



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

**A report on**

**Ysgol Uwchradd Tywyn  
Station Road  
Tywyn  
Gwynedd  
LL36 9EU**

**Date of inspection: January 2018**

**by**

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

## About Ysgol Uwchradd Tywyn

Ysgol Uwchradd Tywyn is a naturally bilingual secondary school for pupils between 11 and 16 years old. It is situated in the seaside town of Tywyn in the old Merionethshire in Gwynedd. There are 268 pupils on roll in comparison with 298 at the time of the last inspection in 2012. Pupil numbers have decreased year-on-year over the last ten years, and this has led to significant cuts in funding and staffing.

The school serves pupils from the town, in the main, in addition to the nearby villages and the surrounding wide rural area. A majority of pupils live in areas that are neither prosperous nor economically disadvantaged. Approximately 11% of pupils are eligible for free school meals, which is lower than the national figure of 17%. Thirty-three per cent (33%) of pupils are on the school's additional learning needs register, which is higher than the national percentage. Three per cent (3%) of pupils have a statement of special educational needs, which is slightly higher than the national figure. Nineteen per cent (19%) of pupils come from Welsh-speaking homes. Very few pupils are from ethnic minority backgrounds and very few speak English as an additional language.

The headteacher has been in post since September 2009, and the senior leadership team includes the headteacher and deputy headteacher.

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 Uwchradd Tywyn is an extremely caring and inclusive community. The headteacher and all staff embrace a culture of high expectations and respect towards others. Very effective leadership has led to excellent standards of wellbeing and an exceptional level of care and support for pupils. It has also led to robust standards over time and good quality teaching.

Most pupils' behaviour is excellent and many make very valuable contributions to the school's life and work. Overall, many pupils make sound progress during their time at the school. They develop as independent pupils with very positive attitudes towards learning.

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

## **Recommendations**

- R1 Improve standards, particularly for more able pupils and in Welsh
- R2 Strengthen and ensure consistency in the quality of teaching across the school
- R3 Improve the quality of self-evaluation and planning for improvement among middle leaders
- R4 Address the financial deficit

## **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 pupils' attitudes towards learning and the quality of care, support and guidance that are provided to them, to be disseminated on Estyn's website.

## Main findings

### Standards: Good

Many pupils are independent and resilient learners who make strong progress in lessons and as they move through the school. In many lessons, pupils are successful in recalling previous learning correctly and make beneficial use of their knowledge and understanding when completing new tasks.

In a few lessons, many pupils make significant developments in their thinking skills. For example, key stage 4 pupils are successful in completing complex reasoning tasks in mathematics, or analysing hidden meaning and reading between the lines when studying literary text in English lessons. In many lessons, pupils develop sound problem-solving skills in a variety of situations, for example when working independently to solve the meaning of unfamiliar words, or when listening to music and evaluating styles from different musical eras.

In most lessons, nearly all pupils listen attentively and respectfully to the teacher and the contributions from other pupils. In these lessons, pupils work together effectively and discuss their ideas enthusiastically in pairs or small groups. In many cases, pupils offer extended oral responses, and explain facts confidently and accurately by using a wide range of subject vocabulary. For example, in Welsh lessons, many pupils use suitable terminology when analysing literature, and discuss the effect of form and technique in the novel 'Ac Yna Clywodd Sŵn y Môr'. A majority of pupils contribute confidently and sensibly to class discussions during morning sessions and in lessons. However, in a few lessons, pupils do not extend their responses or explain their views in enough depth.

Many pupils develop sound reading skills. In general, when they are given an opportunity, many pupils read aloud confidently and with appropriate expression. They are skilful in gathering information, finding facts and coming to a valid conclusion when reading evidence from various sources. In art lessons, many research a range of written sources confidently and weigh up the advantages and disadvantages of different styles. Across the subjects, many pupils consider opposing views on different contemporary topics successfully, such as installing wind turbines. A minority of more able pupils have a firm grasp of higher order reading skills. They present probing analyses of reading texts by using technical terms purposefully. They also analyse poems and literary and factual texts skilfully, and use quotations expertly. However, in a few lessons, although a majority of pupils show an appropriate understanding of reading texts, their analyses lack depth and they have a tendency to make superficial comments when discussing effect.

