



Rhagoriaeth i bawb – Excellence for all

Arolygiaeth Ei Mawrhydi dros Addysg
a Hyfforddiant yng Nghymru

Her Majesty's Inspectorate
for Education and Training in Wales

A report on:

**Hillgrove School
Ffriddoedd Road
Bangor
Gwynedd
LL57 2TW**

Date of inspection: January 2013

by

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



During each inspection, inspectors aim to answer three key questions:

Key Question 1: How good are the outcomes?

Key Question 2: How good is provision?

Key Question 3: How good are leadership and management?

Inspectors also provide an overall judgement on the school's current performance and on its prospects for improvement.

In these evaluations, inspectors use a four-point scale:

Judgement	What the judgement means
Excellent	Many strengths, including significant examples of sector-leading practice
Good	Many strengths and no important areas requiring significant improvement
Adequate	Strengths outweigh areas for improvement
Unsatisfactory	Important areas for improvement outweigh strengths

The report was produced in accordance with section 163 of the Education Act 2002. The main purpose of inspection under this section is to report on compliance with the Independent Schools Standards Regulations 2003. In schools that provide non-maintained nursery education, this report also satisfies the requirements of Schedule 26 of the School Standards and Framework Act 1998.

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Context

Hillgrove School is a co-educational independent school for pupils from age three to 16 years. The school is situated in the university city of Bangor. It was founded in 1934 and the current proprietors took ownership of the school in 1975.

The school is organised into two sections. The junior school caters for children from nursery age to Year 5, and the senior school for pupils from Year 6 to Year 11. There are currently 153 pupils on roll. These include 15 children in the nursery, 62 pupils in the junior school and 76 in the senior school. There is little difference in the total number of boys and girls although the balance varies in year groups across the school.

The majority of pupils travel from a wide area that includes much of Gwynedd, Ynys Môn and the North Wales coast. About 32% come from minority ethnic groups. Around 23% of pupils receive support in learning English as an additional language. No pupils have statements of special education needs although 2% of pupils are on the school's register of special educational needs. Lessons are taught in English and although the school does not aim to make pupils bilingual in English and Welsh, it offers lessons in Welsh as a second language. About 3% of pupils speak Welsh as a first language at home.

The school has a mixed-ability intake. Prior to entry, prospective pupils age six and above undertake verbal reasoning and reading assessments. The offer of a place is dependent on pupils' attainment. Almost all pupils in the junior school transfer to the senior school.

The school motto is 'I learn to serve'. The school consider that this motto reflects the aim of the school, which is to help pupils to achieve high academic standards, sound personal development and to adhere to high moral principles that will serve them well throughout their life.

The last inspection of the school was in March 2007.

Summary

The school's current performance	Adequate
The school's prospects for improvement	Unsatisfactory

Current performance

The good features of the school's work include:

- pupils' high standards of attainment in public examinations at key stage 4;
- the strong emphasis on developing pupils' literacy and numeracy skills, which helps them to achieve high standards in subjects across the curriculum;
- pupils' very good behaviour and high level of respect for each other and staff, which contribute to a positive learning atmosphere;
- particularly strong partnerships with parents, which impact positively on pupils' standards and wellbeing; and
- the school's highly inclusive and caring community, which underpins all aspects of school life and contributes significantly to pupils' wellbeing and learning.

However, current performance is judged as adequate overall because:

- in a minority of lessons, there are shortcomings in the quality of teaching;
- the marking of pupils' work and reporting to parents and carers does not provide enough information about how pupils can improve;
- arrangements for target-setting, and tracking and monitoring pupils' progress are under-developed;
- the provision for developing pupils' information and communication technology (ICT) skills, particularly in the junior school, is limited; and
- there is no overall co-ordination for the development of pupils' communication, numeracy and ICT skills as they progress through the school.

Prospects for improvement

Prospects for improvement are unsatisfactory because:

- the proprietors do not provide clear strategic direction about core aspects of the school's work;
- the school does not systematically manage the performance of staff to support them to improve their practice;
- self-evaluation and planning to secure improvement are not a regular part of the school's working life; and
- the school has made limited progress in implementing many of the recommendations from the last inspection.

