



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

**Ysgol Friars
Lon Y Bryn
Bangor
Gwynedd
LL57 2LN**

Date of inspection: September 2011

by

Mr Peter Harris

Under Contract for

**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 28 of the Education Act 2005.

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Context

Ysgol Friars is a bi-lingual 11-18 mixed comprehensive school of 1,328 students and pupils, including 235 in the sixth form compared with 1,312 pupils and students when the school was last inspected.

Over 14% of learners are eligible for free school meals compared with the Welsh average of just over 17% for secondary schools. Approximately 4% of learners come from Welsh-speaking homes. Thirteen per cent of learners currently learn English as an additional language.

The school's intake represents the full range of ability. Three per cent of pupils have statements of special educational needs. This figure is just above the average for Wales as a whole. A significant proportion of learners has reading ages of more than six months below their chronological age on entry to the school.

The headteacher took up his post in 1997. The present senior management team is comprised of two deputy headteachers and four assistant headteachers. Of the present senior management team, the headteacher and two assistant headteachers were in post at the time the school was last inspected.

The school seeks to provide opportunities for all learners to develop the knowledge, attitudes and skills to lead effective lives.

The school works in close partnership with five other secondary schools and the local further education college to enhance provision at key stage 4 and in the sixth form.

The 2011-2012 individual school budget per pupil for Ysgol Friars is £3,942 which compares with a maximum of £5,098 and a minimum of £3,942 for secondary schools in Gwynedd. The school has the lowest budget per pupil of the 14 secondary schools in Gwynedd.

Summary

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

Current performance

There are many good features of the school's work. These include:

- learners' attainment in a majority of performance indicators;
- very few learners leave school with no qualifications;
- most learners make good progress in many lessons;
- a broad and balanced curriculum;
- well-planned and effective teaching in many lessons; and
- high level of support of learners' wellbeing.

However, inspectors judged current performance to be adequate overall because:

- performance in a few indicators has not shown sustained improvement;
- there has been relative underperformance in English and Welsh first language, particularly at key stage 4;
- the co-ordination and monitoring of literacy skills across the curriculum are ineffective;
- learners do not make enough progress in a minority of lessons where teaching does not challenge them fully; and
- attendance has been adequate when compared to that of similar schools.

Prospects for improvement

The prospects for improvement are good because of the:

- clear and well-targeted strategic direction to the school's work;
- realistic identification of the school's strengths and areas for improvement;
- appropriate improvement plans; and
- established partnerships that contribute well to learner outcomes and wellbeing.

Recommendations

- R1 Continue to improve standards in general, and standards in English and Welsh first language in particular.
- R2 Develop a coordinated approach to the provision for literacy and monitor its impact.
- R3 Improve the quality of teaching and learning to engage and increase the level of challenge for all learners.
- R4 Implement rigorous systems to monitor and review classroom practice.
- R5 Improve attendance.

What happens next?

The school will produce an action plan that shows how it will address the recommendations. Progress in addressing the recommendations will be monitored by Estyn.

Main findings

Key Question 1: How good are outcomes?

Adequate

Standards: Adequate

At key stage 3, the school's performance is around the average when compared with similar schools. Mathematics and science have steadily improved over the last three years and are above average when compared to similar schools, while English is about average. Pupils' progress from the previous key stage is generally good.

In key stage 4, the school performs well in indicators that include a wide range of qualifications, especially vocational qualifications. This is mainly the result of a good range of options available to learners. In those indicators that include English and mathematics, the school has made broadly satisfactory progress over the last three years and its performance is now about average when compared with similar schools.

However, performance in English and Welsh first language is below that in similar schools; in English it is well below.

When compared with their performance in previous key stages, pupils make appropriate progress.

Post-16 learners generally attain well. The percentage of post-16 learners attaining the level 3 threshold has been slightly above the national average in recent years. Attainment on the wider points score over recent years has been above the Welsh average over this period of time.

On the whole, girls perform better than boys in key stage 3 while boys outperform girls in key stage 4. However, in Welsh first language the relative underperformance of boys at both key stages is significant.

Generally pupils entitled to free school meals and pupils with special educational needs achieve as expected.

Learners make good progress in the majority of lessons. They gain new knowledge and are able to apply it in mastering new concepts and solving problems. However, in a minority of lessons, learners do not develop a sufficiently secure understanding of new knowledge and concepts or develop their skills well enough.

Most learners listen with due attention. However a few do not listen with enough care to teachers' explanations or to the opinions of other learners. Many are able to contribute thoughtfully to discussion in the whole class, in pairs or small groups. More able learners express their views confidently.

Most learners extract and interpret information effectively from texts. Many write well for a range of purposes; more able learners produce balanced and reasoned analyses and write at length. A minority of learners of all abilities make spelling and basic grammatical errors.

