



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

A report on

**Ysgol Aberconwy
Morfa Drive
Conwy
LL32 8ED**

Date of inspection: March 2018

by

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

About Ysgol Aberconwy

Ysgol Aberconwy is an English-medium 11-18 mixed comprehensive school situated in the town of Conwy. There are 768 pupils on roll, including 122 in the sixth form. This compares with a total of 975 pupils, including 181 in the sixth form, when the school was last inspected in 2012.

Seventeen-point-two per cent of pupils are eligible for free school meals. This figure is broadly in line with the Welsh average of around 17% for secondary schools.

Less than 2% of pupils live in the 20% most deprived areas of Wales. Around 18% of pupils have additional learning needs, and just over 1% have a statement of special educational needs. Both of these figures are below the Welsh averages of, respectively, 21.5% and 2%. The school houses the Conwy local authority dyslexia support unit.

Most pupils are from a white, British background. Very few speak English as an additional language. Around 10% of pupils are from Welsh speaking homes.

The current headteacher took up his post in September 2014. Since then the headteacher has restructured the senior leadership team. He has redefined the roles and responsibilities of members of the team and also appointed an additional member of staff to this team. The senior leadership team now consists of seven assistant headteachers.

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 Aberconwy's inclusive, supportive and nurturing ethos has a significant beneficial impact on pupils' wellbeing and personal development. Most pupils are courteous and respectful towards their peers, staff and visitors. They behave well in lessons and around the school and have positive attitudes to learning. In many lessons, most pupils make suitable progress in developing their knowledge, understanding and skills. However, over the past four years, performance at key stage 4 and pupils' progress from previous key stages has been inconsistent.

Teaching has many strengths although, in a minority of lessons, learning activities do not always challenge pupils well enough to achieve their full potential. The headteacher and senior leaders communicate a clear vision successfully to staff and parents and have brought about improvements in key areas of the school's work. However, leadership at all levels has not had enough impact on improving the quality and consistency of teaching and in raising standards.

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

Recommendations

R1 Improve standards, particularly at key stage 4

R2 Improve the quality of teaching and the effectiveness of assessment

R3 Improve the effectiveness of leadership at all levels

What happens next

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

Main findings

Standards: Adequate and needs improvement

In many lessons, most pupils make suitable progress in developing their knowledge, understanding and skills. However, over the past four years, performance at key stage 4 and pupils' progress from previous key stages has been inconsistent.

In many lessons, most pupils recall prior work accurately and many apply this well to new situations. Many pupils develop relevant subject-specific skills and acquire a secure understanding of key principles and issues. For example, in science, most pupils understand the properties of light, explain angles of incidence and reflection and describe opaque objects. A few make particularly strong progress, for example when comparing and analysing the impact of writers' techniques in studying World War 1 poetry.

Many pupils express their ideas and opinions confidently both inside and out of classroom. The majority contribute enthusiastically to class or group discussions. They explain clearly, for example, how to solve problems using appropriate technical terms and give accurate descriptions and explanations of their experiments in science. In religious studies, many pupils explain thoughtfully how Buddhist teaching influences people's lifestyles. However, a minority of pupils provide brief, underdeveloped verbal responses to teachers' questions.

Many pupils read effectively to locate and select relevant information, for example to follow a recipe sheet to make a pizza or to explain the nature and impact of prejudice and intolerance. This helps them to consider and form opinions about historical events such as the Nazi treatment of Jews or the slave trade. In English, for example many pupils use short quotations well to support their opinions. More able pupils use inference successfully to analyse features such as the tone and style of literary texts.

Many pupils complete their written work neatly, taking care and showing pride in their presentation. They write competently in a range of styles and for specific purposes, for example when writing persuasive letters to their local member of parliament setting out clearly the arguments for or against extending a quarry in Conwy. Many construct interesting empathetic diary extracts using descriptive language well to create effect and showing a secure appreciation of particular themes such as the experiences of a slave. In science, more able pupils produce detailed extended evaluations of their experiments, explaining their initial hypothesis, describing the experiment and drawing reasoned conclusions. However, a minority of pupils produce generally brief and quite basic responses in their writing. These pupils do not develop their ideas or explain their opinions fully. In their writing across the curriculum, they make frequent errors in their spelling, punctuation and sentence structure.

When appropriate, the majority of pupils demonstrate suitable numeracy skills. They use data accurately, for example to produce graphs showing how the heart rate increases during exercise or how the length of a wire impacts on the current or voltage. More able pupils interpret graphs and charts well to draw thoughtful

conclusions about the data. However, a minority make too many careless errors when carrying out routine numerical tasks. They have difficulty in applying mathematical concepts to solve everyday problems.

