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

A report on

Ysgol Gynradd Tycroes

Pontardulais Road
Tycroes
Ammanford
Carmarthenshire
SA18 3QD

Date of inspection: March 2024

by

Estyn, His Majesty's Inspectorate for Education

and Training in Wales

This report is also available in Welsh.

About Ysgol Gynradd Tycroes

Name of provider	Ysgol Gynradd Tycroes
Local authority	Carmarthenshire County Council
Language of the provider	English
Type of school	Primary
Religious character	*
Number of pupils on roll	190
Pupils of statutory school age	157
Number in nursery classes	13
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 Primary is 23.7%)	21.0%
Percentage of pupils identified as having additional learning needs (a) (The national percentage of pupils identified as having an additional learning need in Primary is 13.2%)	12.1%
Percentage of pupils who speak Welsh at home	3.8%
Percentage of pupils with English as an additional language	*
Date of headteacher appointment	16/04/2018
Date of previous Estyn inspection (if applicable)	10/11/2015
Start date of inspection	11/03/2024

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.

Overview

Leaders, staff and governors at Tycroes Primary School provide a safe and stimulating environment for pupils. The headteacher is a compassionate leader who places pupils' and staff's well-being, happiness and learning at the heart of the school's work. Leaders and governors manage change well. They pay careful attention to the development of staff to ensure that all embrace the school's values and contribute to the strong team ethos. Subsequently, staff and pupils are happy and feel valued and safe.

Pupils feel a firm sense of pride and belonging to their school and their locality. Their behaviour is exemplary. Parents are highly appreciative for the quality of education and the strong, supportive care their children receive. Leaders and staff nurture pupils' personal, social and communication skills well. Pupils' interactions with adults are courteous and respectful.

The school's curriculum is engaging, relevant and planned well to ensure that pupils develop their knowledge and skills progressively. Pupils focus on their learning well and attend school regularly. However, too often teachers over-direct pupils' learning and do not provide sufficient challenge or opportunities for pupils to develop their independent learning skills and make decisions about their learning. Leaders have developed an effective system for the assessment of all pupils as they move through the school; they use this to track the progress of every pupil. However, teachers' use of daily assessments of pupils is not effective enough to plan subsequent learning. Pupils' evaluation of their own successes and next steps in learning is underdeveloped.

Leaders at Tycroes Primary are reflective and strive for success. They have a comprehensive process of self-evaluation in search of school improvement. Leaders and staff at all levels work hard to improve the school. However, while leaders have established a rigorous cycle of evaluation activities, reviewing the impact these actions has upon the quality of teaching and learning is not robust enough. As a result of effective leadership and provision, most pupils, including those with additional learning needs (ALN) and those whose circumstances make them vulnerable to underachievement, make good progress.

Recommendations

R1 Strengthen review processes within self-evaluation activity to have a clear focus on the impact of improvements on teaching and learning

R2 Ensure that teachers use assessment information to refine their teaching to support and challenge pupils appropriately

R3 Embed systematic opportunities for pupils to develop their independence and their skills in evaluating and improving their own learning

What happens next

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

Main evaluation

Learning

A majority of pupils start school with literacy, numeracy and social skills that are at, or above, those expected for their age and stage of development. Most pupils, including those who are from low-income households, make effective progress by the time they leave the school. This includes pupils with ALN who make successful progress towards their individual targets. Throughout the school, pupils make appropriate progress in their ability to apply their literacy and numeracy skills in their work across the curriculum. They make good progress in the application of their digital skills in other areas of learning.

Across the school, most pupils are confident speakers and nearly all are attentive when listening to their teachers and their classmates. Many of the youngest pupils communicate their ideas clearly to adults and each other using well-formed phrases and sentences. As they progress through the school, nearly all pupils' language skills develop effectively, and they begin to use subject specific vocabulary. For example, Year 1 pupils use words such as carnivore and predator when discussing polar bears. Older pupils speak confidently and articulately to each other, staff and visitors. By the time pupils are in Year 6, they discuss the concept of conditional love with understanding when discussing the Christian faith.