Most learners who receive targeted catch-up support in literacy make good progress. Learners at both key stages 3 and 4 develop good mathematical and information and communication technology skills across the curriculum.

Wellbeing: Good

Pupils have a good understanding of how to keep healthy and have positive attitudes towards physical exercise and improving their diet. Good levels of participation are evident in fitness and sporting activities.

The school's involvement with the community is good and learners gain good levels of knowledge, experience and confidence from the partnership. Many pupils play a positive role in a wide range of activities in the local community and beyond.

Pupils across all ages make a sound contribution to several aspects of school life through the activities of the School Council, Eco and recycling groups, nutrition group including presentations to and participation in the work of the governing body.

Nearly all learners feel safe and confident within the school. There are very few incidents of bullying. Learners benefit from secure working relationships and an ethos of trust exists between them and staff.

Nearly all learners are well motivated and behave well. However, in a minority of lessons, a few learners are not fully engaged and do not pay attention.

Despite the introduction of a number of strategies aimed at increasing attendance, levels are well below average.

Identified learners who have received targeted support to raise their self-esteem make good progress.

Most learners' social and life skills are developing well. Learners have benefited from involvement in a range of community projects and charity fund-raising events.

Many older students volunteer as reading buddies for learners in Years 7 and 8 or as tutors on the school's reading catch-up programme.

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

The school provides a broad and balanced curriculum. In key stage 3 it ensures that adequate time is given to cover National Curriculum and religious education requirements. The key stage 3 curriculum builds well on the learning experiences gained at key stage 2. Progression for learners from key stage 2 to 3 in Welsh first language is adequate.

The school meets the needs of key stage 4 and post-16 learners very well. It offers a wide range of general and vocational courses in key stage 4. All learners have the opportunity to gain qualifications. A productive partnership exists with Coleg Menai and with other partnership schools in the area. The school exceeds the requirements of the Learning and Skills' (Wales) Measure. A relevant curriculum is delivered to all

pupils with additional learning needs. More able and talented learners are given valuable opportunities to gain additional qualifications where appropriate.

The school is successful in ensuring that nearly all learners follow their preferred choice of study at key stage 4 and post-16. The school prepares and guides learners well for making their subject choices and planning for Learning Pathways 14-19.

There is a good variety of extra curricular activities. They provide a range of experiences from drama, sporting and musical activities through to the exemplary charity work that learners undertake.

On the whole, the delivery of key skills in key stage 3 and key stage 4 is adequate. There is good provision for information and communications technology and the mapping of contributions from other subjects, delivery is good. Provision in numeracy is developing well.

Opportunities for learners to improve their literacy skills however are under developed. While there is appropriate provision to develop the skills of learners on the special educational needs register, there is insufficient planning and co-ordination for the development of literacy skills for all pupils within all subjects throughout the school.

Opportunities for learners to gain accreditation for their skills are limited.

Welsh language provision is good. Around half of learners are entered for the Welsh GCSE second language long course; the remainder follows the GCSE Welsh first language course. Many departments contribute effectively to the delivery of the Welsh dimension. However insufficient opportunities are provided by the school to develop and raise the status of Welsh and bilingualism.

Opportunities to develop sustainable development and global citizenship are good. The work of the Eco-group is effective and their re-cycling work is very good.

Teaching: Adequate

Teaching is good in many lessons and excellent in a few. However, in a minority of lessons there are important shortcomings.

Where teaching is good or excellent, teachers plan lessons imaginatively to motivate and engage learners, and enable them to work actively and collaboratively in their learning. In these lessons teachers ensure that all learners are developing knowledge and skills which help them learn more effectively. The pace of learning is often brisk and stimulating with high expectations and challenge for all. Teachers have good subject knowledge, and many use well directed questioning and a range of well matched resources skilfully to draw learners into discussion and extend their reasoning and understanding. The excellent rapport between staff and learners promotes a positive learning environment and good progress. Well conducted plenary sessions enhance the learning.

In the minority of lessons where there are important shortcomings there are low expectations, a limited range of poorly matched activities and approaches, insecure

classroom management and too much teacher talk leads to a slow pace and superficial understanding.

Teachers regularly mark and assess learners' work so that they know how well they are performing. Many provide constructive feedback and subject specific pointers for improvement. In a minority of cases marking is less useful and does not identify areas for follow up. In a number of subjects approaches such as peer and self assessment are used well to help learners understand how to make progress and establish improvement targets.

Many learners know their current and expected levels of achievement. A whole school tracking system monitors learners' progress, identifies underachievement promptly, and enables teachers to provide appropriate intervention.