Compliance with the regulations for registration

Independent school inspections are governed by the Education Act 2002 and related regulations: the Independent School Standards (Wales) Regulations 2003. These regulations require an independent school to meet an appropriate standard in the following areas:

The quality of education provided by the school

The school meets the regulatory requirements for this standard.

The spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils

The school meets the regulatory requirements for this standard.

Welfare, health and safety of pupils

Although the school meets many of the regulatory requirements for this standard, in order to comply fully with the Independent Schools Standards (Wales) Regulations 2003 the school should:

- draw up and implement effectively a written policy to prevent bullying, which has regard to National Assembly circular 23/03 'Respecting Others: Anti-Bullying Guidance' [3.(2a)];
- have regard to any National Assembly guidance on health and safety responsibilities and powers of schools by providing a Periodic Test Certificate for the five-yearly inspection of hard-wired electrical installation [3(4)]; and
- maintain an admission register and attendance register in accordance with the Education (Pupil Registration) Regulations 1995, by completing the attendance register for all pupils at the start of the morning and during the afternoon session, with an indication whether the absence of any pupil of compulsory school age is authorised, unauthorised or attending an approved educational activity. The last of these is an educational activity, including work experience or sporting activity, outside the school premises, approved by the proprietor and supervised by a person approved by the proprietor or headteacher [3(9)].

The suitability of proprietors and staff

The school meets the regulatory requirements for this standard.

Premises of and boarding accommodation at schools

The school meets the regulatory requirements for this standard.

The provision of information

The school meets the regulatory requirements for this standard.

The manner in which complaints are to be handled

The school meets the regulatory requirements for this standard.

Recommendations

- R1 Take steps to comply fully with the regulations for registration
- R2 Improve the planning and co-ordination for the development of pupils' communication, numeracy and ICT skills to ensure effective continuity and progression
- R3 Improve the quality of teaching to increase the level of challenge for all pupils
- R4 Improve the quality and consistency of marking and the rigour of assessment, target-setting and tracking of pupils' progress
- R5 Improve strategic leadership and line-management arrangements to provide clear direction for all aspects of the school's work
- R6 Establish robust self-evaluation and improvement planning arrangements that are based on systematic monitoring of the quality of teaching and learning
- R7 Improve the arrangements to meet the professional development needs of all staff through appraisal and performance management systems

What happens next?

Since the school does not meet some of the standards required for registration, the National Assembly for Wales will require the proprietors to submit an action plan within a specified period of time. This plan must set out the steps that the school will take to meet the standards, and the timescale within which it will complete each step. Estyn advises the proprietors to amend the current development plan to show what action the school intends to take in response to the recommendations. It is also advisable to circulate this plan, or a summary of it, to all parents at the school.

Main findings

Key Question 1: How good are outcomes?

Good

Standards: Good

Across the school, pupils have a wide range of abilities. Standards in the Foundation Phase and key stage 2 are good overall. Pupils make sound progress by the time they leave the school at the end of key stage 4.

At key stage 4, the percentage of pupils attaining the level 2 threshold (equivalent to five GCSEs at grade A* to C) including English and mathematics has been well above averages for schools in Wales in each of the last three years. Performance in the core subject indicator has also been well above national averages in this period. In 2012, pupils' attainment in GCSE English and mathematics at grade A* to C was about 35 percentage points above national averages. Overall, these are strong outcomes.

In 2012 no pupils left school without a qualification and almost all continued with full-time education.

Throughout the school, there are no significant differences in the performance of boys and girls. Pupils with additional learning needs make satisfactory progress relative to their abilities. Pupils learning English as an additional language make good progress relative to their ability on entering the school.

In many lessons, pupils make sound progress in building on their previous learning to develop their knowledge, understanding and skills. They have secure knowledge of the key subject concepts and apply this well to new situations. More able pupils provide well-structured and persuasive responses to tasks. However, in a minority of lessons, particularly in the senior school, pupils do not make enough progress largely because learning activities do not challenge them enough.

