



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

A report on

**Ysgol Dyffryn Aman
Margaret Street
Ammanford
Carmarthenshire
SA18 2NW**

Date of inspection: November 2019

by

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

About Ysgol Dyffryn Aman

Ysgol Dyffryn Aman is a bilingual school that is maintained by Carmarthenshire local authority. There are 1,436 pupils on roll, 267 of whom are in the sixth form. These figures are slightly lower than at the time of the last core inspection in October 2012, when there were 1,577 pupils on roll.

The school is situated in Ammanford at the foot of the Black Mountain. Around half of pupils come from the town itself, and the other half from the surrounding rural area and nearby villages. The proportion of pupils who are eligible for free school meals is 18.9%, which is a little higher than the average across Wales of 16.4%.

Almost a third of pupils come from Welsh-speaking homes. Around 47% of pupils speak Welsh fluently and a little over half study Welsh as their first language.

Nearly 6% of pupils have a statement of special educational needs, compared with 2.2% across Wales. Nearly 30% of pupils have special educational needs. This figure is higher than the national average of 22.9%. The school has a specialist teaching facility for 29 pupils with profound and complex learning needs.

The headteacher and one deputy headteacher were appointed in September 2017. The senior leadership team includes the headteacher, two deputy headteachers, three assistant headteachers, two senior teachers and the special educational needs co-ordinator.

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

Ysgol Dyffryn Aman has an extremely homely and inclusive Welsh ethos. Most pupils show very positive attitudes towards their work. An excellent feature is their willingness to persevere when facing challenges. Overall, they are polite and friendly pupils who work together extremely well.

Pupils have a wide range of subjects from which to choose in Year 10 and the sixth form, and there is a variety of beneficial extra-curricular activities. As a result of dynamic and enthusiastic teaching, many pupils make sound progress in their skills and subject understanding. However, a minority of pupils' Welsh linguistic skills are not as good as their English skills.

The senior leadership team sets high expectations for staff and pupils. They share a clear vision to ensure the highest levels of wellbeing and improve pupils' Welsh language skills. Leaders at all levels work together effectively and are willing to trial and evaluate experimental curricular arrangements.

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

Recommendations

- R1 Improve pupils' standards of oracy and writing in Welsh
- R2 Increase the proportion of courses that are available in Welsh in key stage 4 and the sixth form
- R3 Plan to ensure opportunities for pupils to make progress in their information and communication technology (ICT) skills across the curriculum
- R4 Eliminate the financial deficit by working with the local authority, and address the health and safety issue that was identified during the inspection

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 wellbeing and improving pupils' resilience, to be disseminated on Estyn's website.

Main findings

Standards: Good

During their time at the school, many pupils make quick progress in their subject knowledge and skills. They recall previous learning correctly and apply it skilfully to new situations. However, in a few cases, pupils do not have a sound enough understanding of basic subject concepts.

Most pupils have proficient English oracy skills. They listen attentively to each other and discuss complex themes enthusiastically. For example, in their religious education lessons, they consider whether being religious is necessary to be a 'good' person. Most pupils have an extensive general vocabulary and many use subject-specific terminology correctly. However, the Welsh oral skills of pupils who receive much of their education through the medium of Welsh have not been developed to the same extent as their English oral skills. A minority of these pupils are too willing to turn to English during class discussions. They are reluctant to discuss ideas, partly because they do not have extensive enough vocabulary to express themselves confidently in Welsh.

Most pupils are confident readers, particularly in English. They read aloud fluently with relevant expression. They are able to gather relevant information from a range of texts, for example when reading about Luigi Galvani's experiments on the effect of electricity on the muscles of a dead frog in their science lessons. A minority of pupils show the skills to analyse complex texts in depth and find implied meanings. However, when reading aloud in Welsh, a minority of pupils are uncertain and lack confidence.

Many pupils write at length in English about a range of topics and for different audiences with appropriate technical accuracy. They set out their work logically and convey their ideas clearly when discussing complex issues. For example, in their design and technology lessons, they give mature consideration to the effect of deforestation in the rainforest as a result of the human desire for mahogany. A few pupils show exceptional talents in writing, for example when describing the ascent of Mont Blanc: 'Timothy stared at the dark void beneath him, struggling to hold on to the cracked, sharp rocks. All that stopped him from falling was his grip, no harness or companion'. However, overall, a minority of pupils' skills have not been developed to the same extent in Welsh. They do not use appropriate Welsh syntax and there are errors in their linguistic accuracy.

Most pupils across the ability range have sound number skills. They discuss whole numbers, multiplication and division, and use decimals and fractions confidently. Many pupils are able to draw accurate scatter graphs and insert sensible lines of best fit to highlight patterns in the data. Overall, many pupils apply their number skills skilfully across the curriculum. For example, in their engineering lessons, they use their understanding of proportions skilfully to mark the location of holes, divided equally, on a drilling jig.

