

A report on

Ysgol Gyfun Emlyn

**Newcastle Emlyn
Carmarthenshire
SA38 9LN**

Date of inspection: November 2025

by

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

This report is also available in Welsh

About Ysgol Gyfun Emlyn

Name of provider	Ysgol Gyfun Emlyn
Local authority	Carmarthenshire County Council
Language of the provider	English
School category according to Welsh-medium provision	English medium with significant Welsh
Type of school	Secondary
Religious character	
Number of pupils on roll	502
Pupils of statutory school age	418
Number in sixth form	84
Percentage of pupils eligible for free school meals over a three-year average (The national percentage of pupils eligible for free school meals over a three-year average in Secondary is 20.3%)	18.0%
Percentage of pupils identified as having additional learning needs (a) (The national percentage of pupils identified as having an additional learning need in Secondary is 9.0%)	6.0%
Percentage of pupils who speak Welsh at home	11.0%
Percentage of pupils with English as an additional language	*
Lead partner for Initial teacher education	No
Date of headteacher appointment	
Date of previous Estyn inspection (if applicable)	03/12/2018

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Start date of inspection	03/11/2025
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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

Most pupils at Ysgol Gyfun Emlyn feel safe and supported and many demonstrate positive attitudes to learning. The school tailors its care, support and guidance effectively and provides a range of courses and pathways that meets the needs of most pupils. Although the school is working on improving attendance, the rates continue to be lower than expected.

Teachers and support staff foster positive working relationships with pupils and in many lessons, pupils engage with their learning and make secure progress. However, in a minority of lessons, pupils do not make as much progress as they could due to shortcomings in teaching. Teachers in these lessons do not always plan lessons that consistently challenge and meet the needs of all pupils. As a result, a minority of pupils are passive and do not engage fully in the learning.

There is a well-coordinated approach to improving pupils' literacy skills across the curriculum and a strong focus on developing a positive reading culture. Although at the early stages of development, there are useful opportunities for pupils to develop their numeracy, digital and Welsh language skills. The school also provides suitable opportunities for pupils to take part in extra-curricular activities. However, opportunities for them to undertake leadership roles and whole school responsibilities are limited.

Leadership responsibilities are shared reasonably across the school. Senior and middle leaders carry out a range of activities to evaluate the school's work. However, these processes do not always focus sharply enough on aspects of that need improving, in particular in relation to teaching. The curriculum for Year 10 and 11 is suitably broad and balanced, although the cost of the curricular offer in the sixth form is not evaluated closely enough. The school has a significant deficit budget.

Recommendations

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

- R1 Work with the local authority to eliminate the budget deficit
- R2 Sharpen self-evaluation and improvement planning to focus precisely on the elements of teaching that need most improvement
- R3 Ensure that teaching consistently challenges pupils to make strong progress
- R4 Improve attendance
- R5 Increase the opportunities for pupils to undertake leadership roles and whole school responsibilities

What happens next

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

Main findings

Teaching and learning

Most teachers at Ysgol Gyfun Emlyn foster strong working relationships with their pupils and know them well. There is a respectful and supportive learning environment. These teachers have secure subject knowledge.

Many teachers plan sequences of activities that build pupils' knowledge and skills well. They provide clear explanations and exemplification, and as a result, many pupils, including those with additional learning needs (ALN) make suitable progress in their learning. In these lessons, pupils follow their teachers' instructions promptly and behave well. Many teachers question appropriately to check pupils' recall and regularly offer worthwhile individual guidance as they move around the class.

In a very few lessons, where teaching is most effective, pupils make rapid and strong progress. In these lessons, teachers' enthusiasm for their subject is infectious and this highly motivates pupils. Their careful planning ensures that pupils develop the necessary skills to respond to the high levels of challenge they are offered.