In the junior school, pupils' speaking and listening skills are well developed. They speak clearly and with confidence when offering their views, and respond well to others. Pupils' writing skills develop steadily as they progress through the school. They have secure spelling, punctuation and grammar strategies, which they apply well. At the end of key stage 2, many pupils write well for a range of purposes and they use appropriate sentence structures to communicate their ideas clearly and accurately. However, a minority of pupils' creative writing skills are underdeveloped. In the junior school, pupils make sound progress in reading. By the end of key stage 2 most pupils read fluently, with good expression and they are able to analyse a range of texts to draw their own conclusions. More able pupils apply complex reading skills such as inference and deduction to analyse and evaluate an author's style effectively.

In the senior school, pupils develop their speaking and listening skills well. They present their ideas in a clear and confident way, using appropriate technical terms across a range of different subjects to describe their work. As pupils progress

through the senior school, they read increasingly complex texts and can retrieve relevant information from a range of sources to solve problems. Pupils' writing skills are generally good. Most pupils spell accurately and use the full range of punctuation to clarify meaning. Generally, they write well in a range of styles and for different purposes across the curriculum. However, in a minority of subjects pupils do not develop or apply their independent writing skills well enough.

Pupils make sound progress in gaining skills in Welsh second language as they progress through the school. At the end of key stage 4 they achieve high standards in the GCSE Welsh second language short course examination.

Wellbeing: Good

Pupils of all ages have a sense of pride in their school and their achievements. They behave extremely well in lessons and around the school. Pupils are polite, courteous and considerate to each other and to adults. They show a high level of respect, care and concern for others.

Nearly all pupils feel safe in school and most consider that the school deals well with bullying. They have positive attitudes to healthy living and are aware of the benefits of regular exercise.

Across the school, most pupils are enthusiastic, enjoy their work and settle quickly to tasks. They work diligently and concentrate well in lessons and other activities. Older pupils show a particularly mature attitude to learning.

Pupils co-operate well in pairs or groups and develop a good range of social and life skills in lessons and wider activities. They use these skills well to organise and participate in activities such as school fund raising events. Pupils also make helpful contributions to the local community by participating in musical concerts such as in the hospital, cathedral and local elderly residents' homes. However, pupils have limited opportunities to influence the school's work.

The school's attendance rates are broadly in line with the national average and most pupils are punctual. There have been no permanent or fixed-term exclusions over the past three years.

Key Question 2: How good is provision?	Adequate
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Learning experiences: Adequate

The school's curriculum meets the requirements of the Independent Schools Standards (Wales) Regulations 2003.

The small classes throughout the school and the setting arrangements in key stage 4 have a positive impact on learners' experience and progress. The junior school gives pupils a coherent programme, which is developed appropriately. At key stage 4, there is a good range of options and all pupils are able to study the subjects they choose. The curriculum planning and arrangements for pupils who learn English as an additional language are sound.

Across the school, there are limited opportunities for pupils to participate in extra-curricular activities.

The school places a particular emphasis on developing pupils' literacy and numeracy skills. However, there is no overall co-ordination for the development of these and other skills, including ICT, as pupils progress through the school. For example, intervention strategies are left to individual teachers and these are not applied consistently across the curriculum.

The school's provision for Welsh language lessons enables pupils to make sound progress towards gaining formal qualifications.

The school's curriculum and wider learning experiences help pupils to develop a secure understanding of sustainability and global citizenship. These include supporting the school's practices in reducing waste and recycling, and through links with other schools in Kenya and Japan.

Teaching: Adequate

In the majority of lessons across the school, the quality of teaching is good. The most common good features of teaching are:

- the constructive and supportive professional relationships between staff and pupils;
- teachers' secure subject knowledge that engages and enthuses pupils;
- effective questioning to test pupils' knowledge and extend their understanding;
- well-structured lessons that build appropriately on pupils' previous learning and are delivered at a suitable pace; and
- the emphasis on developing pupils' literacy skills.

However, in a minority of lessons pupils do not make enough progress. This is most commonly because:

- the pace of lessons is too slow and learning activities do not stimulate pupils' interests or meet the needs of pupils of differing abilities well enough;
- lessons are too teacher-led, and do not provide pupils with enough opportunities to learn independently;
- there are too few opportunities for pupils to engage in partner or small-group activities that promote pupils' thinking skills and deepen their understanding; and
- there are not enough opportunities for pupils to write independently for a range of purposes, often this is because pupils are required to copy teachers' notes.