Most pupils make good progress in developing their reading skills. Younger pupils develop their knowledge of letters and sounds well. As they move through the school, pupils use strategies to read unfamiliar words successfully. Older pupils develop their fluency and use punctuation to enhance their expression and intonation. By the time they are in Years 5 and 6, many pupils are fluent readers. They read aloud confidently, locate and extract information from the text and use this to support class discussions accurately.

Across the school, many pupils develop their writing skills appropriately. The youngest pupils know that words have meaning and make marks using a variety of writing tools on a range of media. As they progress, most pupils develop their spelling, punctuation and handwriting suitably. Generally, they present their work appropriately. However, very few pupils join their letters and develop a fluent style of writing. By the time they are in Year 4, pupils begin to make beneficial use of authorial techniques including personification and similes, to add interest to their writing, for example when pupils write a diary entry In response to the Society for the Protection of Magical Beasts. Pupils in the oldest classes write narratives with well-formed descriptive sentences. However, pupils' development of independent writing skills across the curriculum is generally limited due to an over-reliance on the completion of worksheets or writing frames.

Nearly all pupils develop secure mathematical knowledge and numeracy skills as they progress through the school. They apply these skills suitably across the curriculum. For example, the youngest pupils count five ducks accurately and add one more to make six. Year 2 pupils order animals according to size and use blocks to check for accuracy. Many older pupils develop as confident mathematicians. By Years 5 and 6, pupils develop their understanding of whole and part numbers by comparing fractions and calculating percentages of amounts to two decimal places effectively.

Most pupils are enthusiastic about the Welsh language. The youngest pupils use basic vocabulary and respond to simple questions to communicate successfully. Generally, pupils pronounce words and phrases accurately. By Year 3, pupils are beginning to use conjunctions to extend their responses to familiar questions. Older pupils ask and answer questions in Welsh, and successfully translate a paragraph from Welsh to English without any prompts.

Across the school most pupils develop their digital skills effectively. The youngest pupils use a range of digital programs successfully to support their learning. Year 4 pupils use digital apps to record their Welsh language conversations about what they are doing at the weekend. Older pupils create and use databases well, for example when comparing earthquakes and use codes to create Saint David's Day games.

As they progress through the school, most pupils develop their skills well through a range of sporting and creative activities. The youngest pupils control digging tools and play percussion instruments while singing Mi Welais Jac y Do. Year 1 pupils use movement, space and direction well to express how seals and foxes move on ice. Year 2 pupils read musical notation when playing recorders. Older pupils play African drums enthusiastically and use buckets to create a beat using alternating hands.

When given the opportunity to work independently, most pupils show perseverance and develop their problem solving and thinking skills well. The youngest pupils consider which materials keep us warm in winter when describing the features of properties. Older pupils explain their strategy for folding paper into accurate fractions.

Well-being and attitudes to learning

Pupils are welcoming and friendly. They are polite, kind and respectful of others and play and work harmoniously together. Nearly all pupils are sympathetic to the needs of others and show consideration for their friends. They know about children's rights and feel strongly about the need for equality. Generally, pupils understand the need for rules in school and in society to keep everyone safe.

Nearly all pupils demonstrate high levels of well-being and feel safe and respected in the school's homely community. They believe that the school helps them to treat everyone fairly. Nearly all pupils are happy in school and most feel free from bullying. They contribute successfully when discussing their thoughts and ideas during classroom activities. Pupils are extremely considerate of each other. For example, Year 6 pupils listen to each other carefully, and agree or respectfully disagree with each other when discussing the need for companies to find new areas from which to extract oil. Many pupils feel well supported by staff, know where to turn if they need support and are confident that staff will listen and deal appropriately with any

concerns. Across the school, pupils' behaviour is exemplary in class, during assemblies and at playtimes.

