



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

**A report on**

**Ysgol Gyfun Aberaeron**

**South Road  
Aberaeron  
Ceredigion  
SA46 0DT**

**Date of inspection: March 2023**

**by**

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

**This report is also available in Welsh**

## About Ysgol Gyfun Aberaeron

Name of provider	Ysgol Gyfun Aberaeron
Local authority	Ceredigion County Council
Language of the provider	Welsh
Type of school	Secondary
Religious character	
Number of pupils on roll	581
Pupils of statutory school age	489
Number in sixth form	92
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 Secondary is 20.2%)	15.0%
Percentage of pupils identified as having additional learning needs (a) (The national percentage of pupils identified as having an additional learning need in Secondary is 17.8%)	27.6%
Percentage of pupils who speak Welsh at home	30.5%
Percentage of pupils with English as an additional language	
Date of headteacher appointment	01/09/2015
Date of previous Estyn inspection (if applicable)	10/11/2014
Start date of inspection	06/03/2023

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](https://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

Ysgol Gyfun Aberaeron is a close-knit, inclusive and bilingual community. Through the sensitive leadership of the headteacher and his senior team, a completely clear direction is set that places the pupil at the heart of all the school's work. The headteacher provides passionate and supportive leadership for the future of the school to all stakeholders. Leaders have nurtured a team of staff who are proud to be a part of an organisation that develops and improves regularly.

Pupils' well-being is a very high priority and a strong emphasis is placed on supporting pupils to ensure that they are happy and thrive academically. Most of the school's pupils are considerate and friendly young people who treat each other with care and treat staff and visitors with respect. They promote the school's values of empathy, ambition, creativity, resilience and pride through their good behaviour and positive attitudes to learning.

As a result of cohesive provision across the subjects, pupils develop their literacy, numeracy and digital skills well. They benefit from appropriate opportunities to read aloud to grow as confident readers and develop a range of digital skills in different subjects.

In key stage 4 and the sixth form, there is a range of interesting courses for pupils to choose from, including some that are relevant to the local area. There is a very wide range of valuable extra-curricular experiences available to pupils to enrich their learning experiences further.

While there are strengths in the quality of teaching across the school, where there is careful planning that engages pupils' interest and provides them with an appropriate level of challenge, there are common shortcomings in the expectations, planning and questioning of a minority of teachers. As a result, their lessons do not provide enough opportunities for pupils to be active in the lesson.

Provision for care, support and guidance is broad and cohesive and staff have a clear understanding of their role in keeping pupils safe. Overall, pupils are clear about whom to approach when they need help and support and appreciate the strong support they receive. Provision for pupils with additional learning needs (ALN) is a notable element of the school's work. As a result of a wide and comprehensive range of interventions, pupils with ALN make very strong progress. The school provides valuable opportunities for pupils to express an opinion on its work and play an important part in developments. The contribution of sixth-form pupils is key to many of the school's cultural and social activities.

Self-evaluation and improvement planning have led to improvements over time. Leaders usually evaluate the school's work in detail and identify specific strengths and areas for improvement. In a few quality assurance activities, leaders do not consider the effect of teaching on pupils' progress incisively enough.

## **Recommendations**

- R1 Improve the shortcomings identified in the report in relation to teaching
- R2 Strengthen evaluations in a few quality assurance activities to consider the effect of teaching on pupils' progress more closely

## **What happens next**

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

Estyn will invite the school to prepare a case study, to be disseminated on Estyn's website, on its work in relation to (i) the effect of the wide provision of interventions to support the development of pupils' literacy, numeracy, motor, personal, emotional and behavioural skills and (ii) a whole school programme to raise reading standards.

## Main findings

### Learning

Over time, many pupils make sound progress in their subject knowledge. In lessons, many pupils recall previous knowledge successfully and apply this knowledge appropriately to new contexts. In a very few cases where teaching is very effective, pupils make swift progress in their subject knowledge and understanding. In these cases, pupils use their knowledge skilfully when undertaking tasks and apply it to new contexts and make direct links to what they have learned previously. However, in a few cases, pupils do not make enough progress and do not develop their subject skills or knowledge soundly enough.

Most pupils listen attentively and respectfully to presentations by their teachers and the contributions of their peers. A majority of pupils express themselves fluently using natural Welsh dialect that flows freely. They also use English confidently, with a good range of vocabulary. A few pupils communicate eloquently orally in both languages and have a firm grasp of a wide range of subject terminology and sophisticated vocabulary. For example, in Welsh lessons, they use rich and extensive vocabulary when discussing the potential link between Wales and Ireland by discussing the language and literature of both countries as a background to the legends. However, the lack of confidence and lack of vocabulary of a few pupils means that they struggle to convey their ideas clearly in Welsh. In both languages, a minority of pupils have a tendency to provide short oral answers, without developing them fully. Often, this is because they do not have a wide enough range of vocabulary to express themselves fully or due to the nature of the teacher's questioning.