Many pupils respect the format of their books and present their work methodically, logically and with good handwriting. On the whole, many pupils write suitably for a variety of purposes and they have a sound awareness of audience. They make beneficial use of writing frames for different forms of writing in order to structure their work. For example, pupils in history lessons write a newspaper article on the Battle of Hastings or a letter about William the Conqueror successfully. A majority of pupils re-draft their work successfully, when necessary.

More able pupils have a sound grasp of spelling and syntax in English, and they include rich vocabulary in their written work. However, in a few lessons across the subjects, because of lack of guidance, many pupils' range of vocabulary is limited and they therefore have difficulty writing independently. As a result, they do not make enough progress in their writing skills in these lessons. In general, a majority of pupils have an appropriate understanding of the rules of punctuation and grammar in Welsh. However, there are numerous errors in the work of less able pupils.

In a majority of language lessons, many pupils make good use of their creative writing skills when composing poetry and writing stories. Across the subjects, many pupils write independently and at length skilfully. For example, in science lessons in key stage 4, many pupils explain scientific processes in detail. They use a wide range of subject terminology and vocabulary confidently and correctly when describing the process of extracting iron from iron oxide by using carbon in the blast furnace.

Across the age range, most pupils have sound number skills. In mathematics lessons, many pupils complete mental mathematics work successfully. Many pupils apply their numeracy skills confidently in wider contexts. For example, when using the 'Pythagorean theorem' to solve problems that are based on everyday situations. In general, many pupils also apply their number skills successfully in subjects other than mathematics. In geography lessons, pupils develop their understanding of averages when calculating wind speed, and then interpret their results appropriately. In technology lessons, pupils convert different metric units correctly when designing products.

Overall, a majority of pupils develop appropriate skills in their information and communication technology (ICT) lessons. However, pupils do not make enough progress in their information technology skills across other subjects due to lack of opportunities.

In a minority of lessons, where they are given interesting and stimulating opportunities, many pupils make sound developments in their creative skills. They respond enthusiastically to tasks that enable them to show imagination and creativity, for example when creating a pamphlet to present information about the six types of ecosystems in geography lessons, when imagining being a monarch in waiting in their history lessons, or when writing poems about the First World War in English.

Pupils' performance in key stage 4 in many important indicators has been strong over the last three years, and has compared favourably with the performance of pupils in similar schools. Overall, pupils make sound progress from the end of key stage 2 to the end of key stage 4.

Performance in the level 2 indicator, including English or Welsh and mathematics, has been strong in two of the last three years. Over time, performance in this indicator compares favourably with that of similar schools. Over the same period, performance in the capped points score has been consistently very strong and compares very favourably with the performance of pupils in similar schools.

The number of pupils who sit the GCSE Welsh first language examination, despite English being their first language, is very high. Most gain a qualification in the subject, and a minority gain a level 2 qualification.

The proportion of pupils who gain five GCSEs at grades A\*-A or equivalent has varied over time, and has fallen since 2015. In 2017, it is lower than the average performance in similar schools.

In the indicators that include five GCSEs at grades A\*-C and A\*-G or equivalent, and the capped points score, the performance of boys and girls has been very strong over the last three years in comparison with that of boys and girls in similar schools. The performance of boys and girls in English is also generally sound. However, in the indicator that includes five GCSEs at grades A\*-C or equivalent, including Welsh or English and mathematics, the performance of boys and girls has varied over time.

Pupils with additional learning needs make very strong progress during their time at the school.

No pupils have left the school without a qualification for over four years. At the end of Year 11, all pupils continue in education, training or employment.

### **Wellbeing and attitudes to learning: Excellent**

Pupils at Ysgol Uwchradd Tywyn show very positive attitudes towards the school and their education. Nearly all pupils behave extremely politely and are very respectful towards each other, all members of staff and visitors, in their lessons and around the school. Many are excellent representatives of the school when talking to visitors, and they take great pride in talking about their work and about school life. They have strong social skills, and discuss issues and express their views maturely with adults.

In most lessons, nearly all pupils behave excellently, concentrate throughout the lesson and persevere when facing complex tasks. Many show a high level of resilience when solving problems and take ownership of their own learning. They work diligently to complete tasks independently in the first instance, or discuss with peers before asking the teacher for support. As a result, many pupils make significant progress in developing as independent learners.

