



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

A report on

**Ysgol Dyffryn Dulas
Corris
Machynlleth
Powys
SY20 9TQ**

Date of inspection: November 2019

by

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

About Ysgol Dyffryn Dulas

Ysgol Dyffryn Dulas is situated in the village of Corris, near Machynlleth in Gwynedd. The school has been part of a federation with Ysgol Pennal since 2012.

There are 53 pupils on roll, including four nursery age pupils who start school on a part-time basis following their third birthday. Over time, around 10% of pupils are eligible for free school meals. This is lower than the national percentage of 18%. The school has identified around 18% of its pupils as having special educational needs, which is slightly lower than the national percentage of 21%. Around 2% of pupils come from Welsh-speaking homes. All pupils come from white British backgrounds.

The school was last inspected in December 2013 and the current headteacher was appointed in September 2015.

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

The headteacher leads the school and the federation masterfully and very successfully, and has fostered a highly dedicated and conscientious team. A clear vision has been realised to develop happy and successful pupils in a safe environment, in which pupils can develop and flourish.

The headteacher has high expectations in terms of pupils' standards and wellbeing, and teachers provide rich opportunities for pupils to nurture skills that enable them to overcome challenges in their learning and understand that it is fine for them to make mistakes. The school is highly successful in ensuring that pupils of all ages have very positive attitudes to learning, concentrate for extended periods and show resilience that far exceeds expectations when working independently. An exceptionally good feature of school life is the courtesy and respect that nearly all pupils show towards their peers, staff and visitors.

One of the strengths of teaching is the way in which teachers assess pupils' understanding exceptionally effectively during activities, and provide them with timely feedback, which enables them to produce work of a high standard. Another obvious strength is the way in which teachers provide high quality opportunities to develop pupils' creativity and ensure continuity and progression in their skills across the school.

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

Recommendations

- R1 Increase pupils' use of the Welsh language in informal situations
- R2 Disseminate excellent practice in teaching across the federation
- R3 Strengthen the role of pupils in expressing a direct opinion on the school's wider procedures

What happens next

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

Estyn will invite the school to prepare a case study on its work in relation to 'how the school has developed the principles of the foundation phase' and 'how the school has developed pupils' attitudes to learning', to be disseminated on Estyn's website.

Main findings

Standards: Good

Most pupils make good progress in their skills from their starting points. Pupils with special educational needs make sound progress towards their targets.

Most pupils develop a sound understanding of the Welsh language soon after they begin at the school. They listen well to their peers and adults during class activities and when working independently. By Year 2, most discuss their work confidently, for example when discussing what they need to do to succeed in their activities. They build on their skills increasingly across key stage 2 and, by the time they reach the top of the school, most discuss their work maturely in both languages. For example, in English, they use refined vocabulary when discussing Owain Glyndŵr's feelings about the Battle of Bryn Glas. However, pupils do not use the Welsh language consistently enough at more informal times.

Most pupils develop their early reading skills effectively. As they move through the foundation phase, many use their phonological awareness successfully to read texts independently in the learning areas, for example as they follow instructions to make shapes in the dough area and the construction area. Nearly all pupils have a sound awareness of the features of books, such as the author and title, and express a simple opinion on books by giving valid reasons for their views. Across key stage 2, most make strong progress in their reading skills. Pupils in Year 4 discuss their favourite authors maturely and how they have a preference for different styles. By Year 6, most use their higher order reading skills skilfully, for example when using dictionaries and thesauruses to enrich their written work.

In the nursery and reception class, most pupils develop purposeful early writing skills, for example when making marks in the sand and with chalk on the floor. By the end of the foundation phase, most punctuate their work and spell words in line with their age and ability. They write interestingly in a variety of contexts, for example when writing a story about 'Hugan Fach Felen' (Little Yellow Riding Hood). Across key stage 2, most pupils write creatively across a wide range of genres in both languages. They use their imagination eloquently when writing at length, for example when writing a monologue by a rugby ball. Most pupils' handwriting and presentation of work are of a very good standard and they show obvious respect towards their work.

Across the school, most pupils make effective progress in their numeracy skills. In the foundation phase, most use their number skills skilfully to calculate how many chestnuts they have collected in the outdoor area. They count these correctly and decide to distribute them into tens in order to make it easier to count them. They handle money correctly when selling cards in the role-play shop, and add prices and give change from £1 confidently. In key stage 2, most have a sound awareness of number strategies and choose the most appropriate method to solve word problems. They apply their skills well when working across the curriculum, for example when using measurements and angles to design a periscope to look over the trenches.