When they are given an opportunity to do so, most pupils read aloud willingly and many do so confidently. Many pupils develop beneficial reading skills when gathering information and locating facts in extended texts. For example, in history lessons, they read evidence sources about migration to Patagonia in the nineteenth century. More able pupils develop and compare literary texts successfully, for example in their English lessons when considering the poets' feeling about war in the poems 'Lessons' and 'The Soldier'.

Across the school, many pupils write at length in Welsh and English with a good level of clarity and appropriate vocabulary. Overall, many pupils organise their written work sensibly by using a definite structure and clear paragraphing. They write in a suitable style for a range of purposes and audiences in both languages, for example when expressing an opinion following research and analysing sources on anti-Semitism in their religious education lessons. More able pupils use a wide range of vocabulary and syntax or sophisticated phrases in their written work. However, in Welsh and English, there are careless grammatical and spelling errors in the work of a minority of pupils.

Many pupils have sound numeracy skills. Many pupils use their numeracy skills purposefully in many subjects including mathematics. For example, they use their understanding of shape and space when creating 3D drawings of their terrarium on isometric paper in their design and technology lessons. Many pupils analyse data appropriate and display it in the form of graphs. For example, in their geography

lessons, they calculate, display and analyse information when considering water usage in the home.

Many pupils develop their digital skills beneficially across the curriculum. For example, they use software skilfully when designing logos for the school Eisteddfod and create pie charts embedded in spreadsheets when studying the weather in their geography lessons.

Where there are beneficial opportunities for them to work independently, many pupils make sound progress in their thinking and problem-solving skills. For example, in their English lessons, they consider which characters from the play 'A View from the Bridge' would play in which position in their 5-a-side football team and give balanced reasons for their responses. Overall, many pupils develop valuable creative skills. In art lessons, they study the work of local artists and create skilful pencil images of Aberaeron. In physical education lessons, many demonstrate successful physical skills, for example when developing an effective technique to receive and pass the baton in a relay race.

Pupils with additional learning needs (ALN) make strong progress during their time at the school. Pupils in the specialist resource base, 'Canolfan y Môr', who have autistic spectrum disorders, make sound progress in their speech, language and social communication skills during their time at the centre.

### **Well-being and attitudes to learning**

Most pupils feel safe at the school and say that they are free from bullying. They know whom to approach if they have a cause for concern. They treat visitors, staff and each other with respect. Pupils have a strong sense of pride and belonging to the school community.

Specific pupils receive valuable support to support their behavioural and emotional development in a range of support centres. These include 'Hafan', 'Encil' 'Canolfan Dysgu' and 'Canolfan Croeso'. Most of these pupils benefit from the care and support they receive and make progress in their personal skills.

Pupils, including those with ALN, undertake leadership roles as members of the school council or the eco committee. The school council's decisions have had a positive effect on school life, for example by ensuring that there is a wider selection of vegan food in the canteen and seating and socialising areas around the site. They are currently discussing how to reward good behaviour in their lessons. Through the teaching and learning forum, pupils share their views about aspects of teaching and assessment and about increasing the curricular offer in key stage 4 and the sixth form.

Sixth-form pupils are excellent ambassadors for the school. They have positive attitudes to learning and are developing as confident, mature and responsible young people. They make a valuable contribution to school life and, by doing so, develop beneficial leadership skills. For example, they organise the Christmas fayre, lead the school Eisteddfod and co-ordinate fundraising activities for charities.

Pupils benefit socially from the excellent range of extra-curricular clubs, which include the Cymraeg i Bawb (CIB) club, the chess club and the feminism club. A high number of pupils attend the clubs regularly. Pupils develop their understanding of

healthy living by taking part in a wide range of sports activities. Many pupils appreciate and take pride in the creative, cultural and learning opportunities and experiences that are available.

Respect between staff and pupils is a strong element of the school's ethos and most pupils have a very positive working relationship with teachers. Overall, the behaviour of pupils across the school is very good. Most arrive at lessons punctually and settle immediately into their work.

Most pupils' attitudes to learning are consistently good and they concentrate effectively in their lessons. They listen attentively to the teacher and their peers and are enthusiastic when undertaking tasks in the classroom. When they are given an opportunity to do so, many pupils work well in groups and discuss and interact with each other appropriately.