Many pupils work together effectively and enthusiastically in pairs and groups. For example, in French lessons, many younger pupils show a high level of enjoyment when learning grammatical rules by playing purposeful language games together.

A high number of pupils attend clubs, support lessons and extra-curricular activities during morning sessions, at lunchtime and after school. Many pupils benefit greatly from very beneficial specialist sessions to improve their emotional, mental and social wellbeing.

The work of the school council has had a very positive effect on many aspects of school life, such as the nurturing and supportive ethos, and the learning environment. Pupils who are part of focus groups undertake a great deal of their work independently of the school's staff. The Eco Forum has had a positive influence on the school's environment by creating a garden, reducing the use of plastic and increasing provision to recycle goods. Pupils who are involved with the 'Welsh

Forum' have played an important part in promoting pupils' positive attitudes towards the Welsh language during the last two years. They have made a significant contribution towards creating a new system to promote the use of the Welsh language socially at school and in the community through 'Cynllun Calon'. Members of the 'Healthy Living' forum have recently produced an attractive recipe book, full of interesting meals to promote eating and drinking healthily, to sell in the community.

Many pupils are very active throughout the year, organising and holding events to raise money for charities. They also make a very valuable contribution to the local community. For example, last year, pupils were responsible for creating a film to promote railway safety in partnership with a national rail company. A group of pupils recently took part in a television programme to present information about their work on personal safety on the internet.

Nearly all pupils feel safe at school and believe that bullying is not a cause for concern. Most feel confident that teachers and other staff deal very well with any problems that may arise.

Attendance rates are very high over time and compare very favourably with attendance rates in similar schools. The number of pupils who are persistently absent has reduced significantly over time.

### **Teaching and learning experiences: Good**

In general, the quality of teaching at Ysgol Uwchradd Tywyn is good.

Nearly all teachers have sound subject knowledge and succeed in forging positive working relationships with pupils.

In many lessons, teachers have high expectations of pupils. They are enthusiastic about their subjects and plan lessons carefully, and prepare attractive and interesting resources that stimulate pupils. They plan a series of structured activities that develop pupils' understanding and independence successfully. In these lessons, teachers explain concepts clearly and ensure that pupils are given valuable opportunities to practice and develop their subject knowledge and skills. By doing so, they succeed in developing diligent learners who take ownership of their learning.

The lively pace that can be seen in many lessons means that nearly all pupils concentrate fully throughout the lesson and make good progress from their starting points. Teachers circle the classroom carefully to monitor pupils' progress, and use their knowledge of the pupils to intervene purposefully, where necessary. Teaching assistants work very effectively to support pupils in lessons.

Many teachers question pupils appropriately in order to test their knowledge, and a minority use questioning skilfully to challenge pupils effectively and enable them to deepen their knowledge.

In a few cases, teachers' expectations are not high enough. In these lessons, activities are not planned in enough detail to challenge all pupils, particularly those who are more able. At times, teachers do not exemplify answers and good practices to ensure that pupils are clear about what is expected of them.

Most teachers provide valuable and constructive oral feedback on pupils' work and efforts. Many give purposeful written feedback on pupils' work, which enables them to know how to improve their work. However, the comments of a minority of teachers are not incisive and specific enough to ensure that the quality of work improves. Overall, teachers' expectations of pupils' response to feedback are too varied.

The school's curriculum builds purposefully on pupils' previous learning and succeeds in meeting the needs of nearly all pupils. As part of its work as a pioneer school for the new curriculum, the school works productively when experimenting with different curricular models in key stage 3. An example of this is the effective co-operation between a number of departments in presenting the "Ein Bro" unit in Year 7.

Senior leaders make skilful use of knowledge about pupils' studying preferences when planning the curriculum for key stage 4. A wide variety of courses is provided, including subjects such as astronomy. The school also works successfully with a local college to ensure a wide choice of occupational courses, such as the popular engineering course.

The wide provision of valuable extra-curricular experiences, such as popular sports clubs, the coding club and masterclasses for more able pupils, enrich pupils' learning experiences. There is also a successful 'Opportunities Week', which provides broad outdoor experiences.

