

**A report on**  
**Ysgol Aberconwy**

**Morfa Drive  
Conwy  
LL32 8ED**

**Date of inspection: October 2025**

**by**

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

**This report is also available in Welsh**

## About Ysgol Aberconwy

Name of provider	Ysgol Aberconwy
Local authority	Conwy County Borough Council
Language of the provider	English
School category according to Welsh-medium provision	
Type of school	Secondary
Religious character	
Number of pupils on roll	1083
Pupils of statutory school age	966
Number in sixth form	117
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 21.1%)	18.4%
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 11.2%)	13.4%
Percentage of pupils who speak Welsh at home	11.0%
Percentage of pupils with English as an additional language	1.7%
Lead partner for Initial teacher education	No
Date of headteacher appointment	01/09/2014
Date of previous Estyn inspection (if applicable)	03/03/2018
Start date of inspection	13/10/2025

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](https://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

Leaders and staff in Ysgol Aberconwy prioritise support and care for their pupils. They have established a caring community where diversity is celebrated, and mutual respect is encouraged. There is a positive safeguarding culture where most pupils feel safe when at school. Overall, there are positive relationships between staff and pupils, and many pupils behave well around school.

The quality of teaching is too variable, meaning that pupils make suitable progress in only around half of lessons. In these lessons, teachers have appropriate expectations, plan a range of engaging tasks and have helpful routines that support them to manage pupils' behaviour. However, in around half of lessons, teachers often plan undemanding tasks, have too low expectations of what pupils can achieve and do not challenge off task behaviour well enough. As a result, these pupils make limited progress. In addition, the impact of written and verbal feedback is too variable, particularly in improving pupils' literacy skills.

The school has changed its approach to curriculum in Years 7 to 9 and has worked to create meaningful links between subject areas. Although there are a few examples of effective learning experiences, overall subjects do not plan well enough for pupils to develop their subject knowledge and understanding. In addition, the school's provision for the progressive development of pupils' literacy and numeracy skills is not planned or coordinated strategically enough. As a result, opportunities for pupils to apply or develop their skills alongside their subject understanding are frequently not challenging enough and do not support them to improve their skills, particularly their technical accuracy when writing.

At Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form, the school offers a broad and balanced curriculum and provides pupils with beneficial support and guidance to help them to make informed choices about their future. Pupils in the sixth form enjoy being part of the school community. In general, they engage positively in lessons and work productively with one another. Overall, the school provides suitable support for pupils with additional learning needs (ALN).

The school's two learning resource bases provide a caring environment where pupils feel valued and safe. Social and emotional support for pupils in the Tegfan base are strong and the ABCD base provides helpful targeted support for its pupils to improve their literacy skills. However, the progress pupils make in the Tegfan base is too variable.

Although leaders have secured suitable improvements in the care, support and guidance for pupils, leadership at all levels has not had enough impact on a number of important

areas, in particular the quality of teaching and learning, the progressive development of pupils' skills, and pupils' attendance. This is mostly due to the variation in leaders' ability to evaluate and plan for improvement and because senior leaders do not ensure that middle leaders are consistently effective in the way they carry out their roles. Despite the headteacher recently strengthening the senior leadership team, processes for accountability are not effective enough in driving improvements. Leaders have recently refined their processes for improving pupils' attendance, but these are at an early stage. Rates of attendance, particularly for pupils with additional learning needs (ALN) and those who are eligible for free school meals, remain an important area for improvement.

## **Recommendations**

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

- R1. Ensure that leaders at all levels are held to account fully for securing improvement
- R2. Ensure that self-evaluation and improvement processes focus precisely on pupils' progress and skills development
- R3. Improve the quality and impact of teaching and feedback so that it supports all pupils to make strong progress
- R4. Improve pupils' attendance, in particular that of those eligible for free school meals and those with additional learning needs
- R5. Strengthen the co-ordination of the provision to support the progressive development of pupils' skills, and ensure a consistently robust approach to improving the technical accuracy of pupils' writing
- R6. Ensure that the curriculum consistently supports the development of pupils' subject knowledge and understanding

## **What happens next**

In accordance with the Education Act 2005, HMCI is of the opinion that special measures are required in relation to this school. The school will draw up an action plan to show how it is going to address the recommendations. Estyn will monitor the school's progress usually every four to six months.

