



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

A report on

Ysgol Y Gogarth

**Nant y Gamar Road
Craig Y Don
Llandudno
LL30 1YE**

Date of inspection: October 2024

by

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

This report is also available in Welsh.

About Ysgol Y Gogarth

Name of provider	Ysgol Y Gogarth
Local authority	Conwy County Borough Council
Language of the provider	English
School category according to Welsh-medium provision	
Type of school	Maintained Special
Religious character	*
Number of pupils on roll	270
Pupils of statutory school age	210
Number in nursery classes	6
Percentage of pupils eligible for free school meals over a three-year average (The national percentage of pupils eligible for free school meals over a three-year average in Maintained Special is 46.6%)	40.0%
Percentage of pupils identified as having additional learning needs (a) (The national percentage of pupils identified as having an additional learning need in Maintained Special is 100.0%)	100.0%
Percentage of pupils who speak Welsh at home	7%
Percentage of pupils with English as an additional language	
Date of headteacher appointment	30/04/2023
Date of previous Estyn inspection (if applicable)	31/10/2017
Start date of inspection	14/10/2024

Further information

Ysgol y Gogarth is a residential special for pupils aged three to 19 years old. There are currently 272 pupils on the roll of the school. All pupils have a statement of special educational needs or a statutory individual development plan maintained by the local authority. Just over half of pupils are autistic and/or have a speech, communication and language difficulty. Just under a third have a learning difficulty. A very few pupils have a visual or hearing impairment. In addition, a very few pupils have a specific learning difficulty, for example dyslexia or dyscalculia.

A very few pupils are from ethnic minority backgrounds. Just under half of pupils are eligible to free school meals.

There are 29 classes, including a base room at Ysgol John Bright. There are 33 teachers including a deputy and two assistant headteachers and 117 teaching assistants. The headteacher has been in post since January 2023 and was deputy headteacher prior to the permanent appointment in April 2023. The school was last inspected in October 2017.

The school jointly manages the residential provision with Conwy County Borough Council. Llys Gogarth provides respite care for children. In addition, secondary aged pupils can access the residential as part of their school curriculum.

Ysgol Y Gogarth is a lead school for initial teacher education.

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

Ysgol Y Gogarth has recently faced some significant and unexpected challenges. During this time staff, pupils and governors have, and continue to, show considerable courage and perseverance.

The unexpected death of the previous headteacher was a significant shock to staff, pupils, the wider school community and, more generally, the additional learning needs community in Wales. In addition, and shortly after the death of the headteacher, the vice chair of governors, previously the long-standing chair of governors, also passed away. Like the headteacher, was committed to the pupils and staff of Ysgol Y Gogarth.

Members of the governing body and existing leadership team were required to take on new roles and responsibilities. Senior leaders immediately stepped up into the positions of acting headteacher and acting deputy headteacher. These positions were made permanent in April 2023 and July 2023, respectively.

Staff across the school have pupils' well-being and safety at heart. The safeguarding culture is robust, and all staff understand their roles and responsibilities in contributing to pupils' safety and well-being.

Teaching staff know the pupils well and have a clear understanding of their additional learning needs. They have developed nurturing relationships with the pupils. As a result, most pupils engage happily in their learning and demonstrate positive attitudes to learning. Learner voice is a particular strength at the school and this successfully fosters a community and sense of belonging where **"Children come First"**.

Most pupils at Ysgol y Gogarth make strong progress from their initial starting points and across a range of skills, due to the valuable support and encouragement they receive from staff. However, overall, the quality of teaching is variable.

Class routines are well established and provide valuable stability in many classes. Transition from one activity to another is well managed. As a result, most pupils know, understand and follow classroom routines and expectations readily. This supports pupils to participate fully in their learning.

Overall, many members of teaching staff are effective role models who approach their work with enthusiasm and energy. Overall, they create welcoming and positive learning environments.

Curriculum experiences develop as pupils progress through the school and teachers planning builds upon prior experiences and skills development. The curriculum provides numerous opportunities for pupils to learn to develop healthy lifestyle choices, complemented by an extensive after-school clubs, including many sporting activities.

Many older pupils access an on-site residential centre allowing them to develop their independent living skills in real life contexts. It is comprehensive and strategically designed to equip pupils with the skills and independence to successfully navigate

their next steps and adult life. The school has a long standing and beneficial partnership with Ysgol John Bright where pupils are included in mainstream classes including studying a range of subjects at GCSE. The post-16 curriculum offer at Ysgol Y Gogarth is a notable strength.