The school plans in detail in order to ensure that pupils develop their literacy and numeracy skills successfully. Work is co-ordinated skilfully in order to ensure that teachers use consistent strategies. As a result, pupils use their skills confidently in a variety of contexts. An example of this is the beneficial use of mind maps in religious education in order to compile and structure pupils' ideas before they write a letter to describe the experience of being at the Sikh festival, Baisakhi. Overall, there are appropriate opportunities across the curriculum to develop pupils' ICT skills, but there are few opportunities for them to develop their higher order skills in this area.

There are successful interventions to support pupils with poor reading and number skills. Productive use is made of learning assistants and the school's older pupils to support pupils in reading sessions.

Provision to develop Welshness is a strong element of the school's work. There is a broad offer of fun activities that promote the pupils' use of the Welsh language in formal and informal situations. During the recent period, the school has ensured that most pupils in Year 11 sit the GCSE Welsh First Language examination and gain a qualification in the subject.

### **Care, support and guidance: Excellent**

Pupils' wellbeing and their development as well-rounded, respectful and proud learners are at the heart of Ysgol Uwchradd Tywyn's work. The school is an exceptionally caring and inclusive community, which has a culture of high expectations and respect towards others. This has had an extremely positive effect on pupils' behaviour, wellbeing and academic progress.

The school offers exceptional provision for vulnerable pupils. A notable example is the 'Clwb Cystadweithio' which supports Year 7 pupils as they settle and socialise at the beginning of their school career. Beneficial mindfulness sessions raise pupils' confidence and self-respect across the school. The school works highly effectively with a wide range of external agencies in order to support pupils' wellbeing, health and social development. All of this enriches the staff's understanding of individual pupils' needs and ensures that these are met successfully.

A particular feature of the school's work is the numerous extra-curricular activities that respond to a wide cross-section of pupils' interests. A particular example is the popular 'parkour' club, which develops pupils' physical, social and creative skills effectively. A high proportion of pupils develop their personal and linguistic skills during a Welsh games club each week.

There is valuable provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development through assemblies and a personal and social education programme. The important contributions of a number of external speakers contribute towards pupils' understanding of a wide range of social issues. A notable example is a speaker from India discussing respect towards other religions and cultures. As a result of this valuable provision, pupils develop robustly as responsible, tolerant and respectful citizens.

Leaders have complete trust in pupils' ability to shoulder responsibilities and undertake leadership roles. Pupils undertake various roles enthusiastically, which develop them into active and responsible citizens. For example, older pupils act as reading buddies for younger pupils and lead various opinion forums.

There are robust arrangements for promoting eating and drinking healthily, and beneficial and interesting thematic days on subjects such as drugs, mental health and domestic violence. A notable example is the provision for healthy relationships and sex education. As a result, pupils have a sound understanding of how to develop positive relationships and identify and respond to situations where they could feel awkward, uncomfortable or threatened. The school's arrangements for safeguarding pupils meet requirements and are not a cause for concern.

Pupils receive valuable guidance and advice when making decisions about their choice of subjects at the school and about the next stage in their lives.

Pupils with additional learning needs receive high quality support. As a result, these pupils have full access to all learning experiences and make strong progress over time. Individual education plans include beneficial quantitative targets for pupils and useful advice for teachers. The school works closely with these pupils and their parents to set suitable targets and to monitor pupils' progress in detail.

Learning assistants make a significant contribution to supporting pupils who need support. They provide pupils with very valuable support in lessons and intervention groups.

There are reliable and consistent systems for tracking pupils' academic progress, attendance and wellbeing. These enable the school to identify any pupils who are at risk of underachieving at an early stage and intervene immediately in order to

address their individual requirements. There is a comprehensive programme of effective interventions to support pupils with weak basic skills or emotional, behavioural or social needs.

Annual and interim reports provide parents with valuable information about their child's progress. They include useful advice and specific targets for improvement.

### **Leadership and management: Good**

The school's headteacher is a sincere and prudent leader who is well respected by staff, pupils and the community. She works tirelessly to provide equal opportunities and stimulating experiences for pupils in the catchment area. Her ambitious vision is based on providing educational experiences of the highest standard while maintaining pupils' wellbeing in a supportive ethos. This vision is shared convincingly and clearly with all of the school's stakeholders. As a result, all staff profess the same values. This has ensured high standards, effective teaching and pupils' exceptional attitudes towards learning.