Across the school, nearly all pupils make exceptionally good progress in their creative skills. For example, they consider colour, line and tone carefully when emulating the work of a famous Welsh artist in the foundation phase, while key stage 2 pupils consider texture and the effect of different instruments to create atmosphere when composing a piece of music based on the theme, 'Heroes'.

Pupils' information and communication technology (ICT) skills in the foundation phase are one of the school's strengths, and they apply them effectively and purposefully across the areas of learning. From an early age, they create imaginative pictures to correspond with the theme and a pictogram graph based on the number of teeth that pupils have lost, based on real data. Across the school, most pupils' use of ICT to develop their creative skills is a prominent strength, as pupils from the nursery to Year 6 produce videos and animations to support and enrich their class work. A notable example of this is the animation work by pupils in the foundation phase of Arctic animals. In key stage 2, many pupils build appropriately on their previous ICT skills. They search for relevant information on the internet safely and use this information to create a multimedia presentation on the organs of the body. Many develop thinking skills and problem-solving skills purposefully when creating a game to reflect one of Owain Glyndŵr's battles to correspond with the theme. However, pupils' ability to create and interrogate databases and spreadsheets is inconsistent.

Wellbeing and attitudes to learning: Excellent

An exceptionally good feature of school life is the courtesy and respect with which nearly all pupils treat their peers, staff and visitors. Nearly all behave very well during lessons, lunch time and break time. They are very caring towards each other and work and play together very effectively, for example when moving a programmable toy to find three-dimensional shapes in the foundation phase.

There is an excellent working relationship between pupils and they are very respectful towards staff. This is an exceptional feature of the school, which makes a very positive contribution towards the lively learning environment. As a result, nearly all pupils concentrate diligently for extended periods and are confident about what they need to do to improve their work and progress to the next step in their learning. Most understand and develop very effective strategies to help them to persevere and overcome difficulties. They accept that it is fine if they make any mistakes, and make proficient use of their 'learning powers' to solve any problems. For example, they ask a friend, think carefully and use resources, such as books or dictionaries, before asking teachers for support. They show particular resilience when undertaking tasks and challenges in the classroom.

Most pupils across the school work productively and effectively as individuals, in small groups and with partners. They make independent choices, support each other's learning very effectively and develop to become confident and ambitious learners who take responsibility for their learning. For example, while changing the teaching methodology in key stage 2, pupils have created definite rules in relation to choosing challenges in the classroom. Across the school, pupils' attitudes to learning and ability to use their independent learning skills are excellent features.

Across the school, nearly all pupils express a clear opinion about what they would like to learn by contributing to activities during the term's themes. As a result, they apply themselves fully to tasks and take ownership of their learning.

Nearly all pupils feel happy and at home at the school. They enjoy the school's life and work and speak highly of their experiences. They feel safe there and know whom to approach if anything is worrying them. They understand the importance of staying safe online and explain in detail what to do if they are concerned.

Nearly all pupils understand the importance of eating and drinking healthily. They discuss maturely the importance of a balanced diet and the need to ensure a balance between different types of food in order to be healthy. They have a strong understanding of the positive effect of exercise on their health. A particularly good example of this is the way in which pupils in the foundation phase run regularly on the 'keep going track', and use their numeracy skills to calculate how many metres they have run. In order to vary the activity, they choose different equipment and ways around the track. Pupils have a sound understanding of fairness and equality. For example, they discuss the importance of giving boys and girls equal opportunities to participate in sports, such as rugby and football.

Pupils' attendance rates over the last four years are very high and compare well with similar schools.

Teaching and learning experiences: Excellent

Teachers know their pupils thoroughly. They create a lively and safe learning environment for them and manage their behaviour masterfully in order to meet all pupils' specific needs. They provide rich opportunities for pupils to nurture skills that enable them to overcome challenges in their learning, and understand that it is fine if they make a mistake. Through the proficient use of strategies, such as 'learning powers', they ensure that pupils have very positive attitudes to learning. As a result, nearly all pupils concentrate for extended periods and show resilience when working independently. Teachers and assistants have high expectations of their pupils and tailor activities skilfully to meet nearly all pupils' learning needs. Teachers are good language models and take advantage of regular opportunities to reinforce new words and language patterns for pupils, for example by encouraging assistants to role-play with pupils in the home corner in the foundation phase. One of the strengths of teaching is the way in which teachers assess pupils' understanding highly effectively during activities, provide them with feedback on the spot and give them opportunities to persevere with activities to solve challenges themselves. They question pupils sophisticatedly in order to encourage them to think for themselves.