The school works effectively with a range of external partners to support the additional and medical needs of pupils. The school communicates with parents and carers very effectively and parents recognise and value the strength of this relationship. The governing body also places a high value on the relationship the school has with the parents and carers and has effective communication with families as a priority.

The parent, staff and friends' association are highly active within the school and have raised significant funds to help improve learning opportunities for pupils. They have funded school cycling equipment, helped purchase digital equipment and supported the purchase of a school minibus.

The school has grown considerably in numbers since it opened 10 years ago. To accommodate new pupils, specialist teaching areas and therapy rooms were lost. However, there are well-developed plans to extend the school building. The local authority has provided reassurance that the extension will accommodate existing pupils. There are no plans to increase the number of pupils on roll.

The school uses grants to support the implementation of national priorities well and this impacts positively on, for example, pupils' and families' well-being. Staff absence is high, with an average of three teachers and 15 support staff absent daily throughout 2023-2024 every day. Nearly all of the core school budget is allocated to staffing costs, a situation that is financially unsustainable.

Recommendations

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

- R1 Ensure that the most effective teaching and learning is shared across the school
- R2 Improve the analysis of school information to inform coherent improvement priorities
- R3 Continue to work with the local authority to improve staff absence

What happens next

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

Main evaluation

Most pupils at Ysgol y Gogarth make strong progress from their initial starting points and across a range of skills, due to the valuable support and encouragement they receive from staff.

The school provides a calm, nurturing and welcoming atmosphere for pupils. Most staff know pupils very well and develop supportive, positive working relationships with them. They have high expectations of pupils' behaviour and support pupils' learning well by helping them to regulate their emotions and emotional responses to others.

Effective teaching

Many teaching staff plan effectively for progression in relation to individual pupils' needs. Where teaching is most effective planning, and lessons relate well to pupils' lived experiences and interests. In many lessons, staff encourage pupils' active participation throughout the lesson. Verbal feedback is immediate, positive and supportive of pupils' efforts. This motivates pupils to persevere with their learning tasks and make effective progress within lessons. Overall, the pace of many lessons and range of activities is effective in maintaining pupils' attention and enjoyment.

In a very few cases, planning and teaching do not support pupils' additional learning needs well enough. For example, activities are overly teacher-led, and the focus of learning, along with the provision of resources, is not sufficiently tailored to pupils' interests or abilities. This impacts negatively on their progress and limits their engagement in meaningful activities.

Teaching assistants are delegated sensitively and purposefully within many classes. Overall, they provide effective support, and both encourage and motivate pupils effectively. As a result, pupils are engaged in their learning and demonstrate positive behaviour. However, in a very few lessons there is limited purposeful support from teaching assistants. For example, teaching assistants are not always deployed well enough to support individual pupils by class teachers.

Teachers ensure that pupils have beneficial opportunity to develop their numeracy skills, for example staff encourage them to use terms such as 'one more', 'one less' and 'how many times?' Pupils successfully sort and match objects and colours and count simple sequences in English and Welsh. Older pupils identify coins correctly and practise using these when shopping or in the pupil-run on-site coffee shop. Where appropriate, abler pupils join mathematics lessons, and other mainstream classes at Ysgol John Bright.

The school has implemented valuable approaches to develop pupils' communication skills as they move through the school. As a result, most pupils develop their communication skills successfully, enabling them to access the curriculum, engage with each other, make choices and express themselves effectively. Over time, many pupils become increasingly competent in using their preferred approaches to communication to express their needs, feelings and choices or to answer teachers'

questions. For example, they communicate well through gestures, sounds, communication boards, speech or using technology.

There is a structured approach to developing reading and writing skills in relation to pupils' needs and abilities. As a result, most pupils develop and improve these skills appropriately. For example, pupils recognise and understand symbols and signs to indicate their choice of activity and develop a love of reading by listening to the class teacher read a story. A few more able pupils read aloud confidently and write their own instructions for a cooking recipe.

The bilingual provision at the school is a strength.

The curriculum and pupil progress

Curriculum experiences develop as pupils progress through the school and teachers' planning builds upon prior experiences and skills development. A recent effective development in this area has been the introduction of areas of learning experience (AoLE) based learning for secondary age pupils, allowing them to access subject specialist teachers and to develop their confidence to transition across school and experience different classrooms and teaching approaches.