Many pupils use ICT programs appropriately, for example when designing three-dimensional shapes in their design and technology lessons and moving a virtual turtle around a grid in their mathematics lessons. However, overall, pupils do not develop their ICT skills increasingly across the curriculum.

Many pupils develop their creative skills beneficially. Examples include experimenting with syncopation when composing songs in a reggae style in their music lessons and experimenting with a range of artistic styles in their art lessons when creating original designs for doors.

By the end of key stage 4, during the last three years, pupils' performance has compared favourably with that of similar schools, overall. However, in the sixth form, pupils' performance is slightly lower than expected, considering their previous performance. The performance of pupils who are eligible for free school meals compares favourably with the performance of this group of pupils in similar schools.

Wellbeing and attitudes to learning: Excellent

Pupils' wellbeing and attitudes to learning are an extremely strong feature of Ysgol Dyffryn Aman. Pupils appreciate the support that they receive and thrive within a community that has a special familial spirit.

Most pupils enjoy coming to school. They behave very well in lessons and around the school. Most pupils are very polite and treat each other, staff and visitors with respect.

Most pupils show very positive attitudes towards learning. They concentrate diligently in lessons and show resilience when working on challenging tasks. They work very effectively in pairs and groups in order to support each other to make progress in their learning.

The school council is a very enthusiastic body that has a very positive influence on a wide range of aspects of school life, for example by improving the school environment by introducing water fountains in order to reduce the use of plastic. It has also established the proactive lesbian, gay, bisexual and transsexual group, which makes a beneficial contribution towards fostering positive attitudes towards diversity.

Pupils with profound educational needs develop excellent life skills within Canolfan Amanwy, for example by taking increasing responsibility for travelling independently to the local college.

Many pupils, including those with special educational needs, are given very valuable opportunities to develop their leadership skills by taking part in a number of the school council's sub-committees, such as the 'Eco Group' and the 'Welshness Group'. Sixth-form pupils develop their leadership skills beneficially in various ways, for example by organising the 'Amanwyl' festival to promote awareness and enjoyment of Welsh culture. They also act effectively as 'buddies' for vulnerable pupils and contribute beneficially towards supporting pupils' wellbeing in the "Cwtsh" provision.

Many pupils take part in a wide range of very appealing extra-curricular activities, which include Latin, gymnastics and art clubs. Groups of pupils have shown initiative by establishing and running their own clubs, for example the 'Polish Speaking Club' and the 'Clwb Clecs', where they are given opportunities to use the Welsh language socially.

Pupils make valuable contributions to the community by raising money for local and national charities, such as Ammanford food bank, Sport Relief and Save the Children.

Many pupils develop their personal and social skills exceptionally by shouldering different responsibilities within the school community. An example of this is the 'Kindness Ambassadors' who organise activities to promote pupils' understanding of humanitarian issues.

Most pupils feel safe at school and are confident that they receive support when facing problems. Many feel that staff respond well to the rare cases of bullying. Most pupils understand the importance of following a healthy lifestyle and understand how to stay safe online.

Teaching and learning experiences: Good

Most teachers forge an extremely close and supportive working relationship with their pupils. Nearly all have good subject knowledge and many conduct their lessons dynamically and with infectious enthusiasm.

In many cases, teachers plan their lessons very carefully to capture pupils' imagination and ensure consistent progress in their skills and subject knowledge. In these lessons, teachers provide an appropriately high level of challenge for pupils and prepare attractive and interesting learning resources. These teachers provide pupils with clear and useful explanations. They also provide valuable opportunities for them to develop their skills and subject knowledge independently. These teachers have high expectations in terms of what pupils can achieve and manage their behaviour sensitively. In a majority of cases, teachers adapt their teaching skilfully to ensure that pupils across the ability range make progress.

There are a few cases of inspirational teaching, which lead to exceptional progress. In these cases, teachers have very high expectations of pupils and show passion for their subject. These teachers use their deep subject knowledge to plan lessons very carefully and ensure very swift progress in pupils' skills and subject knowledge.

In a few lessons, teachers do not have high enough expectations. Teachers' planning in these lessons does not ensure appropriate progress in pupils' skills. Often, this is because of shortcomings in planning, which provides activities with insufficient challenge, for example copying information from the board. These lessons move at a very slow pace. They do not succeed in capturing pupils' imagination or improving their skills. In a minority of cases, teachers do not use the Welsh language with pupils or encourage them to use it.

In most lessons, teachers use questions skilfully. They ask probing questions and develop pupils' responses by challenging them to think more deeply and strengthen their understanding. In these lessons, teachers walk around the classroom to ensure that pupils understand the concepts in question and correct misconceptions sensitively. In many lessons, teachers provide useful feedback on pupils' work and follow-up tasks to give them an opportunity to improve a particular skill. However, in a minority of cases, teachers' feedback is not specific enough to ensure that pupils know how to improve their work.