Across the school, in most lessons teachers have a good appreciation of pupils' strengths and weaknesses and provide constructive oral feedback that helps pupils make progress. Most teachers mark pupils' work regularly. However, the quality of written feedback varies too much. Only a minority of teachers provide clear advice for pupils to know how to improve subject-specific skills and there is not a consistent approach in the senior school to correcting pupils' spelling and grammatical errors. The school's use of assessment data to set suitably challenging targets for pupils and to monitor their progress against these targets is under-developed.

Regular progress cards and reports to parents are generally helpful. While the reports comment extensively on pupils' attitudes to learning and general progress, in most cases they do not provide clear enough advice on the subject-specific skills a pupil needs to improve.

Care, support and guidance: Adequate

The school helps pupils to adopt healthy lifestyles through the curriculum and a range of additional activities. For example, the local community police officer delivers a programme of sessions that help pupils to understand age appropriate issues such as personal safety, and drugs and substance misuse. However, there are limited opportunities for a minority of pupils in key stage 4 to participate in a regular programme of curricular sporting activities to help contribute to their physical development.

The school promotes pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development well. The school's values are explicitly based on Christian principles. These are promoted effectively in the day-to-day activities of the school, including a daily assembly. This provides pupils with an appropriate opportunity to reflect on their own beliefs and to consider the impact of their behaviour and actions on those around them.

The school makes effective use of a range of specialist services to support pupils' educational needs. For example, older pupils receive helpful guidance and specialist careers advice to make well-informed choices about their future education or work options.

Overall, the school's provision for pupils with additional learning needs is too variable. There is an effective system to identify pupils' with specific learning needs associated with dyslexia. A specialist service provides those pupils with individual support out of class. However, information sharing with relevant staff about pupils' additional learning needs in the classroom is not routine and systematic. This means that staff, particularly in the senior school, do not plan to meet pupils' additional learning needs well enough during lessons.

The school's arrangements for safeguarding pupils do not fully meet requirements and give cause for concern. This is because the school's anti-bullying policy does not meet the requirements of the Independent School (Wales) Regulations 2003 and the school's arrangements for recording attendance are not rigorous enough.

Learning environment: Good

The school's motto: 'I learn to serve' sets the focus for establishing a caring and respectful community where pupils are very courteous and considerate of others. The proprietors and staff know their pupils extremely well. Together with the effective partnerships the school has with parents, this contributes to the school's strong family ethos.

The school is a highly inclusive community that successfully recognises and celebrates diversity. Pupils have equal access to the school's curriculum. Wider school activities such as the involvement of older pupils in assemblies help to

promote good role models for younger pupils. Assemblies are also used well to celebrate all pupils' achievements.

Wall displays, particularly in the hall and in the junior section of the school, are colourful and used to good effect to support learning. This is less evident in the senior pupils' classrooms.

Overall, resources and equipment are suitable for meeting pupils' learning needs. However, the school has limited information technology resources.

The school site is secure and well maintained, with a satisfactory standard and adequate maintenance of decoration in the classrooms and teaching areas.

Key Question 3: How good are leadership and management?	Unsatisfactory
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Leadership: Unsatisfactory

Leadership across the school does not give suitable strategic direction or set out expectations clearly enough to drive improvement and raise standards.

The proprietors show great commitment to the school. They have been successful in establishing a particularly harmonious school community based on shared values and a clear vision. This vision is communicated effectively to parents, and through school assemblies and other activities. Staff and pupils feel valued and work well together. There is a clear sense of purpose towards pupils achieving high outcomes and strong emphasis on promoting pupils' personal and social development. These factors have contributed significantly to the good standards pupils achieve and their high levels of wellbeing.

The proprietors lead and manage all aspects of the school's work but have not set out clear strategies to raise standards and improve provision. No other staff have formal responsibility for any specific areas. As a result, staff largely work independently and do not have enough influence over important areas of the school's work. The lack of devolved arrangements limits the school's capacity to move forward and improve the quality of provision. This restricts the professional development of staff.