Most pupils develop their information and communication technology (ICT) skills appropriately in their ICT lessons, although they do not use these extensively across the curriculum. They create documents and spreadsheets and produce interesting and informative presentations using transitions and effects imaginatively to engage the audience. Many pupils develop their creative skills well, for example when designing and manufacturing their own wooden robot in Year 7 using a laser cutter.

Performance in the level 2 threshold including English and mathematics has been inconsistent in the last four years. In 2017, performance in this indicator improved and is broadly in line with that of similar schools. Over the last four years, performance in the capped points score has been broadly in line with levels in similar schools. However, the proportion of pupils gaining five GCSE or equivalent grades at A*/A has been consistently below the proportions in similar schools for the last four years.

At key stage 4 in 2017, the performance of boys and girls improved in around half of indicators. However, over the last four years, the performance of boys and girls in many indicators has generally been below that in similar schools. In 2017, the performance of pupils eligible for free school meals dipped in many indicators. Over the last three years, performance for these pupils is generally above that of these pupils in similar schools in the majority of indicators. Pupils with additional learning needs make appropriate progress in line with their personal targets. At the end of Year 11, most pupils remain in full time education, employment or training.

Sixth form pupils generally demonstrate effective independent learning skills. They make good progress, for example, in the analysis of complex historical sources or when applying their understanding of the properties of vectors to solve particular problems. Over the last four years, performance in the sixth form has been variable. In two of the last three years, the percentage of pupils achieving the level 3 threshold has been broadly in line with the average for similar schools, as has the percentage of pupils achieving three A*/A grades. However performance in the average wider points score has been consistently below that in similar schools.

In each of the last three years, nearly all pupils have entered the full course GCSE in Welsh second language, with many achieving a C grade or better. Many pupils make effective progress in developing their Welsh language skills, in particular their understanding of the spoken language. The majority of pupils contribute well to group discussions and write with appropriate technical accuracy for a range of purposes. A few pupils use their Welsh language skills well across curriculum.

Wellbeing and attitudes to learning: Good

The school's inclusive and supportive ethos based on mutual respect is successful in promoting high levels of pupil wellbeing. As a result, most pupils feel safe in school and consider that the school deals well with any instances of bullying.

Most pupils are courteous and respectful towards their peers, staff and visitors. They behave well in lessons and around the school. Most pupils have positive attitudes to learning. They arrive promptly to lessons, settle quickly, and listen attentively to teachers' explanations and the views of their peers. Most pupils engage enthusiastically and apply themselves purposefully to a variety of tasks. In technology, many pupils enjoy choosing a particular product to design and make such as a cushion or piece of jewellery. They show pride in their work, for example by taking photographs of the finished product.

Many pupils are able to work independently for sustained periods. Most pupils work well in pairs, small groups and in whole-class settings, supporting each other's learning effectively. Many enjoy explaining their personal opinions, for example when writing letters or preparing speeches about a particular topic. A minority undertake valuable independent research, for example to understand the structure and concept of the Holocaust Memorial in Berlin. A few pupils ask thoughtful informed questions such as when considering the reliability of biblical texts. A very few pupils do not sustain their concentration well enough and are too easily distracted. As a result, these pupils make limited progress in their lessons.

Most pupils have a sound understanding of how to keep healthy, for example by eating a nutritious diet and undertaking regular physical exercise. Many take an active part in the school's wide range of extra-curricular sports clubs and recreational activities such as gymnastics, dodgeball, trampolining and tag rugby. Many pupils benefit from their participation in the school's valuable programme of cultural and creative activities, including musical and drama productions.

Where opportunities arise, pupils take on leadership roles and responsibilities enthusiastically. A minority of pupils make a particularly valuable contribution to the life and work of the school. For example, sports ambassadors organise and lead a beneficial variety of sporting activities for their fellow pupils. Sixth form mentors help younger pupils to improve their reading skills.

The school council makes a positive contribution to school life, for example through initiating the redesign and refurbishment of the toilet facilities and by obtaining funding to purchase and install two defibrillators on the premises. It has also played an active role in influencing behaviour policies, raising pupils' awareness of the importance of gender equality and re-designing the content of school planners.

Most pupils develop well as ethical and informed citizens. They contribute successfully to raising substantial amounts of money for local and national charities, such as Make Some Noise and Children in Need. As a result, these pupils make a valuable contribution to the local and wider community.

Teaching and learning experiences: Adequate and needs improvement

Although teaching has many strengths, overall, the quality of teaching is adequate and requires improvement.

Nearly all teachers have strong subject knowledge and are effective language role models. In many lessons, teachers explain concepts well and develop supportive working relationships with the pupils that create a positive learning environment.

