



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

A report on

**Ysgol Dinas Bran
Dinbren Road
Llangollen
LL20 8TG**

Date of inspection: November 2018

by

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

About Ysgol Dinas Bran

Ysgol Dinas Brân is a bilingual, 11 to 18 mixed comprehensive school. It is located in the town of Llangollen and serves the town and surrounding areas. The school is maintained by Denbighshire local authority but around 70% of pupils come from regions within Wrexham local authority and a few pupils come from two other neighbouring local authorities. There are 1,062 pupils on roll, including 135 pupils in the sixth form. This is higher than at the time of the last inspection when there were 984 pupils, including 210 in the sixth form.

Around 12.5% of pupils are eligible for free school meals, which is lower than the national average of 16.4% for secondary schools. Around 6.6% of pupils live in the 20% most deprived areas in Wales. Nearly all pupils are white, British and 1.2% of pupils speak English as an additional language compared to the Wales average of 3.0%. Currently, around 26% of pupils are on the special educational needs register, which is higher than the national average of 22.9% for secondary schools. Just over 1% of pupils has a statement of special educational needs; this is lower than the national average of 2.4%.

This school is a Curriculum for Wales pioneer school for the expressive arts.

The headteacher has been in post since September 2018. The senior leadership team consists of two deputy headteachers, one assistant headteacher and an acting assistant headteacher.

Further information is available from the Welsh Government My Local School website at the link below.
<http://mylocalschool.wales.gov.uk/Schools/SchoolSearch?lang=en>

Summary

Leaders, teachers and support staff at Ysgol Dinas Brân place a considerable emphasis on fostering positive and engaging relationship with their pupils. Most pupils are highly respectful of staff and visitors. Many pupils are proud of their school and its warm, friendly ethos. They engage well in the many beneficial activities that take place outside of lessons.

Over the past four years, leaders have worked suitably to secure strong outcomes in the majority of performance indicators and to improve whole-school attendance. However, there has not been enough focus on improving the quality of teaching and assessment during this time. Opportunities to develop pupils' skills, in particular writing and thinking skills as well as opportunities to work independently are underdeveloped. As a result, pupils do not make as much progress as they could in lessons.

Inspection area	Judgement
Standards	Adequate and needs improvement
Wellbeing and attitudes to learning	Good
Teaching and learning experiences	Adequate and needs improvement
Care, support and guidance	Good
Leadership and management	Adequate and needs improvement

Recommendations

- A1 Raise standards in skills and for the more able
- A2 Improve the quality of teaching and assessment
- A3 Improve the provision for skills, in particular writing, thinking and in Welsh first language
- A4 Improve the quality of strategic planning for self-evaluation and school improvement
- A5 Address the health and safety issues identified during the inspection visit

What happens next

The school will draw up an action plan, which shows how it is going to address the recommendations. Estyn will review the school's progress.

Main findings

Standards: Adequate and needs improvement

Pupils make appropriate progress in the majority of lessons and recall prior learning well. In a few lessons, many pupils make strong progress. They work well independently and make productive use of their acquired skills and knowledge when completing new work. However, in other lessons, pupils do not develop skills and subject knowledge well enough. In a very few lessons, pupils make limited progress.

Many pupils speak confidently and fluently in lessons and with adults and visitors to the school. Many express thoughts and ideas clearly and coherently and a minority communicate mature views and opinions. Generally, many pupils have a suitable grasp of subject-specific terminology. For example, when they discuss the properties of different metals and their uses in engineering. Many pupils are keen to participate in class discussions. When there are opportunities, pupils engage well in productive discussions in pairs and small groups. For example, pupils in modern foreign languages lessons engage enthusiastically in short dialogues in Spanish and French. In art lessons, pupils analyse and evaluate the artistic quality of the work of local Welsh artists confidently in small groups. Although many pupils listen well to teachers and their peers, a few do not demonstrate a suitable level of understanding of the subject and offer short, underdeveloped answers when questioned.

The majority of pupils have sound reading skills. They locate facts and information from texts effectively. In a few subjects, pupils do not develop their reading skills well enough due to limited opportunities. In a minority of subjects many pupils make strong progress in their ability to interpret and analyse texts. For example, in history, many pupils can balance and evaluate facts and opinions in texts that offer opposing views on the same issue, such as the long-term causes of the First World War.

Many pupils write coherently and use a suitable range of subject-specific vocabulary. They organise their work suitably in paragraphs. Pupils that are more able produce extended pieces of good quality. Overall, the majority of pupils write with reasonable accuracy and show a sound understanding of grammar. However, a minority of pupils make frequent spelling and grammar errors including the mis-spelling of common and basic vocabulary. A few pupils do not sequence their writing logically.

