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a Hyfforddiant yng Nghymru

Her Majesty's Inspectorate
for Education and Training in Wales

A report on

**Ysgol y Gader
Dolgellau
Gwynedd
LL40 1HY**

Date of inspection: December 2010

by

Gareth Wyn Roberts

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 y Gader is a naturally bilingual community comprehensive school for 11-16 year old pupils maintained by Gwynedd Unitary Authority (UA). It has 392 pupils, which is an increase of 83 since the last inspection in 2004. It is expected that this number will decrease over the next few years.

Pupils are from the town and the neighbouring villages or rural areas. A hundred and fifty one pupils (38%) come from outside the school's catchment area. Almost all pupils are from areas which are neither economically nor socially privileged nor underprivileged. Ten point seven (10.7%) per cent of pupils are registered as being entitled to free school meals, an increase of 4% since the last inspection. Ninety eight per cent of pupils belong to the white ethnic group. No pupil receives support to learn English as an additional language. Four pupils are looked after by an UA.

Pupils are from the full ability range. The pupils' ability profile on entry to the school in Y7 is similar to the national and county profile. Twenty pupils (5.1%) have a statement of special educational needs (SEN). This includes the 12 pupils attending the area special educational needs unit located on the school site. Twelve pupils have been disapplied from the requirements of the National Curriculum. In addition, 67 pupils (17.6 %) are on stages of the code of practice for pupils with SEN.

Forty seven per cent of pupils come from homes where Welsh is the first language and the others from English speaking homes. Ninety three per cent of pupils speak Welsh to first language standard and all pupils who studied Welsh as a first language in the primary school continue to do so.

The current head teacher has been in post since January 2004.

As part of the 14-19 Curriculum, a number of vocational courses are arranged for key stage (KS) 4 pupils in conjunction with a nearby secondary school and also with Coleg Meirion Dwyfor.

The per capita budget for Ysgol y Gader in 2010-2011 is £5024 which compares with a maximum of £5024 and a minimum of £3965 for secondary schools in Gwynedd. The school has the highest budget per pupil out of the 14 secondary schools in Gwynedd. The sum, however, includes the budget for the Tŷ Meirion special unit.

Summary

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

Current performance

The school is good because of-

- the caring and Welsh ethos;
- overall good standards, and
- effective collaboration with the school's stakeholders.

Prospects for improvement

The school's prospects for improvement are good because of -

- the firm commitment of the head teacher and senior management team (SMT) to continuous improvement;
- robust structures for self-evaluation and planning for improvement, and
- a firm commitment to sustain a high level of care for all pupils at the school, and the arrangements that ensure that there is mutual respect between the staff and the pupils which promotes consistently good behaviour.

Recommendations

To ensure improvement, the staff and governors of Ysgol y Gader should:

- R1. raise standards in mathematics across the school;
- R2. continue to improve standards in Welsh and continue to reduce the gap between boys' and girls' results across the subjects;
- R3. ensure that the outstanding teaching and assessment for learning practices seen in a small number of lessons are disseminated across the school;
- R4. define more clearly and further reinforce the responsibilities of managers, and
- R5. improve the quality of departmental development plans.

What happens next?

The school will produce a plan to respond to the recommendations.

Main findings

Key Question 1: How good are outcomes?

Good

Standards: Good

Over the past three years, in KS3, pupils' performance has improved. When the school is compared with similar schools in terms of the benchmarks of schools in the same free school meals group (FSM), in 2010, the performance of the school's pupils was in the top quartile of similar schools for English and in the top half for science. Performance in Welsh and mathematics, however, was in the bottom half compared to similar schools.

In 2010, results in English were very good, despite being lower than those in previous years. They were higher than the average performance of schools in the same family¹, and considerably better than the performance for the whole of Wales. Results in mathematics were similar to the family average and higher than the Wales average.

¹ 'Families' of schools have been created in order to allow schools to compare their performance with similar schools across Wales. The Welsh Assembly Government (WAG) distributes schools according to a combination of features, namely schools with similar percentages of pupils who are entitled to free school meals, percentages of pupils living in disadvantaged areas, with special educational needs and for whom English is an additional language.

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Results in science were slightly better than the family average and significantly higher than the Wales average. Pupils' performance in the core subject indicator (CSI)² was higher than the family average and considerably higher than that for Wales.

