress and improve the standard of their work. However, across the school, pupils are not always given purposeful opportunities to improve the quality of their work following written feedback from teachers or to discuss the assessment of their own learning with their peers. The school has robust progress tracking arrangements in place that support teachers and assistants to provide effective support programmes for specific groups of pupils, including support for their well-being.

Care, support and guidance

All staff are committed to supporting the development of nearly all pupils' social and emotional skills successfully. They work well together to create a supportive ethos and a sense of belonging to the school community. The friendly relationship between staff and pupils helps to foster a caring community where there is a clear emphasis on respect for all. Teachers and assistants know the pupils well and respond purposefully to their emotional and social needs. They ensure that all the school's activities are accessible to all pupils as they try to reduce the effects of poverty on pupils' education.

The school is preparing effectively for the Additional Learning Needs Act by working with a variety of beneficial partners. Through the clear and robust guidance of the Additional Learning Needs (ALN) Coordinator, staff have undertaken purposeful training and workshops to refine arrangements to align with the new requirements. For example, they have received training on preparing individual education plans and individual development plans to support pupils in their classes. This has also strengthened staff's understanding of how to support ALN pupils more effectively, including selecting the most suitable interventions and support to meet their learning needs and well-being. The school also has robust progress tracking arrangements in place to identify pupils who need support at an early stage. Individual learning plans are implemented and reviewed regularly to adapt provision, where necessary. Regular meetings with parents and carers provide an opportunity to share key information about pupils' progress.

The school has suitable collective worship arrangements that promote pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development appropriately. Pupils benefit from a good range of educational visits and learning experiences that develop their skills and interest in their learning suitably. However, teachers and leaders do not take full advantage of opportunities to develop and deepen pupils' understanding of their local

area in their work. Although the COVID-19 pandemic and the recent building work on the school site have reduced the extra-curricular opportunities available for pupils, staff have once again begun to provide beneficial clubs and sessions for children outside school hours.

Overall, leaders and teachers communicate appropriately with parents and carers by using a wide range of media. However, arrangements are not always clear enough to parents and carers and there is not enough consistency in approaches between teachers and the home.

The school ensures that staff receive regular training on issues relating to safeguarding and child protection. However, overall, the school's safeguarding arrangements are not coherent or robust enough and aspects of the recording of incidents need to be strengthened. Not all members of staff understand to whom they should refer particular concerns.

Leadership and management

The school has a clear vision that is based on creating a happy and caring environment to provide a firm foundation for pupils to develop their basic skills. Overall, the headteacher and other leaders share their vision with stakeholders appropriately. This has a positive effect on elements of provision, particularly when supporting pupils with ALN and the development of pupils' well-being overall.

The school has an appropriate supply of leaders who support teachers and assistants robustly. Although their responsibilities have changed recently, they have an appropriate understanding of their roles and duties. They model and promote professional values and conduct that contribute towards creative a caring and supportive environment and ethos across the school. However, leaders do not act strategically enough to address important areas for improvement in full. As a result, there are inconsistencies in the quality of provision and teaching across the school.

Leaders respond appropriately to national priorities, which includes preparing for the recent ALN Act and the Curriculum for Wales. However, preparations for the curriculum are in their early stages and have not yet had a positive impact on the provision or pupils' outcomes. On the whole, leaders promote a positive culture and ethos to encourage and support the professional learning of all staff. Overall, they link professional learning appropriately with the improvement priorities in the school improvement plan, for example by providing opportunities for all staff to improve their understanding of support strategies for pupils with ALN. However, leaders do not always identify beneficial opportunities to share good practice across the school or to arrange support to ensure consistency in, and improve, teaching and provision.

The headteacher provides appropriate information and reports to members of the governing body, which supports their work suitably. However, reports do not always state clearly enough the main issues relating to provision and standards across the school. This limits the ability of members of the governing body to challenge the school fully on its performance. Although members of the governing body have not undertaken monitoring activities during the pandemic, they have an appropriate understanding of the priorities in the current school improvement plan. They promote

healthy eating and drinking successfully and discharge their statutory duties appropriately.

The school has purposeful arrangements to manage financial resources and is aware of the importance of trying to reduce the effect of poverty on pupils' achievement. This includes using the pupil development grant suitably to improve the standards and attendance of specific groups of pupils. It has also worked with external partners to explore how the school can reduce the financial burden on families. For example, the school is flexible in terms of school uniform requirements and has paid for all extra-curricular visits this term.

Leaders have an appropriate timetable for evaluating provision and pupils' outcomes throughout the school year. Leaders have not succeeded in undertaking monitoring activities in full during the last two years due to the COVID-19 pandemic. However, they have scrutinised pupils' books during this period to evaluate the quality of provision and standards. However, the findings of these activities are not incisive enough and do not provide enough quantitative and evaluative information to lead to purposeful targets in the school improvement plan. Although leaders seek the views of parents and carers occasionally, they do not take full advantage of their ideas on how to improve provision and the school's arrangements.

The improvement plan includes five priorities that focus suitably on improving provision and pupils' outcomes as well as identifying the staff who are responsible for implementing and monitoring progress appropriately. However, targets for improvement do not address important areas that are in need of attention effectively enough. In addition, the evaluation of the previous improvement plan does not focus sufficiently on measuring the effect of action points on pupils' progress. As a result, leaders do not have a clear understanding of what has had a positive effect on outcomes and what needs to continue to be improved.

Internal meetings between staff, in addition to meetings of the governing body, ensure that key policies and procedures are reviewed regularly. Overall, leaders and staff work robustly with external agencies to improve provision and support pupils.

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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