The majority of pupils develop numeracy skills well in subjects other than mathematics. For example, they produce accurate line graphs in geography to indicate the speed of flow in a river and correctly calculate voltage across bulbs in parallel and series circuits in science.

Overall, pupils make appropriate use of their basic information communication technology (ICT) skills across the curriculum. In general, pupils use too narrow a range of digital programmes when completing tasks, often this is limited to PowerPoint, word documents and excel spreadsheets.

In the few lessons where there are beneficial opportunities to develop pupils' thinking and problem-solving skills, many make valuable progress. For example, pupils explore reasons for anomalies when measuring evaporation rates in chemistry. In a

few cases, pupils make strong development in their ability to think independently. For example, in history, many pupils intelligently discuss and explain examples of change and continuity in the nature of crime since 1500. However, due to limited opportunity across the majority of subjects, pupils do not develop thinking and independent learning skills well enough.

Many pupils demonstrate strong creative skills in a few subjects. For example, in drama, pupils successfully act out scenes from the musical Blood Brothers and, in English, they write imaginatively about life as a child during Shakespeare's time.

Performance in the level 2 threshold including English or Welsh and mathematics has been above that in similar schools for two out of the last four years. Performance in the capped points score has been strong in the three out of the last four years and compares well with performance in similar schools during this time.

The proportion of pupils gaining five or more GCSEs or equivalent at grades A*/A has declined over the past four years, and in 2018 is notably lower than that in similar schools.

The performance of pupils who are eligible for free school meals has been strong over the past four years. The performance of this group of pupils compares favourably with that in similar schools in most of the key performance indicators.

In each of the past four years, the performance of girls is above that of girls in similar schools in the majority of the key indicators. The performance of boys, although variable over time, compares well with boys in similar schools in around half of the indicators.

At key stage 4, the proportion of pupils who gain a level 2 qualification in Welsh first language is below that in similar schools for three out of the last four years. The proportion of pupils who are entered for GCSE Welsh second language has increased consistently since 2015. The performance of pupils who gain a level 2 qualification compares well with the Welsh average.

At the end of Year 11, nearly all pupils remain in education, employment or training.

In the last three years, pupils' overall performance in the sixth form is below that in other similar schools. Since 2015, the proportion of pupils gaining three A*-C grades and performance in the average wider points score is below that in similar schools. The proportion of pupils achieving the level 3 threshold has been below the Welsh average for the last three years. The proportion of pupils gaining three A*-A grades is variable but above the Welsh average in two of the last three years.

Wellbeing and attitudes to learning: Good

Most pupils enjoy school and are friendly and welcoming. Almost all pupils are polite and courteous to staff, peers and visitors. Many pupils feel safe and they know who to turn to if they have any difficulties.

Many pupils demonstrate positive attitudes to learning and behave well in lessons and around the school. Most are well motivated and many show strong resilience and tenacity in lessons even when tasks may not be challenging enough for them.

They work effectively in pairs and in groups and listen respectfully to their peers' contributions. They enjoy and value the positive working relationship they have with their teachers. However, a few pupils do not engage fully in their learning, talk too much in lessons and lose interest in their work.

Many pupils make strong progress in their social skills by participating in a range of curricular and extra-curricular activities. A strong feature is the way in which pupils develop as ethical, informed citizens. For example, a group of pupils helps organise a festival to celebrate minority languages. Pupils also regularly raise large sums of money for local and national charities such as Hope House and Welsh Air Ambulance.

Many pupils participate beneficially in a wide range of extra-curricular activities such as expressive arts workshops, the book club and the chess club. Many pupils organise and take part enthusiastically in the popular annual talent show.

Most pupils develop a clear understanding of how to keep healthy through diet and exercise. Many pupils participate keenly in a wide range of sporting and fitness activities, such as canoeing on the Llangollen Canal and rock climbing.

A few pupils influence positively the work of the school through their involvement in working groups such as the School Nutrition Action Group and Eco group. For example, they have extended the range of healthy food available in the canteen and have campaigned to reduce the use of single use plastics. The work of the school council has had a positive impact on a few areas of the school's work such as participating in the interview for senior leader posts. However, overall, the school council's influence on other important aspects such as teaching and learning is limited.

Teaching and learning experiences: Adequate and needs improvement

In most lessons, teachers foster positive working relationships with their pupils. In many lessons, teachers have strong subject knowledge; they communicate clearly and are good language models. Generally, many teachers manage pupil behaviour well.