In a minority of lessons, there are weaknesses in teaching which mean that pupils do not always make enough progress. In these lessons, teachers:

- do not plan lessons that challenge pupils well enough, particularly the more able pupils
- give overly lengthy explanations that limit pupils' independence and opportunities to participate in classroom activities
- do not use questioning well enough to probe pupils' understanding and extend their responses

As a result, a minority of pupils are passive and are not fully engaged in the lessons. A few teachers do not maximise the use of lesson time well enough, leading to lessons that either start slowly, finish early, or lack clear structure. These teachers do not have sufficiently high expectations of what pupils can achieve. Pupils in these lessons make limited progress.

The impact of written feedback is variable. In the majority of cases, pupils use their teachers' advice to improve their work well. However, too often feedback is not helpful enough to enable pupils to make purposeful improvements to their work.

Literacy

The provision for the progressive development of pupils' literacy skills is co-ordinated effectively. Many pupils have a good vocabulary and use subject-specific terminology suitably. Generally, when opportunities arise, pupils express their ideas clearly and respond appropriately to teachers' questions. A few pupils express themselves particularly effectively and fluently. They provide extended answers, explaining their reasoning well. However, a few pupils are reluctant to expand on their answers and do not have a good general or subject-specific vocabulary.

Leaders have strengthened the school's culture of reading, and this has included renovating the library and timetabling reading lessons. The school has a well-structured reading buddy system and numerous sixth formers volunteer to read with younger pupils. The 'Emlyn reading challenge' recommends books for pupils to read on a monthly basis, and their understanding is tested during an end of year quiz. There are sensible strategies in place to enable pupils to develop their reading skills. As a result, many pupils analyse literary texts competently, including selecting valid quotations to support the points they make. There are beneficial opportunities across the curriculum for pupils to develop their advanced reading skills. For example, when analysing propaganda posters in history, pupils infer information from historical sources particularly adeptly, synthesising information about the sources' context whilst discussing purpose and provenance.

Leaders work effectively with departments to ensure that there are suitable opportunities for pupils to develop their extended writing skills. As a result, many pupils produce worthwhile extended writing for a range of audiences and purposes. A few pupils write very effectively. For example, in history when describing the changes in Wales between 1750 and 1900, they use varied and appropriate vocabulary of increasing complexity. There are sensible strategies to help pupils to improve the accuracy of their English written work, and this includes adopting a consistent approach with local primary schools. However, a minority of pupils make repeated spelling and grammatical errors in their writing.

Cymraeg

The school has recognised the importance of improving pupils' bilingual skills and made it a whole-school priority. The llythrennedd co-ordinator is new in post and has begun work to develop pupils' Welsh language skills. This work is at the very early stages of development and is restricted to provision for Years 7 to 9.

In general, pupils display a positive attitude towards the Welsh language. In Welsh medium lessons across the curriculum, the majority of pupils use a suitable range of vocabulary to

express their views and contribute to group discussions. A few use their local dialect naturally and confidently. However, a minority lack confidence due to their limited Welsh vocabulary.

The majority of pupils use a range of reading strategies to select and make suitable comments on key ideas and themes. In Welsh lessons, more able pupils demonstrate good understanding and appreciation of challenging literary texts, selecting relevant quotations to support their ideas. For example, when they analyse and interpret meaning of the text 'Gogls Rhithwir'. In history lessons, a few pupils successfully evaluate the reliability of sources and display a strong understanding of bias when learning about the race riots in Cardiff.

Across the curriculum, pupils have meaningful opportunities to write at length in Welsh. The majority of pupils organise their work suitably and produce appropriate written responses. However, a minority write with awkward syntax and make frequent and repetitive grammatical and spelling errors.

Many pupils who study Cymraeg Craidd recall and use vocabulary effectively. They construct simple sentences confidently and produce short pieces of writing using a suitable range of vocabulary. However, in general, pupils' lack confidence to communicate in the language and are over-reliant on structure patterns given to them by their teachers. Opportunities for pupils to further develop their knowledge of the Welsh language and culture across the curriculum are limited.