The headteacher receives robust support from the deputy headteacher, who shares the same values and ambition. The senior leadership team has high expectations and professes these clearly in their work to set a strategic direction for the school. They have responded energetically and enthusiastically to implementing the government's priority to promote the number of Welsh speakers through their purposeful and innovative planning.

All managers have a clear understanding of their role and shoulder their responsibilities in full. There are clear structures of line, departmental and staff meetings, which ensure that there is a consistent focus on standards and pupils' wellbeing. Lines of accountability are clear and senior leaders set clear expectations in terms of what is expected of middle managers at different times of the year. This allows them to manage their workload effectively and provides a definite order and direction for management work.

Leaders have established a culture in which there is a clear emphasis on continuous professional learning. Despite the tight financial situation, leaders have ensured that there are frequent opportunities for all staff to broaden and refine their professional knowledge. There is a comprehensive programme of weekly workshops, training days, professional learning communities, local professional networks, external courses and visits to other institutions. Leaders have also ensured that good practice within the school is disseminated. Through a series of strategic partnerships and training, middle managers are given opportunities to develop their awareness of best practice and they share this beneficially with staff.

Members of the governing body are experienced and loyal, and they protect the school's interests carefully. Very effective use is made of the experience and expertise of members of the governing body to support specific areas in the school. The governing body has taken very robust action to ensure that the necessary resources and funding are provided while the school faces financial cuts. They know the school very well and have a secure knowledge of performance data and of strengths and areas for improvement. They have useful links with specific departments, and many members of the governing body have played a valuable part in departmental quality assurance activities.

Through effective self-evaluation processes, the school has identified its strengths and areas for development accurately, and takes robust action to plan for improvement. There are clear examples of where the school has succeeded in improving important aspects of its work, such as standards in mathematics and English, and the quality of teaching.

There is a calendar of useful self-evaluation activities and quality assurance processes. Activities include rigorous data analysis, lesson observations and scrutiny of books, and beneficial opportunities for pupils, staff and parents to voice their opinions. These are implemented regularly and all of the school's stakeholders are involved in the process. As a result, leaders have a clear and honest picture of the school's work. The self-evaluation report is a sound basis for leaders to identify good practice and decide which aspects are in need of attention. However, the report does not make enough use of the findings from lesson observations and scrutiny of books to judge pupils' standards, skills and progress.

There is a clear link between the areas for improvement in the self-evaluation report and the priorities in the school improvement plan. Leaders have selected the main issues for development wisely, and have implemented sensible actions to address most of these. However, not enough specific attention is given to improving the achievement of more able pupils. The plan includes clear success criteria and purposeful arrangements in terms of responsibilities and timescales. Leaders monitor progress against the improvement plan carefully and frequently.

Overall, middle leaders understand the main strengths and weaknesses within their departments, and they have sensible improvement plans that correspond with the school's plan. However, there is too much inconsistency in terms of the effectiveness and quality of middle leaders' self-evaluation work.

There are clear links between the professional development programme, the school's priorities, and training needs that are identified through the performance management system. This system includes valuable opportunities for staff to review progress against their targets, and to discuss their general professional development, twice a year. However, there is too much inconsistency and lack of clarity in terms of the number and nature of performance management targets. Through support and challenge, the school has responded robustly to any cases of staff underperformance.

The headteacher and governors manage resources and expenditure carefully. They have a purposeful budgeting strategy, in which there is a very close link between decisions on expenditure and the school's improvement priorities. Provision and class sizes are monitored carefully to ensure a positive effect on school life and pupils' wellbeing.

The school currently has a financial deficit, which has been licensed by the local education authority. Despite the financial pressure as a result of the significant reduction in pupil number over recent years, the school has succeeded in maintaining high standards in all aspects of school life.

The school makes beneficial use of grants to support the achievement of the school's most vulnerable pupils, such as arranging transport for children to attend after-school activities.

## Copies of the report

Copies of this report are available from the school and from the Estyn website ([www.estyn.gov.wales](http://www.estyn.gov.wales))

Estyn evaluates a provider's effectiveness using a four-point judgement scale:

<b>Excellent</b>	Very strong, sustained performance and practice
<b>Good</b>	Strong features, although minor aspects may require improvement
<b>Adequate and needs improvement</b>	Strengths outweigh weaknesses, but important aspects require improvement
<b>Unsatisfactory and needs urgent improvement</b>	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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