The curriculum provides extensive opportunities for pupils to learn to develop healthy lifestyle choices with high levels of engagement in use of facilities such as the astro turf playing field, climbing wall, adapted bikes in purposeful ways, co-ordinated by the physical literacy lead. The school provides relevant opportunities for pupils to learn about healthy food choices and to prepare food. There is an extensive after-school clubs offer, including many sporting activities. In addition, many older pupils access an on-site residential centre allowing them to develop their independent living skills in real life contexts. These features are a strength of the school.

Close links with Careers Wales provide pupils with advice, interaction with employers, visits to workplaces, and in a few cases work experience placements. The school hosts the North Wales Special Schools annual careers event where up to 30 employers visit and offer hands-on experiences. Pupils benefit greatly from this opportunity, gaining practical insights and exposure to diverse career paths such as engineering and making bath bombs.

Many pupils make effective progress in developing their independence skills during their time at the school. For example, they put on their jackets independently when going out to play and hang them up when they return to the classroom. Where appropriate, pupils benefit from valuable opportunities to stay at the school's residential setting, Llys Gogarth. Pupils develop valuable independent living skills such as taking responsibility for their own personal care when at home or in the community. Further, older pupils improve their skills in areas that support their transition to their future destinations effectively. They practise work-related skills and consider their personal safety within the community. Pupils that attend Ysgol John Bright are supported well in developing independent learning skills.

The school develops pupils' understanding of how to keep themselves safe successfully. This is delivered through a multi-agency approach co-ordinated by the school. Key messages for pupils are reinforced across the curriculum and in

assembly and pastoral time to further support pupil awareness and understanding. In addition, the school addresses any incidents of perceived bullying well. These approaches effectively support pupils to develop the skills they need to stay safe and make more informed choices.

There is a comprehensive programme of relationships and sexuality education that supports pupils at all stages to understand healthy relationships at a level appropriate to their needs.

Spotlight: Supporting the needs of pupils through multi-disciplinary working

Across the school, there are a range of whole-school support teams who provide support for speech and language, physical literacy, augmentative and alternative communication, medical and behavioural needs of pupils. These colleagues collaborate effectively with teachers, teaching assistants and other professionals to support teaching and learning for all pupils.

For example, the school records and monitors all behaviour incidents very effectively, including incidents involving physical interventions. This valuable expertise positively supports the teaching team to understand the underlying causes of challenging behaviours and the functions that behaviours serve for the pupil, and provides useful strategies to help both staff and pupils in class. As a result of thoughtful reflective practice from staff with the valuable support from the behaviour team, over time many pupils show a significant improvement in the incidents of behaviours that challenge.

Post-16 curriculum

The post-16 curriculum offer is a notable strength. It is thorough and effectively targeted to preparing pupils for the skills and independence they will need to navigate their next steps and adult life. Many post-16 pupils access courses such as web design, motor vehicles and hospitality & catering at a local college. This experience helps them develop valuable skills, become familiar with the college environment and make informed choices about their future studies. Where appropriate, pupils access GCSE qualifications. Where pupils access part of their learning in off-site provision, they are suitably supported by Ysgol Y Gogarth staff.

The school has a long standing and beneficial partnership with Ysgol John Bright. Where appropriate, pupils are included in mainstream classes. Older pupils select and follow GCSE courses. Pupils benefit from the support of Ysgol Y Gogarth's teaching assistants and lead teacher. In addition, pupils access the base room to undertake independent learning, follow other accredited courses and receive individual advice and guidance. On completion of their GCSEs, due in part to the pupils age in completing them, opportunities to further their studies at level 3 at Ysgol John Bright are very limited.

Leavers' destinations are suitably plotted and progress and engagement in their first year after school are monitored to inform planning for future leaver destinations. In the last three cohorts of Year 14 pupils, nearly all learners moved on to appropriate next steps.

Pupil voice

Pupil voice in Ysgol y Gogarth is very inclusive and is a significant strength of the school. The school council are elected pupils who take great pride in their important role within the school. The captain and vice-captain clearly demonstrate a commitment to capturing all learners' voices in and around the school, including acting as an advocate for pupils who are less able to communicate. For example, all pupils contributed to the development of the new community hub, Ty Morgan, by sharing their ideas through a mood board located in the café. Pupils at the school demonstrate great pride and courage in their work within the school community. A few pupils also have the opportunity to take part in the interview process for the appointment of new staff, including the appointment of the headteacher.