Staff job descriptions lack detail and do not set out clearly and precisely their roles and day-to-day responsibilities. Junior school teachers work well together to develop the curriculum and plan pupils' learning experiences, while teachers in the senior school take responsibility for planning their own areas of the curriculum.

Overall, the quality and range of documentation is poor. There are suitable policies and procedures that guide certain areas of the school's work. However, in too many areas, staff do not receive clear direction about the school's expectations because the policies either lack clarity or are not in place. For example, the proprietors do not set out explicit expectations to improve the quality of curriculum planning and teaching, and to ensure rigour in assessment, target-setting and the tracking of pupil progress. Although there are weekly staff meetings, there are no formal records of these meetings or of expected actions. Many matters are dealt with informally.

These arrangements lead to inconsistencies in the way in which staff carry out their teaching, assessment and pastoral responsibilities.

The proprietors do not carry out performance management or hold staff formally to account through performance targets based on regular lesson observations. As a result, arrangements to identify staff development needs, and ensure all staff receive appropriate professional training and support to improve the quality of teaching and learning are weak.

The school meets almost all of the Independent School Standards (Wales) Regulations 2003.

Improving quality: Unsatisfactory

The school's self-evaluation report gives a limited overview of what the school does well and identifies only a very few areas to improve. The school development plan does not set priorities for improvement. As a result, there is no shared understanding of what the school needs to do better and how to make these improvements.

The school's process for improving quality is informal and is based largely on consideration of GCSE results. This arrangement does not provide a suitable basis to plan and secure improvement across the school.

The proprietors have a satisfactory picture of the school's strengths and weaknesses. However, they do not make use of a range of rigorous monitoring activities drawing on first-hand evidence to improve standards and provision. For example, there is no system to monitor the quality of learning and teaching in lessons or through the scrutiny of pupils' work. This means that the school does not identify accurately or address fully important areas for improvement in learning and teaching.

Pupils' views on teaching are gathered formally by means of a questionnaire. However, the data obtained is not analysed rigorously to identify common strengths and areas for improvement.

Teachers share ideas and information on an informal basis. This is particularly noticeable in the junior school where staff work together well in order to use information from assessments to plan learning activities that meet pupils' needs. However, the school's formal arrangements to identify and promote best practice are limited.

Since the last inspection, the school has taken steps to comply with the regulations for registration and to improve several aspects of provision. However, the school has made extremely limited progress in addressing the key recommendations from the previous inspection to improve:

- the monitoring of pupil progress to inform progression and continuity in learning;
- identification and meeting the professional development needs of all staff through appraisal and performance management systems;
- arrangements for self-evaluation; and
- learning provision for information and communication technology across the school.

Partnership working: Good

The school works effectively with a range of partners to enhance the curriculum and improve pupils' outcomes and wellbeing. There are particularly strong partnerships with parents who are well-informed about activities at the school. They can easily approach the school with any questions or concerns and are confident that these will be addressed.

Pupils benefit from the school's well-established links with the local university. This includes regular use of its sporting facilities and an effective working partnership with the university's dyslexia centre. The school also has helpful links with the local further education college and provides work placements for students from the college who are studying child care.

The school has established useful links with a range of agencies and organisations to support pupils' learning and wellbeing. For example, the school works effectively with Careers Wales to provide pupils with a range of appropriate information.

Resource management: Adequate

The school provides enough qualified teachers to cover all aspects of the school's curriculum effectively. Staff are deployed appropriately to make use of their knowledge and expertise. Those teaching examination subjects at key stage 4 participate in subject-related examination boards' professional development activities. However, overall, the school's arrangements to identify and meet the professional development needs of staff are under-developed. This is because the school does not have systematic performance management arrangements.

Over the past two years, the school has successfully undertaken a programme to improve several aspects of the school's accommodation. This includes the refurbishment of the school hall and construction of a new toilet block and classroom.

These improvements have helped to ensure that the accommodation is largely suitable. Across the school, there are generally sufficient learning resources.

Because of the good outcomes pupils achieve and their high levels of wellbeing, the school provides value for money.