## Main findings

### Teaching and learning

Pupils in Ysgol Aberconwy are proud to be part of their school community. Many behave well around school and have positive relationships with their teachers and peers. Many pupils are compliant in lessons and a majority maintain focus during tasks and engage suitably in learning,

In around half of lessons, pupils, including those with ALN, make suitable progress in their learning. They engage purposefully in activities and demonstrate a commitment to improving their work. In these lessons, teachers:

- establish helpful routines that support them to manage pupils' behaviour appropriately
- have suitable expectations of pupils' engagement and progress
- plan suitably for pupils' learning and design tasks to support progress
- provide clear explanations and use questioning to test pupils' understanding and recall

In the very few lessons where pupils make strong progress in their learning, teachers have high expectations of them, provide precise explanations and model learning processes and language effectively. They adapt the pace of lessons skilfully in response to pupils' learning and ask incisive questions that probe learning and develop thinking.

In around half of lessons, shortcomings in teaching mean that pupils make only limited progress in developing their knowledge, understanding and skills. In these cases, teachers:

- have low expectations of pupils' engagement and progress
- provide pupils with activities that are insufficiently demanding or too heavily scaffolded
- do not intervene when pupils are disengaged
- do not support pupils well enough to develop their subject knowledge or skills

In lessons, a minority of pupils struggle to maintain concentration and are often allowed to remain passive. As a result, they do not develop their independence or their resilience when work becomes challenging.

The impact of feedback to pupils is too variable. Although around half of teachers circulate their classrooms and provide prompts to re-engage pupils in their learning, overall, written

and verbal feedback does not help pupils understand how to improve their work well enough. Too often, important errors in pupils' literacy are not identified.

In general, pupils in the sixth form have positive attitudes towards their learning and engage suitably in learning. They engage positively with their teachers and peers and are keen to improve their learning.

The majority of pupils listen carefully to their teachers, though a minority do not and often miss information that would support their learning. A minority provide suitably developed verbal responses and use an appropriate vocabulary when, for example, explaining their mathematical thinking. Around half of pupils have a limited spoken vocabulary and lack the confidence to express themselves coherently. The school has developed a programme of support to develop pupils' oracy skills, but the strategies provided are evident in only a limited number of lessons. In addition, teachers' questioning does not probe pupils' understanding or challenge them to develop their verbal responses. As a result, pupils are not supported well enough to extend their verbal skills or improve their vocabulary development.

The school recognises the importance of reading to pupils' development and aims to encourage them to read through a reading programme and weekly dedicated reading time in Years 7 and 8. However, appropriately challenging opportunities for pupils to develop their advanced reading skills across the curriculum are limited, and too many pupils are not required to use reading skills beyond information retrieval and basic inference and deduction.

The writing of the majority of pupils lacks technical accuracy. They make frequent common errors in basic sentence construction, spelling, including subject-specific vocabulary, and in the structure of their work. The school has suitable expectations for the marking of literacy, but this is applied consistently by only a few teachers. Relevant opportunities for pupils to produce extended writing in different subjects are too limited overall. This is exacerbated in a minority of subjects where younger pupils are encouraged to produce brief examination style answers rather than developing their writing skills or are required to complete work sheets that do not allow them to extend their responses.

Opportunities to develop pupils' numeracy skills across the curriculum are not challenging enough and are limited mainly to the construction of simple graphs. In general, pupils do not develop their understanding of mathematical concepts sufficiently and this limits their ability to recall and apply these concepts in more challenging contexts.

A majority of pupils have suitable basic number skills. They use the four rules of number correctly, for example when calculating ratios and the areas of basic shapes. More able pupils work competently with more complex aspects such as compound interest and

trigonometry. A minority of pupils have weak numeracy skills. They do not have a sufficient understanding of aspects such as place value, which limits their ability to add and subtract simple decimals and to round numbers.

Leaders promote the advantages of learning the Welsh language well. The school is developing partnerships with external organisations, including the Urdd. This has helped to enhance pupils' experiences of Welsh language and culture. Pupils in the 'Cryw Cymraeg' work with staff beneficially to promote the use of Welsh outside of Welsh lessons.

Many pupils have a positive attitude towards learning Welsh and generally make sound progress in their language skills. They pronounce basic Welsh words correctly and hold short conversations. When given the opportunity, they read sentences and short paragraphs aloud in a confident manner. A few pupils lack confidence when speaking Welsh. The majority of pupils write with a good standard of accuracy overall. A minority of pupils adapt their writing for different audiences and purposes effectively, for example when writing a speech on the impact of the Welsh Not on education.

The majority of pupils make suitable progress with their digital skills. There are worthwhile opportunities for pupils to develop these skills in a few subjects across the curriculum, including producing short films and podcasts.