Many teachers plan their lessons well, with clear learning objectives that include developing a range of skills as well as extending pupils' subject knowledge and understanding. In a few cases, teachers prepare stimulating and engaging tasks that capture pupils' imagination and inspire them to extend their learning beyond the classroom.

In many instances, teachers use questioning well to establish links to pupils' prior learning and to help them understand new concepts and skills. A few teachers use probing questioning to encourage pupils to think more deeply to justify their views. This helps pupils to understand, for example, how and why ingredients such as gluten are processed in food manufacture. In these lessons, teachers have high expectations of pupils that enable them to make strong progress in their learning.

In a minority of classes, teachers do not provide suitable opportunities to extend pupils' deeper understanding of the aspects introduced or to develop relevant higher-order skills. In a few cases, teachers do not ensure that activities are sufficiently well-matched to pupils' abilities, including those that are more able, or build well enough on their prior learning.

In many lessons, teachers give helpful and supportive verbal feedback to pupils, which enables them to make suitable progress. The majority of teachers provide useful written feedback that provides pupils with clear advice on how they can improve their work. A few teachers provide particularly valuable written feedback that directs pupils to reflect on the quality of their work or to make specific improvements. As a result, these pupils make immediate and beneficial improvements to their work. For example, in English, pupils describe the impact of a writer's choice of language more analytically. However, too often teachers' written comments do not indicate clearly enough what pupils need to do to improve the quality of their work. Overall, few teachers ensure that pupils have made suitable improvements to their work.

The school provides a broad and balanced curriculum that builds appropriately upon pupils' previous learning and meets the needs of nearly all pupils. In Year 7, in addition to the core subjects, the school provides pupils with engaging experiences through projects that develop their skills. At key stage 4 and in the sixth form, the school offers a broad range of academic and vocational qualifications through successful partnerships with a neighbouring college and other sixth forms in the local authority. These arrangements help the school to address national and local priorities well and support pupils to develop important employability and life skills. There is a broad range of sporting, creative and cultural enrichment activities that support pupils' learning and contribute well to their personal development.

The school has suitable arrangements that help pupils with weak literacy and numeracy skills to make secure progress in developing these skills. In each key stage, there are beneficial opportunities for pupils to utilise and develop their speaking and thinking skills. In many subject areas, there are appropriately planned opportunities for pupils to undertake a useful range of written tasks. However, there is too much variation in how effectively subjects across the curriculum develop pupils' ability to produce well-structured written responses. There are appropriate opportunities in a few areas of the curriculum for pupils to develop their numeracy skills but this aspect of the school's work is not well established.

In a few subject areas, pupils have worthwhile opportunities to use ICT. Overall, planning for pupils to develop these skills across the curriculum is at an early stage.

There is a well co-ordinated approach to developing pupils' knowledge and understanding of Welsh language and culture. Provision for Welsh second language is strong at key stage 3 and key stage 4. The school provides valuable opportunities for Welsh speaking pupils to maintain and develop their language skills through following a Welsh first language course in key stage 4. In technology lessons, a few Welsh speaking pupils use both Welsh and English when completing their project work and discussing their ideas.

Care, support and guidance: Good

The school promotes successfully an inclusive, supportive and nurturing community that has a significant beneficial impact on pupils' wellbeing and personal development.

Recent changes to the school's pastoral arrangements are contributing effectively to promoting pupils' wellbeing. Heads of year and year mentors work closely with form tutors to provide beneficial pastoral and academic support for pupils.

There are rigorous and systematic arrangements to monitor pupils' academic progress and wellbeing and to identify those pupils who need specific support. The school provides a broad range of relevant mentoring and intervention strategies to help meet the needs of these pupils. The school keeps parents well informed regarding all aspects of their children's progress. It works closely with parents to address those issues that may be affecting their child's learning and to help parents to provide whatever support they can. The school has strong links with a range of outside agencies such as educational psychologists, mental health teams and counsellors that offer valuable specialist support to individual pupils. These partnerships and specific initiatives such as beneficial personal support plans are having a positive impact on improving pupils' behaviour and attendance.

The school promotes pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development appropriately, for example through assemblies, tutor periods, visiting speakers and a suitable personal and social education programme. This programme helps pupils to lead healthy physical and emotional lives. There are suitable arrangements to promote healthy eating and drinking. The school provides helpful and impartial guidance and advice to pupils relating to subject options and future career choices. These approaches assist pupils in making informed choices about their future and in preparing them for the opportunities, responsibilities and experiences of adult life.

The school's house system contributes well to pupils' moral and ethical development, for example by encouraging their participation in valuable charitable activities such as raising money to purchase defibrillators for the school and local community. The school provides worthwhile opportunities for pupils to take part in a wide range of extra-curricular activities. These include sporting and recreational activities, as well as musical and dramatic performances, that enrich pupils' experiences.