Interim and end of year reports of good quality provide parents with comprehensive information on progress, effort and attainment. Comments are specific and indicate clearly to learners how to improve.

Care, support and guidance: Good

There are effective arrangements to encourage and support learners' health and wellbeing. Most learners and their parents state that learners feel safe at school. However, a minority of learners states that the school does not take sufficient notice of their views and make changes as they have suggested.

Learning experiences successfully promote pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.

The school makes effective links with other agencies to provide a wide range of supportive and specialist services. Well planned induction programmes provide new learners with a good understanding and knowledge of the school. The school provides a well planned personal and social education programme and offers good support and guidance to ensure that learners make well-informed choices.

Pupils with additional learning needs are identified early and receive well planned provision in designated classes. Pupils who are withdrawn for specific literacy lessons receive good support.

Individual education plans are detailed, but strategies recommended are not always applied and tasks are not adapted consistently to meet their needs in mainstream classes. Learning assistants provide good support but there is insufficient monitoring of the impact of their work.

The school has an appropriate safeguarding policy and procedures for safeguarding.

Learning environment: Good

The school is a well ordered community where diversity is respected and celebrated. Learners comment very favourably on the ethos of the school. They feel safe and secure. They benefit from good levels of individual care and support. Assemblies and personal and social education lessons enable learners to engage positively with multiculturalism and diversity. Equal access to the curriculum, subject choices and extra-curricular activities is provided for nearly all learners.

Accommodation is sufficient for the number of learners. Both general teaching classrooms and specialist areas are of good quality. The campus is well maintained and clean.

Resources are matched to learners' needs with good information and communications technology and library facilities. Displays in corridors and classrooms support learning and celebrate achievement effectively.

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

The headteacher has a strategic vision for the school. He is well supported by his senior management team. Together they give clear direction to the school's work and future development.

The headteacher has introduced a series of measures to ensure greater consistency to the work of the school. These arrangements are beginning to have a positive impact on the school's work.

Nearly all staff at all levels are clear about their roles and responsibilities and carry them out effectively. Senior managers are generally well informed about the work of departments and year groups and provide good support.

Middle managers are becoming increasingly accountable for their areas of responsibility.

The school's governing body is generally well organised and are appropriately informed about the performance of the school. They work well with the headteacher to agree development strategies and monitor the school's progress towards its targets. Governors are developing in their roles as critical friends.

The school works well to address local and national priorities such as Learning Pathways, healthy living and partnerships with other providers.

Improving quality: Good

The cycle of monitoring, evaluation and review is embedded in school procedures. Senior and middle managers analyse performance data in detail and use it to set challenging targets. They make use of a wide range of first-hand information to make reasoned judgements about performance. However, they do not make enough use of lesson observation to judge standards in the classroom.

Planning for improvement is developing steadily and it draws on the results of self-evaluation. The plans allocate resources and outline success criteria, but these lack sufficient detail.

Several teachers make valuable contributions to the development and sharing of professional knowledge with other schools. Effective arrangements within the school help ensure that good practice is shared. This is beginning to have a positive effect, for example in the quality of support for vulnerable learners.

Most of the recommendations from the last inspection report have been addressed and implemented.

Partnership working: Good

The school has formed strong and effective partnerships with other providers which has improved the range of curriculum choices for learners at key stage 4 and post-16.

The school has established good curricular links with its primary partner schools in order to facilitate continuity and progression in learning experiences. The school has strong links with the community, notably Bangor Pride and good liaison with parents/carers. It works well with other agencies to improve learners' outcomes and wellbeing.

There are excellent links between the school and the initial teacher training establishments.

Resource management: Adequate

The headteacher controls and manages the budget very effectively and spending is well planned and monitored. Within budgetary constraints the school makes effective use of its resources.

There are suitable staffing levels of appropriately qualified teaching staff. They are deployed effectively and are well supported by ancillary staff. The school meets all statutory requirements relating to the national agreement on 'Raising Standards and Tackling Workload'. Senior managers identify teachers' professional development needs through performance management arrangements.

The management of the school site and buildings is very good.

In view of their judgement on standards inspectors judged value for money to be adequate.

Appendix 1

Commentary on performance data

In 2011, at key stage 3, the percentage of learners attaining the core subject indicator (the expected performance in English or Welsh, mathematics and science) was slightly below national and family averages. Compared with schools with a similar percentage of free school meals, the school dropped to the fourth quarter having been above average in the two previous years.

The percentage of key stage 3 learners attaining level 5 or above in English was well below average in 2011. At level 6 and above performance in English in 2011 was in line with the family average. However, over the past three years performance at this level has been consistently below average when compared with schools with a similar percentage of free school meals.