### **Teaching and learning experiences**

The school provides a broad and balanced curriculum that meets the needs of nearly all pupils. In key stage 4, there is a range of subject options, which include vocational courses such as engineering, construction and health and care. The school provide a useful alternative curriculum for pupils at the 'Canolfan Dysgu' and 'Canolfan Croeso' class in key stage 4 and 5, which include appropriate vocational courses such as work skills, personal social development and home cooking. This prepares pupils for life outside school.

The school provides a wide range of courses in the sixth form, in addition to e-sgol courses and courses in co-operation with a local secondary school. Pupils are provided with beneficial information and guidance to make informed choices by advising them to follow the path that best suits them for the future.

Work on designing the curriculum, along with a specific focus on improving teaching, has led to a clear vision for the Curriculum for Wales. Staff have developed and tested interesting units of work, which aim to develop pupils' subject knowledge, understanding and skills. For example, Year 7 pupils are given opportunities to study and cook healthy foods and evaluate how nutrition benefits the body in their health and well-being lessons. Staff have trialled a variety of teaching strategies, evaluated their effectiveness and adapted and refined their planning to strengthen provision. Teachers work closely with primary schools in the Aeron cluster to plan learning progression.

The skills co-ordinators work effectively with departments to identify appropriate opportunities to plan and develop pupils' literacy, numeracy and digital skills. Following the pandemic, leaders have focused on specific strategies to improve pupils' literacy, including their oracy, to improve pupils' ability to discuss. Leaders work diligently to improve and strengthen pupils' reading skills, in addition to promoting their interest and enjoyment of reading. The school fosters a culture of reading that provides valuable experiences for pupils across the school. There is an opportunity to enjoy guided reading sessions and also beneficial opportunities to develop as independent learners.

The numeracy co-ordinator works with relevant subjects to develop beneficial opportunities for pupils to strengthen their numeracy skills. However, not all departments have responded to ensure valuable opportunities for pupils to develop

their numeracy skills at the appropriate level. There are numerous opportunities for pupils to develop their digital skills across the curriculum. Pupils who are digital ambassadors provide pupils and staff with useful support in the classrooms and create contemporary videos to be shown during the morning periods on subjects such as e-safety.

The personal and social education (PSE) programme supports the development of pupils' social and emotional skills effectively. During well-being lessons and morning periods, there are beneficial opportunities to discuss current and timely issues. The school provides valuable creative and cultural opportunities for pupils. These include local and international trips and clubs such as the rowing club, the crochet club, yoga sessions and the mixed basketball club. The school promotes Welshness and the use of the Welsh language appropriately through various activities, such as the CIB (Cymraeg i Bawb) Club, the school's annual Eisteddfod, Urdd activities and by celebrating Welsh occasions such as St Dwynwen's Day.

In most lessons, teachers have a positive working relationship with their pupils and create a supportive and homely learning environment. They have sound subject knowledge and many give clear instructions and explanations that support pupils to complete their work. They also provide beneficial resources to support learning. Many teachers move around the classroom regularly to provide pupils with useful advice on how to improve their work.

A majority of teachers plan useful tasks that build well on pupils' previous learning. These teachers provide beneficial opportunities for pupils to develop their understanding, knowledge and skills. They meet pupils' individual needs by providing a useful structure to help pupils to move forward without limiting the challenge. These teachers are enthusiastic, question appropriately to check understanding and model answers and subject terminology to help pupils understand what they need to achieve.

In the very few cases where teaching is at its best, teachers plan imaginative lessons and provide challenging and interesting tasks that motivate pupils to achieve to the best of their ability. These teachers ask probing questions that prompt pupils to think more deeply, broaden their understanding and justify their views.

In a minority of cases, teaching does not ensure that pupils achieve their potential. This is often because teacher plan a series of tasks, rather than considering what pupils need to know, understand or be able to do. They have a tendency to talk too much or set tasks that last too long and this hinders the pace of learning. These teachers do not set enough of a challenge or ask probing enough questions to encourage pupils to think more deeply or consider wider points of view. As a result, pupils are not given enough opportunities to respond, discuss and contribute orally.

Overall, the quality of written feedback on pupils' work varies within and across departments. In the best examples, teachers draw pupils' attention to mistakes, including language and spelling errors, and provide valuable comments and beneficial suggestions on how to improve. However, this feedback does not always lead to an improvement in pupils' work. Pupils are not always given enough opportunities to respond to teachers' comments.

The school provides beneficial information to parents and carers about their child's progress through parents' evenings, interim and full reports. Reports for parents



include information about the child's achievement and progress, in addition to useful targets for how to improve.