The school council have also recently completed work to review the school expectations and have played a leading role in designing the new school logo in the form of a flower representing that all pupils at Ysgol y Gogarth bloom.

Where appropriate, pupils have a good understanding of their rights and regularly share information linked to the articles of the United Nations Rights of the Child through assemblies, the work of the school council and displays around the school.

Spotlight: Developing effective links with families and the community

Ysgol y Gogarth is a very effective community focused school. Staff work effectively in partnership with families, parents and carers, pupils and external agencies. The family and community engagement officer for example, provides support to families either by directing to organisations and services that may be helpful, or by providing workshops for family members to attend. They meet on a regular basis with families to discuss issues that may arise and support parents and carers to work with the school to address these. This includes where there are challenges in relation to school attendance, supporting the parents on an individual basis with a focus on identifying and overcoming the barrier to attendance. This work has a positive impact on increasing parents' and carers' involvement in their child's education, both at school and at home.

The eco-council meets on a weekly basis and includes parent volunteers working alongside their child with the family and community engagement (FaCE) officer. This positively supports the relationship between the school and the parent volunteers.

More information on the work of Ysgol y Gogarth can be found in the case study from the Welsh Government. <https://www.gov.wales/community-focused-schools-video-case-study-ysgol-y-gogarth-conwy>

Adapting to significant challenges and change

All members of the senior leadership team continue to adapt to their new responsibilities. However, senior leaders retain legacy responsibilities that are operational in nature, which limits the time they can dedicate to focusing on the school's strategic priorities.

There is a well-established culture of trust between the governing body and the school leadership team. Governors have a suitable range of skills and experience that allows them to offer suitable support and challenge to school leaders.

The governing body receive informative reports from the headteacher. However, information on the quality of teaching and learning lacks detail and precision. This limits the ability of the governing body to fully support and challenge senior leaders.

The headteacher has thoughtfully negotiated the school improvement journey over the past couple of years and has been exceptionally mindful of the thoughts and views of middle leaders, pupils and parents. As a result, the school has continued to implement both previously agreed priorities and new ones.

Leaders have conducted a range of quality assurance activities. Individually the results of these activities highlight both the perceived strengths and areas for improvement across the school from staff, parents and other stakeholders. However, the systematic collation and synthesis of the information gathered is at a very early stage of development. As a result, school improvement priorities do not focus as well as they could on identified areas for improvement. In addition, the variability in the quality of teaching identified by the inspection team does not feature as an area for improvement. The role of the governing body in self-evaluation is underdeveloped.

Overall, leaders ensure that staff are deployed appropriately to support the teaching and well-being of pupils. However, leaders continue to face staffing challenges and this impacts negatively on consistency in both teaching and learning. Staff absence has a significant impact on the school budget.

An average of three teachers and 18 support staff were absent daily throughout 2023-2024. Leaders manage this situation sensitively in partnerships with the local authority.

Since the last inspection the school has implemented a useful programme of professional learning, which provided valuable opportunities for teaching staff to share best practice and work in small groups. Leaders evaluated the impact of this provision prior to the pandemic and have continued to use this approach in recent years.

Leaders are mindful of staff well-being during the recent difficulties, and tailor their support to individual staff sensitively, helping them to develop the capacity to improve aspects of their teaching. Recent professional learning focuses beneficially on helping staff improve areas, such as pupil well-being and supporting those with additional medical or learning needs.

The school collaborates well with other providers, such as local special schools and institutes that provide initial teacher education. This helps to support the development of new teachers and helps to develop their professional practice well.

Leaders provide helpful professional learning opportunities for staff at all levels and stages of their career to develop their skills and knowledge, for example through coaching, peer observation and external programmes that seek to develop outstanding practice. However, due to the impact of staff absence, the ability of staff

to share best practice with colleagues has been limited. In addition, processes to evaluate the impact of this more recent professional development are at a very early stage of development.

The school uses grants to support the implementation of national priorities well and this impacts positively on for example pupils' and families' well-being. However, nearly all of the core school budget is committed to staffing costs. This is unsustainable.

Additional information

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

The school's arrangements for site management do not give any cause for concern.

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/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

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 (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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