Nearly all pupils have a strong understanding of how to make healthy choices and the importance of physical activity. This supports pupils in becoming healthy and confident. They readily explain the positive impact of drinking water and eating a varied diet. Pupils enjoy participating in a wide range of physical activities such as ball games, playground activities and dance. They engage positively with and benefit from the opportunities that the school offers, such as football matches and table tennis tournaments. The school's sports ambassadors play with younger pupils to teach them new games and to encourage positive attitudes to being active. Pupils engage in breathing exercises and learn to calm down using these techniques. A few pupils explain the benefits they feel from this.

Many pupils take on a variety of leadership roles and responsibilities enthusiastically. For example, the school council actively supports whole-school budget decisions by taking the step to have costly air fresheners removed from around the school. Most pupils think staff ask them for their views, feel that leaders listen to their ideas and make changes as a result. The eco group supports the work of the school in encouraging everyone to reduce, reuse and recycle. They know it is important for people to decrease their use of plastics and were active in campaigning for clean natural water ways, being successful in achieving an award from the Senedd.

In all classes, pupils demonstrate strong attitudes towards their learning. Nearly all pupils listen well to teachers and support staff and are diligent in following instructions. They settle quickly to their learning and move between tasks sensibly. They engage fully, maintain concentration and complete their tasks, taking care to produce their best possible work. Most pupils make valuable contributions in activities, which enhances the learning experiences for all. Throughout the school, most pupils demonstrate curiosity and nearly all pupils relish learning about new topics.

Most pupils are keen to share their learning and are proud of their work. They value the feedback they receive from teachers and use the success criteria provided by teachers to guide their responses to tasks. However, pupils are not confident enough to refine their work as the support provided through teacher feedback is not specific enough. In addition, pupils are not provided with sufficient opportunities to improve their work, which limits their progress. This results in pupils not knowing how to improve their work and having insufficient time to address misconceptions or make amendments.

When pupils are challenged and provided with opportunities to be independent and creative in their learning, think freely and make decisions about their work, they demonstrate ambition and resilience to complete their learning successfully. For example, when working in a team to transport a ball from one side of the hall to the other using small sections of guttering, younger pupils refine their approaches and find creative solutions to resolve the problems encountered.

Teaching and learning experiences

The school has a clear, shared vision for learning that reflects the principles and culture of the Curriculum for Wales. Staff have developed a curriculum that provides suitable breadth and depth of learning and engages pupils well. The school plans many authentic learning experiences, including providing older pupils with the opportunity to interview a holocaust survivor, for example. Teachers provide beneficial opportunities for pupils to contribute their ideas about what they would like to learn and use this information appropriately when planning. Teachers plan for pupils to work with, and learn from, others in the locality and beyond. For example, teachers and pupils connect with a school in Kenya and raise money to help fund the school's new science block.

Teachers create classrooms which are calm, orderly and inviting learning environments. In most lessons, teachers present activities with stimulating and lively presentations. In the best instances, they capture pupils' interest through asking probing questions, and encouraging pupils to think and share their ideas. Teachers provide an appropriate range of learning experiences to enable pupils to develop and apply their literacy and numeracy skills suitably across the curriculum. They plan well for the development and application of digital skills. For example, older pupils use their digital skills to consolidate their learning in humanities by creating databases on earthquakes.

Leaders and staff utilise the community and local area successfully to enrich the curriculum and provide opportunities to develop skills that will benefit pupils in their future. They use visitors from their community, including a paramedic, to learn about the world of work. This widens pupils' awareness and aspirations around future careers and the world of work. Teachers plan appropriate outdoor learning activities and take pupils on educational trips and annual residential visits to an outdoor activity centre. These experiences have a positive impact on pupils' confidence and their ability to work together.

Teachers promote the Welsh culture and language successfully. They provide valuable opportunities for pupils to learn about their locality and the heritage of Wales. Teachers promote discussion, debate and reflection, such as comparing modern peaceful protests to the Rebecca Riots. Most staff are effective language role models and use a variety of greetings and instructions in Welsh. Teachers plan and deliver activities to support pupils to develop their oracy skills systematically. They reinforce vocabulary and language patterns for use in daily life and encourage pupils to speak Welsh during formal and informal activities.