In a few lessons, teachers have high expectations of their pupils. They set challenging tasks and have purposeful lesson objectives. In these lessons, there is a brisk pace to the learning and pupils make valuable progress in their thinking skills and in working independently.

In the majority of lessons, teachers plan suitable starter tasks that enable pupils to recall previous work appropriately. They make effective use of purposeful resources to support them in their delivery. In around half of lessons, there are suitably planned tasks to engage pupils and enable them to make appropriate progress. However, in other lessons, teachers do not meet the needs of all pupils well enough as they do not take sufficient account of pupil ability or potential when planning tasks. In a minority of lessons, teachers' expectations of pupils are not high enough. In these lessons, they do not develop pupils' skills effectively, in particular extended writing, listening and thinking skills. In addition, they do not provide enough meaningful opportunities for pupils to work independently. Tasks go on for too long or are not challenging enough and teachers present for too long. In a few cases, the pace of the lesson is extremely slow.

There is too much variation in the quality of teacher feedback and assessment. In the majority of lessons, teachers use suitable questions to check recall. They provide appropriate verbal feedback to enable pupils to make progress. In a minority of lessons, teachers ask relevant and extended open questions, which engage pupils well and enable appropriate development of their thinking skills. In a few cases, teachers use more able pupils well to exemplify answers. However, in a majority of cases, teachers do not probe and extend pupils' understanding by skilful questioning. Instead, they tend to answer their own questions. This restricts pupils' independence and the development of their thinking.

The quality of feedback and assessment in pupils' books is too variable. In many subjects, feedback by teachers is not sufficient or purposeful enough to allow pupils to make changes and improvements in their work. Only a few teachers ensure that pupils correct their work or respond to feedback.

The school's curriculum builds suitably on pupils' previous learning and succeeds in meeting the needs of most pupils in key stage 4 and in the sixth form. In key stage 4, there is a valuable range of GCSE courses, as well as vocational subjects such as engineering, catering and child development. The school adapts its curriculum appropriately to meet the needs of vulnerable pupils. A particular feature of the key stage 4 curriculum is that it enables all pupils to gain a beneficial qualification related to physical education.

The school has worked creatively to expand pupils' experiences in the expressive arts. There is effective joint co-operation between music, drama and art departments in planning future changes to the curriculum. This collaboration provides pupils with a clear insight into possible career paths connected with these areas of study.

There are beneficial opportunities for pupils to participate in activities outside the classroom that link directly with the curriculum. For example, an important feature of the pupils' cultural and personal development is linked effectively to pupils' comprehensive involvement in the Llangollen International Eisteddfod. The majority of departments support the development of the Cwricwlwm Cymreig appropriately. Beneficial educational visits, opportunities to participate in musical activities and participation in the Duke of Edinburgh award enrich the learning experiences of pupils.

A systematic approach to whole-school planning ensures that the provision to develop pupils' literacy and numeracy skills is co-ordinated suitably. In the majority of subjects, there are appropriate opportunities for pupils to develop these skills. However, in a few subjects, the focus on developing pupils' reading skills is not strong enough. In addition, there is too much variation in how effectively subjects develop pupils' accuracy and their ability to write at length. There is appropriate support for pupils with weaker reading and number skills. Teaching assistants support these pupils well.

In key stage 3, there is appropriate provision for pupils to study a range of subjects through the medium of Welsh. However, the range of choices reduces as pupils get older.

Individual subjects offer pupils appropriate opportunities to use basic ICT skills in different contexts. However, the school's planning for the implementation of the digital competency framework is in its infancy.

Care, support and guidance: Good

The provision for care, support and guidance is characterised by the school's motto 'success through effort'. The school promotes a highly inclusive, supportive community that respects diversity. This has a beneficial impact on pupils' wellbeing and personal development. Provision for personal and social education includes a broad range of suitable topics. These include citizenship, social and personal skills, sex and healthy relationships education and anti-radicalisation.

Learning managers, with the support of the assistant learning managers and the rest of the inclusion team, work enthusiastically together and offer pupils strong support and guidance. The school works productively with many external support agencies to complement the school's provision and to provide beneficial support for vulnerable pupils. This has had a positive impact on improving these pupils' resilience and wellbeing. The school monitors pupil behaviour thoroughly and has an appropriate system of rewards and sanctions. This has ensured that many pupils' behave well in lessons and around the school. The school monitors attendance regularly and robustly and plans effective strategies to support pupils with low attendance.

The school has a useful tracking system to monitor pupils' academic progress. This allows leaders to provide suitable targeted support for pupils at risk of underachievement. However, they do not always make comprehensive use of this data to provide suitable support for all groups of learners. Recently the school has introduced a new system that allows leaders to identify individual pupils' areas of weakness within specific subjects. However, it is too early to evaluate the impact of this work.