Able pupils have achieved well in English over the past three years. The attainment of the most able pupils is not as good in science and mathematics.

Across KS4, 2010 results were not as good as those in 2009, although they were slightly better than results in 2008.

Pupils' performance in the majority of optional subjects was good between 2008 and 2010.

In 2010, the percentage of pupils attaining the level 1 threshold, (namely attaining grades A*-G in five or more GCSE subjects or equivalent qualifications), was slightly lower than the family average but higher than the Wales average, with boys doing slightly better than girls.

The percentage of pupils attaining the level 2 threshold (namely grades A*-C in five or more GCSE subjects or equivalent qualifications) was lower than that of the family but considerably higher than that of Wales.

The percentage of pupils attaining the other level 2 threshold which includes either Welsh (first language) or English and mathematics, was considerably lower than the family percentage although higher than the Wales average. Results in mathematics have affected the percentage of pupils attaining this level 2 threshold and the percentage of pupils attaining the CSI in KS4. This CSI percentage was much lower than the family but higher than the percentage for Wales.

Due to results in mathematics, the percentages of pupils attaining the CSI and attaining level 2 threshold placed the school in the bottom half of similar schools in terms of FSM. The percentages of pupils attaining level 1 and level 2 thresholds, including Welsh or English and mathematics, placed the school in the bottom quartile of similar schools in terms of FSM.

The boys' results are not normally as good as those of the girls but, in 2010, there was a marked difference between the quality of boys' and girls' results in KS3 in Welsh. In 2010, at the end of KS4, there was a large difference between boys' and girls' results in English and mathematics and the percentage attaining level 2 with girls attaining better. The difference was not as apparent in science and Welsh.

Immigrant pupils from outside the United Kingdom make good progress. Looked after children make appropriate progress, and pupils with additional learning needs (ALN) make good progress. There is no significant difference between the performance of pupils who receive FSM and those who pay for their meals.

² The KS3 core subject indicator (CSI) refers to the percentage of pupils who attain level 5 or above in Welsh (First Language) or English, mathematics and science combined. The KS4 core subject indicator (CSI) is the percentage of pupils gaining grade A*-C in the same combination of subjects.

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During 2008-2010, no pupil left the school without a recognised qualification. There were only two (3.4%) school leavers at the end of year 11 in 2010 who belonged to the not in education, employment or training (NEET) group. This is lower than the percentage of the county (4.2%) and Wales (5.7%).

KS3 and KS4 pupils make good progress although that progress varies from subject to subject. Progress is good in the majority of optional subjects at KS4 but is uneven in the core subjects. Progress in English and science is good. It is not as good in mathematics.

Pupil standards in listening, speaking, reading, writing, numeracy and information and communication technology (ICT) are good across the school.

The standards of achievement in Welsh of the 93% of pupils who study Welsh First Language are good. Pupils listen, speak, write and read well. The few pupils who learn Welsh as a second language make very good progress. The use of Welsh and English by pupils and staff is a natural part of the school's social life as well as in the teaching and learning curriculum.

Wellbeing: Good

Pupils feel safe in the school and have a positive attitude towards healthy eating and improving their fitness. They appreciate all the extracurricular and sports activities provided for them. Almost all pupils show interest and pride in their work and are enthusiastic in completing it.

Almost all are extremely respectful and caring of each other. Pupils' social skills and community engagement, their ability to make decisions and their grasp of living skills are good. Their behaviour is consistently good and their attitudes towards learning are positive. Attendance at the school is satisfactory. The very low number of permanent and fixed term exclusions is laudable.

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

The school provides an effective curriculum in both key stages and for all pupils. The KS3 curriculum satisfies the requirements of the National Curriculum and religious education.

The flexible provision builds positively on previous knowledge, understanding and skills.

At KS4, the school provides a wide range of academic and vocational courses that meet the requirements of the Learning and Skills Measure (Wales) 2009. An effective curriculum is delivered in conjunction with a number of other providers.

At KS4, good opportunities are provided to strengthen pupils' living and social skills through the Welsh BaccaLaureate qualification. The school provides a wide and balanced range of subject choices that meet the needs of every pupil.

The school provides a range of good extracurricular experiences at KS3 and KS4. These experiences are facilitated by partnerships established between the school and other bodies.