Teachers plan experiences for the younger pupils that enable them to develop their critical thinking skills and ability to innovate. For example, Year 1 pupils use foam and powder paint to develop an island for their polar bears, create land features such as hills and consider the colour of landforms on their island. However, opportunities for the oldest pupils are less frequent. In these instances, teachers do not always challenge pupils to produce work which they are capable of. They over-direct learning and use worksheets too often, which limits pupils' responses. This hinders the development of pupils' independence, including pupils not being given adequate opportunities to make decisions about what and how they will learn, and how they will present their work.

Staff develop close working relationships with pupils and foster a positive and supportive environment for learning. Teachers have high expectations of pupils' behaviour and good subject knowledge. Generally, they use a variety of teaching methods that stimulate and encourage pupils to learn. Support staff work alongside teachers skilfully. Most staff use questioning effectively to deepen pupils' understanding.

Leaders have begun to use a bespoke assessment system to track pupil progress in literacy and numeracy suitably. Teachers monitor pupils' learning during lessons and, where this works well, they support pupils with useful verbal feedback that enables them to improve their work. However, teachers' use of daily assessment to inform teaching is underdeveloped. Teachers' feedback to pupils is often not specific enough to help pupils know how to improve their learning and they do not provide sufficient opportunities for pupils to develop their skills in evaluating and improving their own learning. Staff share relevant information with parents about their children's progress through informal conversations, meetings and informative annual reports.

Care, support and guidance

Tycroes is a caring school that places a purposeful focus on meeting the needs of each individual pupil. Leaders promote worthwhile partnerships between parents, staff and governors to support pupils to develop and learn effectively.

Leaders and staff foster successful relationships with the parent community. These relationships impact positively on pupils' well-being. Parents and carers appreciate how approachable leaders and staff are. They value the regular communication they receive about aspects of school, such as planned events, and regarding their child's progress. The school operates a policy where parents are able to contact leaders and staff as the need arises. This is particularly helpful for those parents who have a child with ALN, supporting these pupils to make strong progress overall.

Leaders utilise effective systems and processes to identify those pupils who require additional support. They hold regular pupil progress meetings with teachers and support staff, giving staff purposeful opportunities to reflect on each child individually and to help identify those pupils requiring extra provision. This includes those pupils who have ALN. Leaders work closely with a wide range of agencies to provide valuable specialist services to support pupils' emotional health and learning needs.

The ALN Co-ordinator knows pupils with additional needs well. She advises other staff on how to support pupils in their classes effectively. She involves parents purposefully in reviewing pupils' learning and in planning their next steps. Staff track the progress of pupils with additional needs carefully, from their starting points and in relation to their targets. Staff have begun to involve pupils with additional needs in ensuring that they are purposefully engaged in setting their own aspirations for improvement.

Leaders and staff ensure that many pupils are given worthwhile opportunities to become members of various pupil leadership groups. Staff ensure that most of these groups meet frequently and support pupils purposefully to make decisions about how to improve their school. For example, pupils from Y Criw Cwl Cymraeg promote the use of Welsh on the school playgrounds at break time. Older pupils act as good

language role models to support younger pupils. The Digital Dragons create videos, which are sent home explaining to parents how to access some of the information technology programs used in the school.

The school provides ample opportunities to support pupils to understand their identity, heritage and culture at both a local level and in relation to the wider world. For example, older pupils carry out video calls with a school in Mombasa, teaching traditional dance and Welsh to the children that they meet online.

Leaders and staff utilise the community and local area successfully to nurture pupils' personal and social skills to benefit them in the future. They use visits and visitors from the community, including a dietician to learn about healthy lifestyle choices, and provide pupils with a range of physical activities including creative dance and sport. This supports pupils' understanding of diet and exercise on the body. The school actively encourages pupils to participate in extra-curricular activities and clubs such as health and well-being, Urdd, gardening and a range of sports clubs, further embedding messages regarding healthy lifestyle choices. These experiences have a positive impact on pupils' fitness and well-being, motivating pupils to keep fit and promoting their understanding of healthy living.