The school provides a broad and balanced curriculum that meets most pupils' needs. In key stage 4 and the sixth form, there is a wide range of academic and occupational qualifications. By working with local partners, including a further education college, the school succeeds in expanding options that are available to pupils and ensure progression in subjects such as engineering and construction. The school adapts the curriculum effectively in response to the needs of individuals and groups of pupils. This includes providing courses to expand the learning experiences of more able pupils and support the progress of pupils with special educational needs. For example, there are Latin, geology and astronomy courses. However, pupils do not receive enough sports lessons in key stage 4.

The curriculum builds successfully on learning from previous key stages. A minority of subjects have developed useful projects jointly with partner primary schools in order to support the transition from key stage 2 to key stage 3. Leaders evaluate and review the curriculum regularly, and adapt it appropriately to meet pupils' needs and national priorities. For example, the school is experimenting with a new teaching method in Year 7 through a project learning scheme. Although it is in its early stages, pupils have benefitted from valuable experiences, such as a visit to an old people's home, to research the difference between generations.

A wide range of extra-curricular activities enriches pupils' learning experiences effectively. For example, visits to Glamorgan cricket club and the Hay Festival help to promote the importance of reading. More able pupils benefit from valuable activities, such as an art project for Crimestoppers and contributing to an archaeological dig.

The school provides appropriate opportunities for pupils to learn about Welsh heritage and culture, for example by studying the Welsh landscape in geography lessons, appreciating the work of Welsh artists and working with a Welsh composer. In key stage 3, the school provides a suitable range of subjects through the medium of Welsh. However, in key stage 4 and the sixth form, the proportion of lessons that are provided through the medium of Welsh is relatively small.

The school provides valuable opportunities for pupils to develop their literacy and numeracy skills across the curriculum. However, planning is not detailed enough for pupils to make progress in their ICT skills across the curriculum.

The school identifies pupils with poor literacy and numeracy skills skilfully by using information that is available from tests and assessments. It provides effective interventions that improve these pupils' skills, and processes to track their progress are thorough.

Over the last three years, the school has ensured that many pupils succeed in gaining an appropriate qualification in Welsh at the end of key stage 4.

Care, support and guidance: Good

Ysgol Dyffryn Aman is a familial and caring community that provides valuable support and guidance for its pupils. The principle of 'ready to learn, develop and succeed' is a strong foundation for its work. As a result, there is a positive ethos that promotes pupils' health and wellbeing very successfully.

The school has robust procedures in order to track, monitor and promote pupils' academic progress and wellbeing. This includes a positive behaviour policy and an effective reward system. There is a wide variety of valuable strategies, such as the 'Nurture Group' in Year 7, which helps vulnerable pupils to settle quickly, and the 'Wellbeing Council Booklet', which includes valuable advice and references to useful apps.

The school provides comprehensive support for learners with special educational needs. The school tracks and reviews these pupils' progress very carefully against their relevant and ambitious targets. Support staff provide a wide range of beneficial interventions to meet their learning and social needs. Provision at Canolfan Amanwy provides excellent support for pupils with profound needs to develop their social and life skills, as well as enabling them to make significant academic progress.

The school has robust procedures to monitor attendance. Leaders use purposeful strategies to improve attendance, which have a positive effect on attendance across the school.

Overall, the school communicates effectively with parents in terms of their children's progress. Interim and full reports include beneficial comments and useful targets for improvement.

Pupils are given valuable opportunities to develop their personal skills by taking part in numerous extra-curricular activities, for example the chess club and various sport and music clubs. There are robust arrangements for eating and drinking healthily and promoting pupils' health and fitness. However, pupils in key stage 4 do not have sports lessons often enough.

The school succeeds in ensuring that pupils from all backgrounds and of all abilities, including pupils at Canolfan Amanwy, are included fully in all of the school's activities. This includes beneficial opportunities to discuss their work with managers and peers, and exciting activities such as shows and eisteddfodau. There are various stimulating opportunities for more able pupils to broaden their horizons, for example a 'Develop a Doctor' workshop in which they dissect a pig.

The school has strong arrangements to promote pupils' moral, social, spiritual and cultural development. The school provides a beneficial and relevant personal and social education programme as a result of an extensive consultation with pupils.

The school works successfully with a range of external agencies, which enriches support further. The pupil counselling service is used very effectively to plan support for them.

Pupils benefit from very beneficial advice and guidance when they transfer from one stage to another. For example, all Year 9 pupils receive one-to-one advice from a senior teacher on their subject options.

The school provides beneficial opportunities for pupils to contribute to the behaviour policy. As a result, many pupils understand the school's expectations. Most staff implement the behaviour policy consistently effectively. In a very few cases, the policy is not implemented effectively enough and there is minor disruption.