There is beneficial provision to identify and support pupils with additional learning needs. Overall, individual educational plans provide staff with relevant information regarding pupils' individual needs. The school makes productive use of information about new pupils to plan suitable support when they transfer from key stage 2 to key stage 3.

The school provides parents with regular reports about their child's progress. However, information within these reports is confusing and subject reports do not always contain important subject specific areas for improvement.

The school has appropriate arrangements to promote healthy eating and drinking. This is supported by the provision of a wide, valuable and well-attended range of extracurricular activities that also promote the importance of regular exercise, for example the varied range of sporting and fitness sessions.

The school works well in partnership with external agencies to provide helpful and impartial guidance and advice on subject options and future career choices. This assists most pupils in making informed choices about their future and in preparing them for further education and adult life.

The school makes valuable use of the well planned 'ready for learning' morning sessions to develop pupils' social, personal and moral values. However, arrangements to promote pupils' spiritual development are limited.

Overall, the school's arrangements to safeguard children are appropriate and there are suitable policies and procedures in place to respond to any concerns around their welfare. However, a few health and safety matters were brought to the attention of the inspection team, including traffic management issues.

Leadership and management: Adequate and needs improvement

The newly appointed headteacher and the senior leadership team have a clear sense of commitment to the school and work well together. They communicate suitably their vision for improving pupils' performance in examinations and ensuring good behaviour and positive attitudes. Leaders have had a positive impact on standards in the majority of indicators at key stage 4, strong performance in many subjects in the sixth form and improved attendance. Leaders have also ensured pupils' positive attitudes to learning, and effective care, support and guidance. However, leaders have had insufficient impact on a few important areas of the school's work, such as the quality of teaching and the attainment of more able pupils.

The roles and responsibilities of leaders at all levels are clear and most carry out their work competently. Line management and performance management arrangements are appropriate and leaders have taken suitable actions to tackle underperformance.

Governors have a sound understanding of the school's work and recognise the main strengths and areas in need of improvement. Their roles as link governors enable them to have a useful insight into the work of individual departments. They are very supportive of the school and offer a suitable level of challenge to school leaders.

Leaders have identified accurately weaknesses in the school's processes for evaluating performance and effecting improvement. They have recently introduced changes to these processes but it is too early to evaluate the impact of these amendments.

Leaders have an appropriate understanding of most of the school's strengths and weaknesses. Overall, they analyse data and information from examinations well to evaluate pupils' performance. In addition, they gather a suitable range of evidence from activities such as lesson observations, scrutiny of pupils' work and informal feedback from pupils and parents. However, the school has not ensured that lesson observations have been quality assured and this means that judgments about the quality of teaching are not accurate. In addition, feedback from these observations does not give a full enough picture of pupils' progress. In general, scrutiny of pupils' work focuses too much on compliance with school policy. Consequently, there is not enough focus on the progress pupils make in lessons. These shortcomings mean that leaders do not have a comprehensive understanding of the impact of teaching on pupils' progress.

Leaders use their understanding of the school's performance in examinations well to set priorities for improvement. Plans include suitably ambitious, measurable targets.

However, the school's planning to improve aspects of teaching is underdeveloped. Records of whole-school and departmental meetings do not give due attention to evaluating and discussing the quality of teaching. In addition, while most leaders share their practice within the school to improve teaching, only a few have observed others' lessons. In general, staff do not visit other schools regularly enough to gather new ideas and improve practice.

Professional learning opportunities at an individual level link appropriately to performance management objectives and whole school priorities. Overall, whole staff training covers suitable areas. However, leaders do not plan this training strategically. The school does not set out a calendar of training based on areas for improvement identified in its self-evaluation.

Leaders and governors manage the school's resources well. They monitor spending carefully and ensure that it is matched well to the school's needs and priorities. The school is well resourced and leaders make best use of its site and buildings. Leaders make effective use of the pupil development grant. Pupils who are eligible for free school meals achieve well and their attendance has improved over time in comparison with that of similar pupils in similar schools.

Copies of the report

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

Estyn evaluates a provider's effectiveness using a four-point judgement scale:

Excellent	Very strong, sustained performance and practice
Good	Strong features, although minor aspects may require improvement
Adequate and needs improvement	Strengths outweigh weaknesses, but important aspects require improvement
Unsatisfactory and needs urgent improvement	Important weaknesses outweigh strengths

The report was produced in accordance with Section 28 of the Education Act 2005.

Every possible care has been taken to ensure that the information in this document is accurate at the time of going to press. Any enquiries or comments regarding this document/publication should be addressed to:

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