Leaders and staff encourage pupils to develop empathy, respect, courage and compassion. The school's provision for collective worship promotes pupils' ethical, spiritual and moral development successfully. For example, school assemblies carefully weave together aspects of the children's rights with a core school value. School staff then link these themes to a world event such as how friendship links to the International Day of Peace.

The school uses a number of effective strategies to promote good attendance and monitors the impact robustly. As a result, attendance for all pupils is continuing to improve.

The school has developed a behaviour policy based on pupils developing a clear understanding of self-discipline and acceptance of responsibility for their own actions. The school sets out to create the conditions for an orderly community in which effective learning can take place.

Leaders have established a strong culture of safeguarding across the school, which is understood by all. Pupils have a good awareness of how they can seek help and support if they need to and most have a sound understanding of how to keep themselves safe, for example when working with digital devices online.

Leadership and management

The headteacher has worked effectively with staff to create a strong team ethos. Over time, she has established sound principles and foundations on which to build and develop an effective school. These principles are based on trust, transparency and support for all. She promotes and demonstrates strong professional values amongst her team. She is supported skilfully by other leaders including the deputy headteacher.

Over time, the headteacher and leaders have established clear systems and processes that have brought about important progress in key areas and have established clear expectations for all, for example improving communication with parents, improving pupil behaviour and establishing clear roles and responsibilities for all staff. These improvements have been sustained over time, set firm foundations on which to move forward and build, and have a worthwhile impact on pupils' learning and well-being overall. In addition, staff feel confident in understanding what is expected of them in relation to their roles and responsibilities, and as a result contribute positively to the life of the school. During this period, leaders have also established a strong safeguarding culture in the school, which is well understood by all staff and governors.

Leaders involve all staff in contributing to the setting of the school's priorities for improvement. All staff are included purposefully into a curriculum team. They conduct evaluations of progress in their curriculum areas and identify aspects for improvement. Leaders also pay due regard to national priorities and have placed a strong focus on promoting Welsh language and digital skills in particular. This has had a positive impact on pupil progress in these areas.

Leaders have established a well-planned calendar of self-evaluation activity, which involves all staff and supports the appropriate identification of priorities for improvement. They consult regularly with others including pupils and parents to seek their views. Leaders and staff use a broad range of activities such as book scrutiny, listening to learners and conducting learning walks to inform their evaluations. They use these processes, along with a bespoke system they have developed to monitor and support pupils to make progress. However, school leaders do not always ensure that improvement actions are reviewed robustly enough with regard to the impact they have on learning and teaching. For example, when reviewing how well teachers provide feedback to pupils on their learning and how teachers use this information to plan their lessons.

Governors take an active and purposeful role in the life and work of the school. They are effective critical friends and offer useful guidance and support to the headteacher. Governors have a broad skillset and use these skills purposefully to assist leaders in making decisions. They are actively involved in self-evaluation activities and, as a result, they have an improving understanding of the strengths and areas of development for the school. They produce useful written reports, which focus appropriately on what they have seen, including evaluating pupils' attitudes to learning. Governors ensure that there are suitable arrangements in place for healthy eating and drinking that comply with statutory legislation.

Leaders work to ensure that families who are disadvantaged by poverty are well supported, for example by subsidising the cost of trips and visits. They also provide opportunities for uniform exchanges and have made helpful changes to the uniform policy.

Leaders have established a positive culture of professional learning. This focuses primarily on links to priorities within the school development plan, individual research projects and to national priorities, for example the new ALN legislation. 'Trust triads' amongst staff are used for staff to share identified effective practice and support each

other to improve the quality of teaching. However, opportunities for teachers and staff to observe and learn from effective teaching practice beyond the school are limited.

The school manages its resources effectively. Classrooms are well resourced, and leaders use grants, such as the pupil development grant, to ensure that there are good levels of staffing to provide effective well-being and learning support for pupils.

Evidence base of the report

Before an inspection, inspectors:

- analyse the outcomes from the parent/carer 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/carers 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, 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 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

Copies of the report

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

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 publication. Any enquiries or comments regarding this document/publication should be addressed to:

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