The school has placed considerable emphasis on constructing the curriculum at Key Stage 3, which reflects its mission statement of Inspire, Support, Succeed. The project-based approach is ambitious in its aim to support pupils to make productive links across subjects and to provide them with authentic contexts in which their learning can flourish. However, while there are a few examples of well-designed and engaging learning experiences, there is too much variation in how well individual subjects plan for the development of pupils' subject knowledge, understanding and skills. This is often because teachers do not have a consistent understanding of how to implement the school's vision for the curriculum, and they often focus too strongly on linking their plans to an overarching theme rather than planning for pupils' learning.

At Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form, the curriculum is generally broad and well-balanced. The school works effectively with local colleges to extend its curriculum offer to pupils, including providing vocational options such as vehicle technology and construction.

The school places a strong emphasis on local identity and the sense of 'Cynefin', offering pupils opportunities to deepen their appreciation of Welsh heritage and culture, and fostering their sense of place and belonging. For example, Year 8 pupils learn about what Conwy was like in medieval times and why the castle was built.

The school offers a wide range of opportunities for pupils to participate in extra-curricular activities during and at the end of the school day. This includes well-attended sporting,



cultural and creative clubs such as mountain biking, chess, and photography, as well as an engaging range of trips and visits. Pupils value these experiences, which contribute to their strong connection with, and respect for, their school.

The school has suitable arrangements for personal and social education which supports pupils' social, moral, spiritual and cultural development and understanding appropriately. The programme is planned responsively in light of information from health questionnaires and from pupil and staff voice. A helpful feature of this provision is the first-aid and life-saving training provided to Year 7.

Pupils benefit from a range of meaningful opportunities to develop their awareness of diversity. For example, the staff diversity team, together with student ambassadors, organise theme days throughout the school year, promoting and celebrating diversity and inclusion. This contributes to pupils' strong sense of belonging and helps them to develop respectful relationships with each other and with staff and visitors.

### **Well-being, care, support and guidance**

Ysgol Aberconwy is a caring and inclusive community where pupils feel safe, valued and respected. Relationships between staff and pupils are supportive and there is a strong culture of care. The school promotes a suitable sense of mutual respect, including celebrating diversity and equality suitably through initiatives such as the LGBTQ+ club, diversity ambassadors and inclusive fundraising, which further strengthen pupils' sense of belonging and well-being.

The school provides a range of supportive environments where pupils feel nurtured, including through a range of helpful interventions for their emotional and physical well-being. Collaboration with external agencies provides additional appropriate targeted support for pupils with specific needs.

Pupils benefit from a well-organised options and transition process supported by a number of events, option booklets and information evenings for pupils and parents. Impartial advice enables pupils to make informed decisions about future learning or employment. Transition arrangements for pupils with ALN at different points in their learning support their individual needs and help them to adjust as they progress through and beyond the school.

Leaders have a clear vision for developing pupil leadership at the school. They have recently adapted an approach to enable pupils to have a stronger influence on school life. This range of meaningful opportunities and experiences allow pupils to take on responsibilities and develop their leadership skills. These pupils are listened to and are beginning to influence decision making, although the impact of their work on securing improvement in the school is at an early stage.

Leaders and staff in the ALN team demonstrate a strong commitment to supporting the pupils they work with. They employ a range of approaches to meet individual needs suitably. Pupils with ALN have relevant Individual Development Plans (IDPs) which are reviewed appropriately in collaboration with outside agencies, parents and pupils. In addition, relevant professional learning opportunities that focus on supporting pupils with specific needs are provided. This helps to improve the targeted provision for pupils with ALN.

The school is committed to improving pupils' punctuality and attendance and has recently strengthened its focus on this aspect. It recognises and promotes the importance of good attendance appropriately. Leaders have reviewed strategies for monitoring and analysing attendance, making useful changes to their processes. Where poor attendance persists, the school has begun to take suitable steps to support pupils to return to school. However, much of this work is recent and over time, leaders' work in this area has not had sufficient impact on improving rates of attendance, which remain below those of similar schools. Unverified school data suggests that the attendance of pupils eligible for free school meals decreased notably from 2023-2024 to 2024-2025, and that levels of attendance for pupils with ALN remain well below that of their peers.

Leaders and staff across the school demonstrate a strong commitment to safeguarding. The safeguarding team has a good understanding of its roles and responsibilities, and staff and governors complete relevant safeguarding training. Staff make referrals when necessary and work effectively with a range of external agencies to support pupils and their families. Pastoral staff respond appropriately to any alleged incidents of bullying, providing tailored support to all parties and helping them to understand and address inappropriate behaviours. Most pupils are aware of how to report safeguarding concerns. Leaders and staff have established a supportive safeguarding culture where most pupils feel safe.