Numeracy

The school is beginning to develop a more cohesive approach to developing pupils' numeracy skills across the curriculum. The mathematics department has recently held discussions with other curriculum areas regarding approaches to teaching data analysis, and it has adjusted its schemes of work to better support this. The numeracy coordinator is beginning to gain an understanding of existing approaches to numeracy across the curriculum and to identify emerging areas of effective practice and areas for improvement.

In general, there are suitable opportunities for pupils to practise and apply their numeracy skills across a range of subjects. However, planning for progression in numeracy across the curriculum is at an early stage.

Many pupils have secure basic numeracy skills and use the four rules of number appropriately. Over time, they develop their skills suitably, including carrying out calculations involving decimals, percentages and ratios. Many convert between units of area and volume accurately and demonstrate a sound understanding of trigonometry. They are able to construct and plot scatter graphs with reasonable accuracy and analyse

the information presented to draw appropriate conclusions. Many are developing their understanding of algebra well.

A few pupils demonstrate a very strong grasp of mathematical concepts. They apply their algebraic knowledge effectively and use it to solve more complex problems with confidence.

A few pupils have weak numeracy skills and make limited progress in lessons. These pupils struggle to represent data accurately, for example when selecting and applying scales in line graphs. In a few instances, the work these pupils' complete lacks challenge, consisting mainly of basic tasks, such as copying data or producing simple bar charts.

Digital skills

Leaders encourage staff to make judicious use of digital technology where it enhances pupils' learning. As a result, pupils are given a range of suitable opportunities to develop their digital skills across the curriculum. For example, they develop an appropriate understanding of online safety, including the consequences of online bullying and the impact of their digital footprint. Many pupils use digital tools effectively in a range of contexts, for example when applying formulae in spreadsheets, creating sound effect timelines in music, producing presentations in English, or drawing isometric shapes in design and technology.

Curriculum

The curriculum offer in Years 7, 8 and 9 provides suitable opportunities for pupils to study all subjects through the medium of English and many subjects through the medium of Welsh. However, there are very few opportunities for pupils to continue to study subjects through the medium of Welsh in Years 10 to 13. There is a wide range of courses, including both general and vocational subjects, available in Years 10 and 11. Vocational options include hospitality and catering and engineering. Pupils in Years 10 and 11 who access an alternative provision follow a worthwhile adapted curriculum that meets their needs.

Although the school offers a worthwhile range of option subjects for the sixth form pupils, the vocational offer is limited. In a few post-16 option subjects' pupils benefit from opportunities offered through online collaborations with other providers. However, leaders and governors do not review the suitability and cost of the curricular offer in the sixth form closely enough to plan sensible adjustments.

The school has trialled and evolved its vision for the Curriculum for Wales. Leaders have supported departments to work together to revise schemes of work and have also ensured that individual subjects have kept their identity. Teachers also provide valuable opportunities for pupils to learn about their 'Cynefin' and Wales. This includes learning

about how Carmarthenshire has developed over time. In history lessons, pupils develop their knowledge and understanding of inequality whilst learning about the 1919 race riots in south Wales. The school is developing its partnership with local primary schools to build on pupils' prior learning. For example, to support the introduction of international languages.

The school's personal and social education (PSE) programme is well co-ordinated and provides valuable learning experiences for pupils. In addition to weekly sessions during registration periods, pupils benefit from workshops delivered by a range of external agencies. Staff make effective use of well-being data to plan a programme of activities, tailored to pupils' needs, that supports the development of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and emotional skills well. Leaders refine the programme suitably in response to current issues. For example, there is now a greater focus on mental health education and pupils in Years 11, 12 and 13 receive useful sessions on democracy before voting for the first time. The school has designed its Relationship and Sexuality Education (RSE) provision carefully to create an age-appropriate curriculum for its pupils.

Pupils benefit from some worthwhile opportunities to take part in activities which develop their knowledge of Welsh culture, such as when taking part in the school Eisteddfod and local eisteddfodau. The 'Criw Cymraeg' helps raise awareness of the importance of the Welsh language by helping to organise 'Diwrnod Shwmae Sumae'.