### **Care, support and guidance**

Ysgol Gyfun Aberaeron is an extremely caring, inclusive and supportive community. A strong emphasis is placed on providing opportunities for all pupils to thrive academically and socially, whatever their needs or difficulties.

The school has robust arrangements for monitoring attendance. Staff deal with the very rare cases of bullying in a timely and effective manner. Valuable support is given to pupils who need emotional and behavioural support at 'Hafan' and 'Encil'. The relevant leaders work effectively and productively with a wide range of external agencies to support pupils' welfare and well-being. They also engage and work effectively with parents to support pupils' participation and progress. The school holds a weekly 'parents' surgery' to discuss concerns and provide support. For example, workshops are held to increase parents' confidence to support their children's reading.

Provision for pupils with additional learning needs (ALN) is an exceptional feature. Under the influential leadership of the ALN co-ordinator, a comprehensive range of support is provided for pupils who need it. This contributes towards pupils making strong progress against their individual targets over time. Provision includes a wide range of enrichment interventions for pupils with ALN and pupils who need specialist support. These include spelling and number workshops, art therapy for individuals and groups of pupils, social stories and clay therapy sessions for pupils with weak motor and handwriting skills. An excellent example of support is the bilingual group reading sessions twice a week, where a number of pupils with poor reading skills make significant progress over time in their reading and processing skills.

The school provides two appropriate support units to meet the needs of vulnerable pupils in the mainstream. 'Canolfan Croeso' is a provision for pupils with moderate difficulties and 'Canolfan Dysgu' is a resource for those with general learning needs. The curricular provision, care and support at both centres are exceptional. As a result of these strengths, pupils make strong progress in their learning, personal skills and life skills. A strong element of this is the number of sixth-form pupils at 'Canolfan Dysgu' and 'Canolfan Croeso' who succeed in gaining vocational and academic qualifications and that move on to relevant courses and work.

The school also maintains a specialist resource base for pupils with autistic spectrum disorders or profound needs, called 'Canolfan y Môr'. The success of this provision in meeting the needs of this pupils is notable. Staff work robustly to ensure exemplary and rich learning experiences for their pupils. For example, they learn about the Aberaeron area and compare the old houses and boats in the harbour with the current ones and follow the town's heritage trail. Recently, pupils have worked on a project with Theatr Felin Fach to create a valuable theatrical performance. Many pupils make significant progress in their communication and social skills over time. In a few cases, pupils at 'Canolfan y Môr' succeed in transferring to 'Canolfan Croeso' and make strong progress in the independent skills by the time they leave school.

The school provides regular and valuable opportunities for pupils across the age range to develop personal and social skills. Provision for personal and social education (PSE) is broad and cumulative. Due emphasis is placed on developing

pupils as respectful and moral individuals by learning about the importance of diversity and through beneficial relationships and sexuality education. On the whole, there are suitable arrangements for pupils' spiritual development. There are numerous opportunities for pupils to develop empathy and understanding through charitable work. For example, they raise money for Ukrainian refugees and the victims of the disasters in Turkey and Syria by holding a cake stall. Valuable opportunities are organised for pupils to contribute to their communities, for example by cleaning Aberaeron beach, working on the Llanerchaeron Estate and sharing homemade cakes with local residents who attend a dementia group.

The school provides extensive opportunities for a wide range of pupils to share their views and influence aspects of school life through the school council and other forums. The recent productive co-operation between the headteacher and a sixth-form focus group is an excellent example of pupils leading and influencing school life. As a result of the concerns of older pupils about an increase in sexual language, behaviour and harassment in society, an appropriate policy was produced for the school and beneficial activities were organised to promote respect and healthy relationships. These include informative assemblies, visits from guest speakers and planning specific discussion sessions.

Senior leaders prioritise keeping pupils and staff safe. Safeguarding and child protection arrangements are robust and known to all. As a result, most pupils feel safe at school and are confident that staff will respond appropriately to any concerns they may have. There are robust arrangements for staff to identify and share concerns with senior leaders and the designated safeguarding person works effectively with statutory external agencies. Arrangements for training staff and governors in safeguarding issues are consistent and robust and the school meets statutory requirements in relation to safe recruitment. The headteacher and governors have worked closely with the local education authority recently to improve the security of the site.

## **Leadership and management**

The headteacher is an ambitious leader who leads by example and treats pupils and staff with respect and empathy. He has clear aspirations that focus on ensuring that the school is the best that it can be in all aspects of its work. The school's vision is based firmly on shared core values that are shared with stakeholders and embraced consistently by staff. Leaders and staff nurture the school's values of empathy, ambition, creativity, resilience, confidence and pride in all aspects of their work.