Pupils' skills are developed well through specific lessons and good co-ordination which develops the essential skills and ICT skills at KS3 and KS4 which lead to an external accreditation. This is a good feature. Intervention strategies are in place to help pupils who have difficulties in terms of their literacy skills.

All lessons in the school, with the exception of Welsh, English and modern foreign languages, are taught bilingually. This is a good feature. Latecomers attend a language centre in Porthmadog which helps to integrate them successfully into the naturally bilingual life of the school.

Pupils undertake a number of activities which promote education for sustainable development and global citizenship (ESDGC) and they are aware of their role in the local community and in the wider world.

Teaching: Good

Most teachers teach well. All teachers use their knowledge effectively when planning their lessons. In many lessons, a wide range of teaching and learning techniques are used. Many lessons have a suitable pace together with an appropriate challenge and clear objectives. In the few excellent lessons, teachers sustain learners' keen interest, recap well, involve pupils fully in the process of assessing their work, and conduct very effective plenary sessions. In the very few adequate lessons, pupils' progress is restricted by teacher-centred presentations and their own lack of involvement in the activities and in the self-assessment of their own learning. The quality of marking is generally good although inconsistent within and across subjects.

In the best examples, teachers offer constructive comments on how pupils can improve their learning. In a few pupils' books, marking is superficial and the comments do not guide pupils on how to improve. Pupils receive regular feedback on their progress. Pupils' progress is tracked thoroughly and underachievement is identified at an early stage. Reports to parents are good and are appreciated by them. The reports are detailed, have been personalised for pupils and note subject specific progress and targets.

Care, support and guidance: Good

The school's care arrangements are consistently good. They promote pupils' standards of health and wellbeing effectively and foster their interest in and involvement with their community and the world. The school fosters pupils' spiritual development in a satisfactory manner, and their moral, social and cultural development well. Pupils' additional learning needs are identified, and the school uses a wide range of internal provision and outside agencies effectively to support its care arrangements. The school tailors the support to meet the needs of individuals and groups who are in need of it. Suitable and timely advice is provided for pupils to enable them to make informed and confident choices and decisions. The school has a child safeguarding policy together with appropriate procedures. The pupils at the Tŷ Meirion unit are integrated into the life and work of the school in an excellent manner. The school monitors these pupils' educational and social development very effectively through innovative methods.

Learning environment: Good

The school is an inclusive community where all pupils have equal right to the school's provision and social life.

Good emphasis is placed on acknowledging, respecting and celebrating diversity. The school deals with the few instances of anti-social behaviour, such as bullying, promptly and effectively.

Good quality resources are provided to meet pupils' learning needs.

The buildings are of an adequate quality and are maintained extremely well. The learning environment promotes good standards.

Recent arrangements for accessing the buses have adequately improved the situation as regards crossing the road; the new traffic barriers on the school grounds are a good development.

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

The head teacher has a clear vision for the school and detailed plans that focus on ensuring the best for all pupils. He is well-supported by members of the SMT who have thorough knowledge of the areas for which they are responsible. The school has effective systems which support the implementation of its vision.

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School staff appreciate the head teacher's leadership and the sense of consistency of implementation and accountability of many school managers is good. Almost all leaders undertake their current responsibilities well, paying due attention to improving standards of teaching, learning and supporting pupils. In a very few instances, lines of accountability are not in operation.

The head teacher, the SMT, and middle managers use data well to monitor performance, identify underachievement and set purposeful strategies to raise standards. Performance Management requirements are implemented well, and members of the teaching and ancillary staff have the opportunity to discuss their work and to set relevant targets.

The governing body is supportive of the school and is committed to doing its best for the benefit of the pupils. Governors have a good grasp of standards in the school, and they are ready to challenge the head teacher on some matters. They fulfil their statutory duties.

The school responds well to national and county priorities. It has successfully responded to the relevant requirements of the Learning Pathways 14-19 programme, and the requirements for creating a healthy school. The school enters pupils for an accreditation in the essential skills and for the Welsh Bacalaureate course in KS4. The school develops pupils' bilingual skills well.

Improving quality: Good

The school's self-evaluation process has a number of good elements. Clear and good quality procedures have been established for self-evaluation and planning for improvement. The 'School Improvement Cycle' document is an effective tool which notes a timetable and the elements to be included in the school self-evaluation report (SER). The school's evaluation is strengthened by files of specific and up-to-date evidence.