Teachers plan a stimulating curriculum for pupils, which engages their interest very effectively. They ensure valuable opportunities for pupils to contribute to their activities. This ensures that they have natural ownership of their curriculum and, as a result, enjoy their learning. The curriculum is enriched purposefully by arranging for a variety of visitors to talk about different activities, and visits to places of interest, such as the Alternative Technology Centre to learn about protecting the environment. Teachers also take advantage of rich opportunities to develop pupils' awareness of Welsh history and culture. Examples of this are activities that are based on the Rugby World Cup and studying the history of Owain Glyndŵr as part of the theme, 'Heroes'.

Teachers provide high quality opportunities to develop pupils' creativity. They ensure continuity and progression in developing their skills across the curriculum, for example their ability to observe detail in the artwork of others before using the same techniques in their own work. This is a prominent strength within the school. This work is enriched successfully through projects with external artists, which provide opportunities for pupils to apply a wide range of skills, such as music and ICT, soundly.

An exceptionally strong element of the school's work is the development of the principles of the foundation phase, which provides live learning experience for pupils. Teachers plan a very good balance between activities that are led by adults and excellent opportunities for pupils to reinforce their skills independently in the learning areas. Masterful use of natural resources and practical activities ensure that pupils take moderate risks in their work and learn actively. A very effective example of this is the opportunity for pupils to use a hammer and nails to create a pattern to make a Christmas decoration. Exceptionally effective use is made of the outdoor area as an extension of the indoor learning environment, and relevant activities are planned outdoors in order to develop pupils' skills skilfully.

The school has recently expanded the use of the principles of the foundation phase in key stage 2. Teachers plan skilfully to ensure that there are creative opportunities for pupils to reinforce their learning across different learning areas, for example by using the green screen to record an interview with Owain Glyndŵr. This has a very positive effect on pupils' attitudes to learning and their independence.

Teachers plan purposefully to develop pupils' literacy, numeracy and ICT skills across the areas of learning. In the foundation phase, they make extensive use of the outdoor area to develop pupils' skills, such as reading instructions and measuring ingredients to make a cake in the mud kitchen, before writing their own recipe. In key stage 2, there are rich and real opportunities for pupils to reinforce their extended writing skills in both languages, for example by writing a letter to try to persuade the World Rugby Union to bring the next competition to Wales in English. These activities ensure that pupils are involved fully in their learning.

Care, support and guidance: Excellent

The school is a happy, caring and homely haven that promotes very good attitudes and behaviour among pupils. A high priority is placed on ensuring that pupils and staff are safe at the school. As a result, the school's arrangements for safeguarding pupils meet requirements and are not a cause for concern. Staff's dedication to introducing strategies that develop pupils' independence and resilience contributes highly effectively, and ensures that pupils show high levels of motivation, interest and pride in their work. As a result, pupils concentrate exceptionally well for extended periods and use agreed strategies successfully across the school to overcome any obstacles in their learning. The school has supportive arrangements to support vulnerable pupils. For example, staff use a wide range of beneficial strategies to ease anxiety successfully.

There is a very close relationship between the school and parents. Staff know the pupils and their families very well and have a robust and effective relationship with them. Parents work successfully with the school as partners in their children's

education. This enriches pupils' experiences very effectively. A good example of this is the gardening club, which raises pupils' awareness of sustainability and global citizenship skilfully. This makes a positive contribution towards the school's effective arrangements to promote eating and drinking healthily.

The school has robust procedures for tracking pupils' progress. Teachers use these procedures very effectively to identify pupils' needs at a very early stage, and provide them with valuable guidance and support. All staff support pupils, including those with special educational needs, very skilfully. These procedures ensure that all pupils receive appropriate support to progress successfully to the next step in their learning.

Opportunities to include the pupil's voice in school life are developing effectively. There are valuable opportunities for pupils, parents and the wider community to share ideas and contribute to learning experiences, such as local history during the Second World War. The school provides appropriate opportunities for pupils to undertake leadership roles. For example, the school council contributes effectively to organising fundraising activities for charities and to purchase resources for the school. However, its role in terms of expressing an opinion about the school's strategic direction has not been developed soundly enough.

The school promotes pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development very well. It has a rich personal and social education programme that ensures that pupils learn about important aspects, such as staying safe online and how to challenge prejudice. Collective worship opportunities are taken advantage of skilfully to discuss and reflect on moral lessons, for example by using the Welsh football team's motto to nurture values such as playing as a team, co-operation and helping others.

The school promotes pupils' awareness of Welsh history and culture very masterfully. For example, they visit the Senedd in Cardiff to learn about the democratic process in Wales. They also make very rich use of the local area, such as researching the life of an Olympic athlete from the village who founded the London marathon and introduced orienteering in Britain. This has contributed significantly to their understanding of their heritage and Welsh culture.