There are valuable opportunities for pupils to influence policies and procedures through the school councils. They have made valuable contributions to improvements such as reducing waste and changes to the school uniform.

Overall, the school's safeguarding arrangements are appropriate. However, a health and safety issue was brought to the school's attention during the inspection.

Leadership and management: Good

Since she was appointed in 2017, the headteacher has shared her clear and ambitious vision successfully with the whole school community. This vision is based on providing educational experiences of the highest standard for pupils while supporting the wellbeing of staff and pupils in a familial community. She is an energetic and wise leader who is respected highly by staff, pupils and the community. The remainder of the senior leadership team provides her with strong support as it responds to the government's priority to promote the aim of increasing the number of Welsh speakers. They work tirelessly to ensure equal opportunities and stimulating experiences for pupils in the catchment area.

Leaders at all levels share the vision of realising the school's motto, 'Let everyone respect their own endeavours', successfully with all of the school's stakeholders. As a result, most staff embrace the values of ensuring that all pupils strive diligently to reach their full potential. Strong leadership has contributed to ensuring high standards, effective teaching and pupils' very positive attitudes to learning.

The headteacher and senior leaders work together very closely and model professional values and conduct prominently in their everyday work. The senior leadership team's duties are allocated suitably to achieve the school's strategic aims and objectives. Its membership is expanded by providing valuable professional learning opportunities for staff to join temporarily to lead on cross-school projects, such as strengthening parental involvement and peer mentoring. This contributes toward creating a successful leadership team, in addition to succession planning.

Many middle leaders have a clear understanding of their role and shoulder their responsibilities in full. They play a key part in realising the school's main priorities of raising standards, improving pupils' wellbeing and improving the quality of teaching. However, a very few middle leaders do not make effective enough use of the evidence that is available to them to plan for improvement. They do not use the findings of monitoring and evaluation processes to improve the quality of teaching within their departments. Pastoral leaders work together successfully to ensure that pupils receive beneficial and relevant support.

There is a beneficial programme of line, departmental and staff meetings which give due and consistent attention to teaching, standards and pupils' wellbeing. As a result, there is clear accountability at all levels. There are also rigorous performance management processes.

The governing body is experienced and loyal and protects the school's interests carefully. They have a full understanding of the school's role in providing bilingual provision for the community. They have comprehensive knowledge of its strengths and areas for improvement, and have a secure understanding of performance data.

They use this knowledge effectively to challenge the senior leadership team on strategic issues. They have useful links with specific departments and use their expertise to operate as a critical friend to middle leaders.

Recently, the school has developed and strengthened its evaluation and planning for improvement processes. There is a valuable cycle of evaluation activities and useful quality assurance processes. These include rigorous data analysis, lesson observations and scrutiny of books, and beneficial opportunities for pupils to express their views. A notable element is that most middle leaders evaluate their performance rigorously and in detail. This provides all school leaders with an honest and clear picture of most of the school's strengths and areas for development. Most leaders plan sensibly to improve performance in their areas of responsibility. However, a very few do not plan in enough detail to improve the quality of teaching.

Most leaders place a strong focus on seeking the views of pupils and parents. Leaders have conducted several focus groups with parents to seek their views on the school's policies. Based on seeking pupils' views, many departments have adapted their provision to respond positively to their comments. For example, boys and girls are now taught jointly in some physical education lessons in key stage 3. This has had a positive effect on pupils' attitudes to learning. The English and mathematics departments have also developed their use of ICT to expand pupils' learning experiences.

There is a strong culture of professional learning within the school. There is a valuable, continuous programme of professional learning activities that link closely with whole-school priorities and staff's performance management objectives. The system of sharing good practice among staff is a strong element. For example, individual staff's expertise is used effectively to provide workshops that focus on specific aspects, such as teaching techniques and provision to support pupils' wellbeing. Recently, the school has provided beneficial opportunities for staff to reflect on their practice through 'Action Research Groups', which look at different elements of provision and plan improvements jointly. These groups are beginning to have a positive effect on a few areas, such as developing the use of digital programs to support learning.

The headteacher, business manager and governors manage resources and expenditure appropriately. They have a purposeful funding strategy in which there is a close link between decisions on expenditure and the school's priorities for improvement. For example, they have increased Welsh-medium provision in order to provide linguistic progression for pupils. However, the school currently has a financial deficit that is licensed by the local authority. There are sensible plans to clear the deficit within three years. Despite financial pressures, the school has succeeded in maintaining high standards in most aspects of school life. The school makes beneficial use of grants to support the achievement of the school's most vulnerable pupils, such as organising transport for pupils and attending after-school activities. The learning environment is used purposefully in order to provide memorable learning experiences for 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 (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' 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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Publication date: 09/01/2020