Appendix 1

Stakeholder satisfaction report

Responses to learner questionnaires

Estyn received responses from 104 learners, selected from key stage 2 to key stage 4. Overall, learners' responses are broadly in line with national benchmarks.

Nearly all learners state that they feel safe in school and that they have someone to turn to if they have any concerns. Many believe that the school deals well with bullying. Almost all secondary-age learners who completed the survey and many primary-age learners say that other learners behave well.

Almost all learners consider that they are doing well. They say that staff help them to make progress and help them when they have problems. Almost all state that they are encouraged to take responsibility and most secondary-age learners feel well prepared for the next stage of their education or employment.

Many learners say that homework helps them to understand and improve their work and believe that they have enough books and equipment.

Most learners consider that the school teaches them to be healthy. Almost all primary-age learners and most secondary-age learners say that there are plenty of opportunities to get regular exercise.

Almost all learners confirm that staff treat them fairly and with respect. They say the school helps them to understand and respect people from other backgrounds.

Many learners feel the school takes account of their views.

Responses to parent questionnaires

Estyn received too few responses to the parent questionnaires to make a commentary on this aspect.

Appendix 2

The inspection team

Denise Whiting-Wade	Reporting Inspector
John Thomas	Team Inspector
Huw Davies	Team Inspector
Glyn Griffiths	Team Inspector
Jayne Treasure	Peer Inspector
Paul Scudamore	Independent School Standards (Wales) Regulations 2003: 3 and 5
James Porter	School Nominee

Copies of the report

Copies of this report are available from the school and from the Estyn website (www.estyn.gov.uk)

Under the Independent School Standards (Wales) Regulations 2003, the school must provide copies of the report to all parents of the school. Where a pupil is subject to placement by a local authority, a copy of the report should be sent by the school to each relevant authority.

Year groups and key stages

Schools use a common system of numbering year groups from the start of compulsory schooling to 18 years of age. This system emphasises the importance of continuity and eases communication among schools, governing bodies, parents and local authorities.

The term 'Reception' (FPR) refers to the year group of pupils in a primary school who reach the age of five during the academic year. FYear 1 refers to the year group of pupils who reach the age of six during the academic year and so on. Year 13 is the year group of students who reach the age of 18 during the academic year.

Primary phase:

Year	FPR	FPY1	FPY2	Y3	Y4	Y5	Y6
Ages	4-5	5-6	6-7	7-8	8-9	9-10	10-11

Secondary phase:

Year	Y7	Y8	Y9	Y10	Y11	Y12	Y13
Ages	11-12	12-13	13-14	14-15	15-16	16-17	17-18

The four key stages cover the following year groups:

Foundation Phase	Reception, Year 1 and Year 2
Key stage 2	Year 3 to Year 6
Key stage 3	Year 7 to Year 9
Key stage 4	Year 10 and Year 11

Glossary of terms

Core subject indicator (CSI)	This relates to the expected performance in English or Welsh, mathematics and science, the core subjects of the National Curriculum.
Level 1	This represents the equivalent of a GCSE at grade D to G.
Level 1 threshold	This represents a volume of learning equivalent to five GCSEs at grade D to G.
Level 2	This represents the equivalent of a GCSE at grade A* to C.
Level 2 threshold including English or Welsh first language and mathematics	This represents a volume of learning equivalent to five GCSEs at grade A* to C including English or Welsh first language and mathematics
Level 2 threshold	This represents a volume of learning equivalent to five GCSEs at grade A* to C.
Level 3	This represents the equivalent of an A level at grade A*-E.
Level 3 threshold	This represents a volume of learning equivalent to two A levels at grade A* to E.
Average wider points score	This includes all qualifications approved for use in Wales at the relevant age, for example at aged 16 or at aged 18.
Capped wider points score	This includes the best eight results from all qualifications approved for use in Wales at aged 16.
Proprietor	The term 'proprietor', as defined in the Education Act 1996, means the person or people responsible for managing an independent school and can include a sole proprietor, governing bodies, trustees or directors. The ways that independent schools are governed and owned varies a great deal. A proprietor or trust may own a school or the school may have a governing body that appoints a headteacher. Some schools have a combination of these.