There are beneficial extra-curricular experiences available, including sporting activities and educational visits. For example, pupils have worthwhile opportunities to take part in the school's musical productions and visit theatres, take part in the British Physics Olympiad competition and attend creative writing workshops organised by local universities.

Sixth Form

In the sixth form, many pupils show a genuine interest in their studies. A few are highly articulate and make thoughtfully constructed points during discussions. Pupils contribute well to school life through opportunities such as running a homework club and supporting younger pupils to read.

Well-being, care, support and guidance

Ysgol Gyfun Emlyn is a caring and inclusive community where staff endeavour to ensure that pupils feel safe, valued, and well-supported. The pastoral staff are a skilled and committed team who know their pupils well. They work collaboratively with external agencies to promote pupil well-being effectively.

The school has established an effective well-being transition process. Pupils from partner primary schools' benefit from an appropriate range of engaging activities which support them in settling quickly and confidently into Year 7. Transition provision for vulnerable pupils and those with ALN is timely and well-targeted, ensuring that their individual needs are met effectively.

The ALN team share a clear strategic vision and strong commitment to supporting the progress of pupils who face barriers to learning. The school adopts a comprehensive and well-coordinated approach to meeting the needs of pupils with ALN. Staff within this team have a secure understanding of pupils' individual learning needs and implement successfully a wide range of targeted interventions. These include suitable literacy and numeracy interventions, provision within 'Canolfan Carlam', and focused support within mainstream lessons. As a result, nearly all pupils with ALN make good progress against their targets.

The consistent use of pupil-centred practices in developing and reviewing Individual Development Plans (IDPs) and one-page profiles, ensures that pupils' needs are clearly identified. Staff across the school benefit from relevant professional learning related to ALN, and there is regular communication and access to a range of useful support materials. However, teachers do not always use this information to ensure their planning meets pupils' individual needs.

The school has an established school council with pupil representation from each year group. Staff gather pupils' views appropriately through departmental reviews and group discussions. However, there are insufficient opportunities for pupils to influence decisions or take on leadership roles.

The school provides pupils with helpful guidance as they prepare for their next steps in education and employment. Leaders work effectively in partnership with external bodies to ensure that pupils are aware of the opportunities available to them. There is a suitable range of activities to support their understanding of potential career pathways. These include collaboration with local businesses, visits to universities, and valuable experiences of workplaces. Sixth-form pupils, in particular, appreciate the support they receive when applying for university courses or going into employment. The school also provides pupils and their parents with helpful information through events, such as option evenings.

There is a strong whole-school focus on promoting positive behaviour, and staff follow a clear policy which includes a graduated approach to addressing instances of poor behaviour. The pastoral team is skilled and committed, offering a wide range of purposeful interventions to support pupils in regulating and improving their behaviour. This includes effective collaboration with external agencies, which helps the team to address more complex emotional or social needs.

The 'Hafan' centre and the 'Canolfan Cyfle' provide safe and supportive spaces for vulnerable pupils or those experiencing behavioural or emotional difficulties. The 'Nyth Natur' offers specific pupils' valuable opportunities to develop their gardening skills as well as their interpersonal skills when they donate their produce in local community events. A very few older pupils benefit from a suitable alternative curriculum, delivered in partnership with a local college and businesses, which helps support their attendance, engagement and reintegration.

Leaders make appropriate use of internal data to identify emerging patterns of behaviour and follow a clear, stepped approach to intervention. As a result, of a strong focus on ensuring positive behaviour, most pupils behave well in lessons and around the school.

Leaders have appropriate arrangements to keep pupils safe. These include clear processes that are understood well by staff, and which enable them to respond promptly when concerns arise. As a result, most pupils feel safe and feel they have someone to talk to if they have concerns. The team drew the school's attention to a health and safety issue during the inspection.