### **Tegfan and ABCD Learning Resource Bases**

Teaching and learning across the Tegfan and ABCD provisions are characterised by strong relationships between staff and pupils, with a consistent focus on well-being and nurture. Nearly all staff know their pupils well and create calm, supportive environments that promote security and emotional regulation. Leaders provide clear structures that align with wider school systems, supporting inclusion and coherent pastoral care.

Provision for sensory and therapeutic needs is well established, with approaches embedded in daily routines. The ABCD provision provides pupils with effective targeted literacy support within lessons and withdrawal sessions. Valuable work to promote independence, such as travel training, outdoor learning, and practical life skills, helps pupils prepare for life beyond school.

Despite these strengths, the impact on pupils' academic progress in the Tegfan provision is too variable. The majority of pupils in social and emotional interventions improve regulation and engagement well. Leaders are beginning to strengthen monitoring systems and increase focus on academic progress, but it is too early to evaluate the impact of this work.

### **Leading and improving**

The headteacher provides thoughtful leadership with the inclusion and well-being of all pupils and staff at the heart of his vision. This vision is based on the school's mission to 'inspire, support, succeed' and its values, 'be ready, be respectful, be kind'. This vision is embraced by the governors, staff and pupils.

Leadership has had a positive effect on the care and guidance for pupils. However, it has not had enough impact on important areas of the school's work such as the quality of teaching, the provision for skills and pupils' attendance.

The headteacher has extended the membership of the senior leadership team to increase capacity and develop leaders. In general, the responsibilities of the senior leaders are allocated sensibly and link appropriately to individuals' skills and experience.

Most middle leaders value the support they receive from their line managers and appreciate their open-door policy. Many of them are enthusiastic about their work and the majority have a suitable understanding of their roles and responsibilities. A few provide clear, purposeful leadership, which impacts positively on the quality of provision in their areas of responsibility. However, the effectiveness with which middle leaders discharge their responsibilities is too variable overall.

Line management meetings provide appropriate opportunities for senior and curriculum leaders to discuss key issues including pupil outcomes, findings from self-evaluation activities and departmental priorities. However, many middle leaders do not evaluate the work of their departments effectively and are not held to account robustly enough by senior leaders. These middle leaders do not give enough consideration to the impact teaching has on pupils' progress and skills development. They are too positive about the quality of teaching, and a minority do not have high enough expectations of their staff or pupils. Consequently, their evaluations do not identify precisely enough the elements of teaching and learning that most need to be improved. This limits their ability to plan for and secure important improvements.

In general, pastoral leaders have a secure understanding of the strengths and areas that are most in need of improvement. They have a sound knowledge of the pupils and their families that helps to ensure timely support where necessary. Leaders prioritise reducing the effects of poverty on pupils' well-being and engagement in learning and the school has

evaluated the use of the pupil development grant suitably. However, during the academic year 2022-2023, the performance of pupils who are eligible for free school meals was well below that of their counterparts in similar schools and remained below in 2023-2024.

The school has a clear calendar of self-evaluation and improvement planning activities, and leaders at all levels participate in a suitable range of evaluative activities. This has helped senior leaders to identify the broad areas for improvement required. However, leaders at all levels do not evaluate the impact of provision on pupils' progress precisely enough. For example, leaders do not identify the specific aspects of teaching or provision for skills that have the greatest impact on pupil progress well enough. In addition, the school has not made sufficient progress against the recommendations from the last core inspection.

There is an appropriate link between the school's priorities and performance development review processes. These processes include beneficial opportunities for staff to discuss their professional aspirations and the learning necessary to achieve those aims. The school has a programme of professional learning activities which links appropriately with the broad development aims of the school. This includes opportunities to share good practice and work collaboratively with other schools. However, as leaders do not identify precisely enough the exact aspects of standards and provision that most need to be improved, the professional learning programme does not target these aspects specifically enough. In addition, professional learning has not had enough impact on leaders' ability to evaluate teaching and learning.

The school has responded to some national priorities appropriately, such as promoting the use of the Welsh language and supporting pupils with ALN. However, they have not had enough impact on improving attendance or on the strategic planning for the progressive development of pupils' skills such as writing with a suitably high level of accuracy.

The headteacher, business manager and governors manage the budget effectively. They are creative in terms of solutions to staffing challenges and have revised arrangements appropriately.

Governors provide a high level of support and appropriate challenge on operational issues, such as staffing decisions. However, they have not challenged the school sufficiently on some important strategic aspects, such as the quality of teaching.

## **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 to support pupils' well-being and engagement in learning. The pupil development grant is evaluated suitably but has not had enough impact on improving outcomes for pupils who are eligible for free school meals.

## **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.

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