Most departmental self-evaluation reports (DSER) successfully identify the department's strengths and the matters to be addressed. A few of them are not evaluative enough in terms of their comments.

The school makes a very thorough evaluation of data about standards and the quality of education which considers trends and progress over time. Members of the SMT and middle managers have an effective system for monitoring lessons, and teachers have the opportunity to see each other teaching. The monitoring does not always bring about the desired improvements. There is a thorough and consistent system for looking at pupils' books and a comprehensive report on the findings is shared with staff.

A thorough analysis of the results of the evaluation is a basis for constructive discussion between heads of department and the head teacher.

The school takes into account the viewpoints of its stakeholders well. The learners' voice is to be heard through the School Council, and through questionnaires, and the voice of the parents is heard through a newsletter, via e-mail, and by allowing easy access to the school. A close and constructive link has been established with the town's businesses and the Town Council.

The school makes good use of the perceptive reviews by support agencies. The school ensures that the findings of the self-evaluation are at the core of the School Development Plan (SDP). The year plan, which arises from the three year plan, is a useful tool. It focuses on strategies to raise standards. The Departmental Development Plans (DDP) follow a similar pattern. Many departments plan effectively, but in a few instances, the plans are not specific enough, and do not include actions and outcomes that are sufficiently challenging.

The school is developing effectively as a learning community. It has responded well to all the recommendations in the last report. There has been purposeful and effective planning to tackle matters relating to raising standards within individual subjects, as well as managerial matters.

Partnership working: Good

The school has established partnerships with a wide range of multidisciplinary agencies, voluntary organisations and education services for children and young people. This leads to raising standards amongst pupils.

The head teacher is the chairperson of the local 14-19 Partnership and links with Coleg Meirion Dwyfor and other providers ensure that the school improves the standards and wellbeing of its pupils.

Links with the primary schools are adequate. The primary-secondary transition plan is reviewed annually.

Latecomers have the opportunity to attend an intensive course to learn Welsh at an UA maintained language centre. This improves the standard of their Welsh. After some time at the centre, learners are reintegrated into the naturally bilingual life of the school and the subsequent support provided by the staff is effective.

A very close relationship has been established between the school and parents, carers and initial teacher training establishments.

Resource management: Good

Staffing is appropriate and the school has good resources to meet the requirements of teaching the curriculum. The school makes effective use of teaching assistants and ancillary and support staff.

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The school has met the requirements of the National Agreement for 'Raising Standards and Tackling Workload in School'.

The school's financial management is good. Financial matters are regularly monitored and reviewed by the head teacher, the business manager and the governing body. The school ensures that expenditure is in keeping with the priorities identified in the SDP. As pupils' achievement, the quality of care and the curricular provision are good, the school offers good value for money.

Appendix 1

Stakeholder satisfaction report

Responses to parent questionnaires

A total of 118 questionnaires completed by either parents or carers were returned. Satisfaction levels amongst parents are very high. The views of 90% or more parents were positive in relation to every aspect of the life and work of the school.

Responses to learner questionnaires

Questionnaires were completed by 25% of pupils, chosen at random. In general, pupils' views about aspects of the life and work of the school are positive.

With very few exceptions, pupils feel safe at the school and are of the opinion that they make good progress. Without exception, they are of the opinion that the school deals well or very well with any bullying. Most pupils are of the opinion that the school teaches them how to stay healthy. Almost all say that they have enough opportunities to undertake physical exercise regularly.

Many are of the opinion that pupils' standards of behaviour are good, which allows them to continue with their school work. They feel that they receive good advice when choosing their courses in KS4. Most believe that school staff treat them with respect and help them when problems arise.

Appendix 2

The inspection team

Gareth Wyn Roberts	Reporting Inspector	Context, Standards Teaching, Stakeholder satisfaction report
Bethan Whittall	Team Inspector	Management, Improving quality
Richard Roberts	Team Inspector	Learning experiences Partnership working Resource management
Eifion Lloyd Jones	Lay Inspector	The learning environment
Anita Hughes	Peer Inspector	Wellbeing Care, Support and Guidance
Peter Maddocks	School Nominee	

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Copies of the report

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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