Providing opportunities for pupils to voice their opinions is a strength of the school. Pupils play a valuable role in the life and work of the school. For example, the pupils' anti-bullying committee has worked well with the school to refine policies that have a positive impact on pupils' wellbeing.

The school provides an extensive range of initiatives to support the wellbeing and access to the curriculum of vulnerable children. The 'ABCD' base (dyslexia), 'Hafan' inclusion centre and 'Pontio' registration group for pupils with autism spectrum disorder support groups of pupils with additional learning needs to engage successfully in their learning. A nurture group for vulnerable pupils in Year 7 helps these pupils to settle into their new school and ensures that the specific needs of individual pupils are met effectively.

Staff provide a broad range of well-planned personalised support for those pupils with additional learning needs. Helpful pupil profiles enable teachers and learning support assistants to meet the needs of these pupils effectively. Pupils' progress in meeting their personal targets is tracked carefully. Specific initiatives include literacy and numeracy catch-up programmes, the 'maths buddy' support provided by sixth form ambassadors and the 'Bud' programme that helps young pupils to develop their self-confidence through reading stories to a dog.

Safeguarding arrangements meet requirements and give no cause for concern.

Leadership and management: Adequate and needs improvement

Leadership and management at all levels have brought about improvements in key areas of the school's work. However, they have not had enough impact on improving the quality and consistency of teaching and in raising standards.

The headteacher provides clear, supportive and decisive leadership that is contributing well to improving key aspects of the school's work. In particular, he has taken suitable steps to strengthen communication, improve staff morale, introduce beneficial curriculum initiatives and establish more robust quality assurance arrangements. The headteacher and senior leadership team work well together and have promoted successfully a clear vision for the school based around the mission 'ysbrydoli, cefnogi a llwyddo' – 'inspire, support and succeed'.

Since his appointment, the headteacher has restructured the senior leadership team and ensured that all members of the team have clear roles and responsibilities. These responsibilities are appropriate and distributed equitably amongst the senior team. Line management responsibilities and levels of accountability are well understood by staff and managers.

Most middle leaders perform their management roles efficiently and understand their responsibilities for improving the quality of teaching and raising standards. However, the effectiveness of middle leaders in ensuring high standards and improving the quality of teaching and learning in their areas of responsibility varies too much.

Governors are passionate about the school and the wellbeing and progress of all pupils. They are developing a sound understanding of the school's performance and the strengths and weaknesses of individual subjects, for example through their link governor activities. The governing body achieves an appropriate balance between supporting the school and challenging leaders, where appropriate, on aspects of performance.

The school has a systematic cycle of quality assurance activities that covers all areas of its work. Self-evaluation activities draw on a broad range of first-hand evidence, including lesson observations and scrutiny of pupils' work, and take suitable account of the views of pupils, parents and staff. Senior and middle leaders undertake thorough and generally robust teaching and learning audits and exam performance reviews for each subject area. Link governors have a worthwhile involvement in these performance reviews.

The school has an accurate and realistic awareness of its key strengths and most areas for development. The self-evaluation report is reviewed regularly throughout the year to provide an up-to-date evaluation of current performance. However, in a few areas the school does not identify clearly enough issues that require improvement, such as using the tutor period effectively.

The school development plan includes a broad range of relevant initiatives that address national priorities and those identified through self-evaluation activities well. The plan includes clear objectives, suitably ambitious targets and useful performance milestones. The quality of departmental evaluations and development plans varies too much. In a few cases, evaluations of subject area performance are over generous. In addition, these documents are not rigorous enough in evaluating the effectiveness and impact of teaching and assessment.

Performance management arrangements provide appropriate support and challenge to help staff sustain and improve their performance. All teaching staff participate in a useful and valued range of professional learning communities. Lead practitioners provide useful support to colleagues that is beginning to help improve the quality of teaching and learning.

The business manager, headteacher and governors manage the school's finances carefully. They use the available funding appropriately to deliver the school's strategic priorities. Together, they have identified financial efficiencies to balance short-term priorities alongside the longer-term needs of pupils and the local community. Leaders and managers know the costs of existing programmes, including sixth form provision, and review the viability of these programmes often to make sure that they are cost effective.

The level of staffing and expertise of teachers and support staff is appropriate to deliver the school's curriculum. Support staff are used effectively in the classroom and in specialist areas.

The school uses the pupil development grant appropriately to provide targeted support and interventions for identified pupils. As a result, over the past three years, outcomes for pupils eligible for free school meals are broadly in line with those in similar schools in many key performance indicators.

The school provides a pleasant and welcoming environment that is well maintained and supports pupils' wellbeing and learning well. Specialist areas, such as science laboratories and technology workshops, are well resourced.

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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