Provision to develop pupils' creative skills is exceptionally good. They study the work of local, national and international artists regularly. They use their observation skills of different artists' styles proficiently to produce their own creative work of an exceptional standard. As a result, they have experienced success in national competitions, such as the Urdd Eisteddfod. This increases their confidence in their own ability and their appreciation of the efforts and talents of others.

Leadership and management: Excellent

The quality and effectiveness of the federation's leadership are excellent and have a very positive effect on pupils' standards and wellbeing. Leaders have established and conveyed a clear vision that is based on developing happy and successful pupils highly effectively. There is a very beneficial focus on creating a happy and inclusive haven as a basis for creating a very effective environment in which pupils can develop very successfully. As a result, there is an exceptional ethos across the federation, and pupils and staff feel that they are valued continuously. All staff share the vision successfully across both campuses, and this has a very positive effect on pupils' experiences and outcomes.

The headteacher sets high expectations for herself and staff, and ensures that provision and pupils' progress are maintained through very beneficial discussions in joint staff meetings. These meetings are recorded concisely, by noting decisions and purposeful comments, any relevant documentation or websites that were referred to, in addition to any further action that is needed. This process ensures that there is clear continuity from one meeting to the next and that all teachers are given an opportunity to review progress jointly in detail against any actions. As a result, accountability is very clear and all teachers have a very robust commitment towards developing an agreed strategy. By doing so, leaders ensure that both schools learn from each other by sharing good practice and working together purposefully on specific areas. A notable example of this is the way in which a teacher who worked in the foundation phase is being mentored successfully as she becomes established in a class that includes the full range of pupils in key stage 2.

Leaders respond very successfully to national priorities. An excellent example of this is the way in which the foundation phase ethos has been embedded very successfully in both schools, and particularly at Ysgol Dyffryn Dulas. Expertise there is used highly effectively to develop provision further at Ysgol Pennal. The headteacher has ensured that staff have begun to prepare purposefully to introduce the new curriculum for Wales in due course. As a result, pupils' willingness to take responsibility for their learning and develop their creative skills is an exceptional strength. This contributes very effectively to teachers' success in engaging pupils' enthusiasm and imagination at both schools.

Governors know, support and challenge the schools effectively. They understand and fulfil their roles and responsibilities conscientiously in terms of monitoring, tracking and promoting the ethos and values of the schools in the federation. Governors visit the schools regularly to scrutinise books, observe lessons and discuss work with pupils. This gives them a valuable, first-hand understanding which enables them to ask relevant questions to evaluate the effect of any changes. Their role as critical friends is developing beneficially. This is very evident as they challenge the standard of pupils' handwriting and presentation, and monitor that pupils understand and respond to teachers' comments on how to improve their work. Governors support staff very effectively and show pastoral care towards them, when necessary. The governing body promotes the principle of the importance of eating and drinking healthily well by ensuring that water is available to pupils during the day, and that there are beneficial opportunities for them to work in the garden and grow vegetables.

Leaders use a range of self-evaluation procedures extremely purposefully in order to identify the schools' strengths and areas that need to be developed further. The federation's priorities for development reflect the outcomes that have been identified very clearly. Both schools have a very strong record of making improvements, and leaders have responded very purposefully to recommendations from previous inspections. As a result, both schools are now in a robust situation and Ysgol Dyffryn Dulas, in particular, has shown exceptional improvement since the last inspection.

Leaders create a rich culture of addressing staff's professional learning needs, by providing beneficial opportunities for them to increase their knowledge, understanding and professional skills in specific areas. They do so by providing an opportunity for teachers to research best practice, in addition to implementing change

in provision. Training sessions are effective and link directly to the priorities in the federation's improvement plan. Staff share their new skills with each other highly effectively after attending courses. A specific example of this is the way in which they have developed staff's confidence in creative digital skills which, in a short time, has had a very positive effect on pupils' skills. Performance management procedures have been established very firmly, and they are operational and highly effective. As a result, leaders ensure as much consistency as possible in provision across the federation.

Leaders have ensured an appropriate level of staffing and learning resources to deliver an interesting curriculum, and they use these resources efficiently. Decisions on expenditure link appropriately with the school's priorities for improvement and the school uses grants effectively. A specific example of this is the way in which it uses the pupil development grant effectively to mitigate the effect of poverty on pupils.

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 and individual teachers to evaluate the impact of the school's work
- meet pupils to discuss their work, to listen to them read and to gain their views about various aspects of their school
- meet groups of pupils in leadership roles, such as representatives from the school council and eco-committee
- visit a broad sample of classes, including learning support groups and the specialist resource base (where appropriate), 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 (where appropriate) and in outdoor areas
- visit the specialist resource base within the school to see pupils' learning (where appropriate)
- 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' wellbeing, 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

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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