The school's senior leaders support the headteacher robustly and they are an effective leadership team with high expectations. They lead their areas of responsibility successfully and drive whole-school improvements. Through their good knowledge of staff and pupils, they succeed in maintaining a supportive, open-door environment, which has led to a sense of team and an ethos of continuous improvement. A strong feature of this is the way in which leaders have responded to the increasing need to support pupils' well-being and progress through a wide range of supportive provision in the various support centres.

On the whole, middle leaders know their departments and areas of responsibility well. They have developed their ability to identify the main strengths and areas for improvement in teaching and assessment appropriately. Through robust line

management arrangements, senior leaders hold regular professional discussions with their link middle leaders. Overall, these meetings have a specific focus on strategies issues such as pupils' progress, teaching and whole-school and departmental priorities.

There are robust arrangements for managing the performance of all staff, which allow leaders to hold them to account for their work. Leaders place an increasing emphasis on the professional development of their staff and identify specific training needs. Where necessary, senior leaders deal effectively with any cases of underperformance with an appropriate level of support and challenge.

Overall, senior leaders pay firm attention to local and national priorities, such as reducing the effect of poverty by supporting families with the cost of school uniforms. The school is preparing well to implement the Curriculum for Wales in September 2023 by trialling and planning. Skills co-ordinators are also successful in planning purposefully to develop pupils' skills across the curriculum. The school gives due attention to developing Welsh language skills and there is an increasing emphasis on Welshness.

The school has a clear calendar of activities for leaders to evaluate the school's work. This contributes to a clear progression and link between quality assurance, assessment systems and meetings. There are robust processes for gathering first-hand information through lesson observations, scrutinising pupils' work and analysing data. Through these, leaders have a good knowledge of strengths and areas for improvement. On the whole, they evaluate their work accurately; however, at times, the evaluation is a little too generous as leaders do not always consider the effect of teaching on pupils' standards in sufficient detail. The school includes most stakeholders successfully in the process of evaluating the school's work. It gathers first-hand evidence from governors and seeks the views of pupils, parents and staff. Senior leaders provide a beneficial overview of important aspects of the school's work and recommend useful actions for improvement, for example on the quality of literacy provision for Year 7.

School and departmental priorities derive directly from the previous year's evaluations and therefore create a clear link between improvement plans and self-evaluation processes. These priorities are sensible and reflect the school's current needs, for example to increase the level of challenge in lessons, recall previous learning and pupils' response to feedback.

Overall, planning for improvement is detailed and there are appropriate arrangements for allocating responsibilities and identifying deadlines. Departmental development plans reflect the school's priorities and include priorities that are specific to the department. There are rigorous arrangements for monitoring plans and leaders review progress regularly based on the most recent evaluations. The school has a successful history of self-evaluation and improvement planning, which has led to improvements such as strengthening provision for pupils' well-being, support for staff innovation and improving pupils' reading skills.

The governing body is passionate and members have strong knowledge of their school. They are confident in their role as critical friends and make a valuable contribution to quality assurance processes. They have a sound understanding of their statutory role to promote healthy eating and drinking and keeping pupils safe.

Leaders have established a programme of professional development for staff that aligns with the school's priorities and values. There is a wide range of training and development opportunities for staff, which include working with other schools, internal training and working with external providers. Beneficial opportunities are provided for staff to develop as leaders through internal support and external courses.

The school ensures regular valuable opportunities for staff to work together on beneficial research on specific areas. This includes developing pupils' skills and providing a challenge for more able pupils. Leaders monitor the effect of professional learning carefully and adapt the training programme where necessary.

The school has an open and strong relationship with parents. It communicates regularly to share key information and celebrate pupils' successes, for example through the weekly bulletin and social media.

The work of monitoring the school's expenditure and budget is supported strongly by the business manager. They provide the headteacher and governors with regular monitoring reports, which form a basis for discussions and strategic decisions. Together, the headteacher, business manager and governors ensure that the school makes valuable use of grants, including the pupil development grant, to support the most deprived 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/members of the management committee 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, middle leaders, and individual teachers to evaluate the impact of the school's work
- meet pupils to discuss their work 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 lessons, including learning support groups and the specialist resource base (where appropriate), and undertake a variety of learning walks to observe pupils learning and to see staff teaching in a range of settings, including classrooms, support groups (where appropriate) and in outdoor areas
- visit the specialist resource base within the school to see pupils' learning (where appropriate)
- observe and speak to pupils at lunch and break times and at a sample of after-school clubs
- 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 (<http://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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