Improving pupils' attendance is a key priority for the school and leaders have taken suitable action to address this. The school maintains close relationships with parents and makes appropriate use of external services to support individual cases. Attendance overall has fluctuated over the past three years and remains slightly below that of similar schools. The attendance of pupils eligible for free school meals has also varied, though it has been above the national average in two of the last three years.

Leading and improving

The headteacher is an assured leader whose values are firmly based on ensuring that the school is inclusive and provides the best education possible for pupils at Ysgol Gyfun Emlyn. This is encompassed in the school's motto of 'Gorau oll y gorau ellir' (best of all, the best that can be achieved?). Leaders aspire to provide opportunities for pupils to contribute and develop as valuable members of the school and the community it serves.

Senior leaders' roles are clear and distributed equitably. They work closely as a team and have a sound understanding of their responsibilities. Lines of accountability are clearly defined. Senior leaders hold middle leaders to account suitably through departmental reviews and line management meetings. These meetings provide beneficial opportunities to discuss pupil progress, teaching and leadership. Middle leaders value the supportive nature of these meetings. Middle leaders are developing in their roles in holding members of their department to account.

Overall, the performance development process allows staff to pursue their personal goals as well as responding to school and departmental priorities. Individual performance goals

are generally suitable with appropriate success criteria. Staff indicate what training or support they require to further their personal development. They value the professional learning on offer, which includes training on specific aspects of teaching and learning, opportunities to attend subject networks and collaborating with colleagues. These activities are beginning to have a positive impact on classroom practice. For example, training for staff to deal with low-level disruption has resulted in many pupils showing positive attitudes and most behaving well in lessons.

The school has a well-understood self-evaluation process which includes a review of all departments over the course of the year. These reviews collect a wide range of evidence from lesson observations, work scrutiny and listening to learners carried out by senior leaders. In addition, leaders at all levels use examination data well to evaluate overall performance as well as that of groups of pupils. As a result, leaders have a suitable understanding of strengths and areas for improvement across departments. Recently, leaders have completed a worthwhile whole school review of provision for developing pupils' skills and its impact. However, activities sometimes focus too much on compliance and the completion of actions rather than their impact. Leaders do not always identify precisely what needs to improve, especially when considering the impact of teaching on learning. This limits how well leaders are able to plan to improve specific aspects of teaching.

Middle leaders are committed to the school and have a generally sound understanding of their roles and responsibilities. They contribute meaningfully to self-evaluation activities such as work scrutiny and listening to learners within their departments. Recently, most middle leaders have been actively involved in lesson observations as part of the departmental review process. This is beginning to have a beneficial impact on their understanding of the strengths and areas for improvement across their areas of responsibility.

Leaders have a suitable focus on addressing national priorities, for example in developing pupils' literacy in English and Welsh and support for pupils with ALN. The school has strengthened its focus on alleviating the impact of poverty on pupils' attainment. Over the last three years, the performance of pupils who are eligible for free school meals in their Year 11 qualifications has fluctuated and in 2024-2025 it is broadly in line with that of their counterparts in similar schools. The school makes appropriate use of grants, including the pupil deprivation grant, to mitigate the impact of poverty. For example, pupils benefit from support to improve their basic skills and are able to participate in extra-curricular activities which might otherwise not be affordable for them.

The governing body are becoming increasingly confident in their role as a critical friend. In general, they are providing suitable challenge and support regarding national and school priorities. They show growing awareness of issues affecting the well-being of pupils and

staff. The school's financial situation has been challenging for some time. Although leaders plan and monitor spending diligently, the school currently has a substantial deficit budget. This growing deficit has not been approved by the local authority and there is no agreed recovery plan.

Over time, leaders have impacted positively on important aspects of the school's work. This includes making progress against many of the recommendations from the last core inspection such as improving behaviour and promoting the Welsh language. The school communicates appropriately with parents through various means such as a newsletter, texts and e-mails. Often these celebrate pupils' achievements as well as providing useful information such as dates for the diary.

Additional information

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

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

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

Leaders and governors do not manage the school's finances appropriately.

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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Publication date: 08/01/2026