The percentage of learners attaining level 5 or above in Welsh first language has fluctuated over the past three years, though in 2011 they were above average. The attainment of key stage 3 learners in mathematics and science has been consistently above average over this period of time.

In 2010, at key stage 4, the percentage of learners attaining the level 2 threshold including English and mathematics was above family and national averages. The percentage of learners attaining the level 1 threshold and the wider points score (comprising all externally approved qualifications at age 16) were also above the national average, though below the family averages.

In 2010, when compared to similar schools based on the percentage of learners entitled to free school meals, the percentages of learners attaining level 2 in English and mathematics combined, in mathematics and in Welsh first language were below average. In science and the core subject indicator, the percentages of learners attaining level 2 were above average. In 2010, the percentage of learners attaining level 2 in English was well below average.

In two out of the past three years, performance in English and in Welsh first language has been below average when compared with schools with a similar percentage of free school meals.

Post-16 learners generally attain well. The percentage of post-16 learners attaining the level 3 threshold has been slightly above the national average in recent years. Attainment on the wider points score over recent years has been above the Welsh average over this period of time.

While on the whole girls outperform boys at key stage 3 and boys outperform girls at key stage 4, the relative underperformance of boys in Welsh first language at key stage 3 and key stage 4 is significant.

Learners with special educational needs, as well as learners for whom English is an additional language, make generally good progress in relation to their abilities. At key stage 3 the performance of learners entitled to free school meals has risen in recent years. However, at key stage 4, the performance of pupils entitled to free school meals is slightly below the family average.

In three out of the past four years the percentages of learners leaving key stage 4 with no qualifications have been below average. Increasing numbers of Year 11

learners have remained in full-time education. Increasing numbers of students go on to higher education after the sixth form.

Learners make good progress in the majority of lessons. They gain new knowledge and are able to apply it in mastering new concepts and solving problems. However, in a minority of lessons, learners do not develop a sufficiently secure understanding of new knowledge and concepts or develop their skills well enough.

Most learners listen with due attention. However a few do not listen with enough care to teachers' explanations or to the opinions of other learners. Many are able to contribute thoughtfully to discussion in the whole class or in pairs or small groups. More able learners express their views confidently.

Most learners extract and interpret information effectively from texts. Many write well for a range of purposes; more able learners produce balanced and reasoned analyses and write at length. A minority of learners of all abilities make spelling and basic grammatical errors.

Most learners who receive targeted catch-up support in literacy make good progress. Learners at both key stages 3 and 4 develop good mathematical and information and communication technology skills across the curriculum.

Learners at key stage 3 make appropriate progress in Welsh second language.

Appendix 2

Stakeholder satisfaction report

Responses to parent questionnaires

There were 474 responses to the parent questionnaire representing a good proportion of the total number of parents. Of those that responded, many parents gave a positive or very positive response to many questions.

Many parents are satisfied with the school. They state that it is well run and that their children are safe and like the school. Most parents indicate that their children were helped to settle in well when they started school. Many consider there is a very good range of extra-curricular activities and that their children are encouraged to be healthy. They feel very comfortable about approaching the school to discuss matters about their child's education and wellbeing.

Most parents believe that their children are making good progress. They consider staff expectations to be good and that homework reinforces learning. Many indicate that teaching is good and that staff support their children well. They feel that their children are well prepared for moving on to the next school or college. The large majority of parents feel well informed about their children's progress and believe that staff treat all children fairly and with respect.

Responses to learner questionnaires

There were 234 responses from learners, selected at random from across the age range. Most learners state that they feel safe in school. Many indicate that they have someone to turn to if they have any concerns and believe that the school deals well with bullying.

Many learners state that the school teaches them to be healthy and most indicate that there are plenty of opportunities to get regular exercise.

Most learners consider that they are doing well and that staff help them to learn and make progress and encourage them to take responsibility. Many believe that they have enough books and equipment and the majority consider that homework helps them to understand and improve their work. Most feel well prepared for further education or employment.

Most learners confirm that the school helps them to understand and respect people from other backgrounds. Many indicate that staff treat them fairly and with respect. About half of all learners feel the school takes account of their views.

About one quarter of all learners express concerns about behaviour.

Appendix 3

The inspection team

Peter Harris	Reporting Inspector
Glyn Griffiths	Team Inspector
Bethan Whittall	Team Inspector
David Hughes	Team Inspector
Andrew Herdman	Team Inspector
Gwynoro Jones	Lay Inspector
Rod Francis	Peer Inspector
Michelle Hanlon	School Nominee

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 LEAs.

The term 'Reception' (R) refers to the year group of pupils in a primary school who reach the age of five during the academic year. Year 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	R	Y1	Y2	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:

Key stage 1	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