



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

A report on

**Dyffryn Taf School
North Road
Whitland
Carmarthenshire
SA34 0BD**

Date of inspection: November 2019

by

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

About Dyffryn Taf School

Dyffryn Taf School is an English-medium 11-19 comprehensive school for pupils, maintained by Carmarthenshire Local Authority. There are currently 922 pupils on roll. This is slightly more than at the time of the last inspection when there were 900 pupils on roll. The school is located in a semi-rural area with pupils drawn from the west of Carmarthenshire and the east of Pembrokeshire. The school was last inspected in October 2013.

Just over 8% of pupils are eligible for free school meals, which is lower than the national average of 16.4%. The percentage of pupils with special educational needs is around 30% which is well above the national average of 23%. Nearly 2% of pupils have a statement of special educational needs which is close to the national average of 2.2%. Nearly 20% of pupils are fluent in Welsh and the school provides a bilingual education for one form in each year group. Just under 2% speak English as a second language.

The headteacher took up post in September 2018. The senior leadership team consists of the headteacher and three assistant headteachers, supported by two directors of learning.

Further information is available from the Welsh Government My Local School website at the link below.
<http://mylocalschool.wales.gov.uk/Schools/SchoolSearch?lang=en>

Summary

Ysgol Dyffryn Taf is a warm and inclusive school which is at the heart of the community it serves. Its caring, respectful and inclusive ethos puts pupils' wellbeing at the centre of its work. The school community works together in a compassionate and tolerant way. Pupils are supported well to achieve and encouraged to be ambitious about their future. However, in lessons a minority of teachers do not challenge pupils to achieve their very best.

School leaders are committed to creating a school that embodies its mission statement, 'We can, we care'/'Gallwn, Gofalwn'. They have been successfully in creating a learning community that acknowledges and celebrates individual achievement. They recognise aspects of the school that are in need of improvement and have coherent plans to improve teaching.

The school provides pupils with a wealth of opportunities to enhance and enrich their learning. Pupils value these opportunities. They understand how these broad experiences contribute usefully to their understanding of the world and provide valuable skills to help them move on to the next stage in their learning. However, in a minority of instances the school's provision has not secured sufficiently strong progress for all pupils.

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	Good

Recommendations

- R1 Raise standards of achievement to ensure that all pupils fulfil their potential in all subjects
- R2 Improve the quality of teaching, including the level of challenge in lessons, to ensure that teaching meets the needs of all pupils
- R3 Reduce variation in the quality of assessment and feedback
- R4 Improve the impact of professional learning, particularly that focusing on the evaluation of teaching on pupil progress

What happens next

Ysgol Dyffryn Taf will draw up an action plan to address the recommendations from the inspection.

Main findings

Standards: Adequate and needs improvement

In lessons, many pupils make suitable progress. Most recall prior learning well and build on this to develop a sound understanding of their subjects. A few pupils make very strong progress in lessons. In these instances, pupils apply their knowledge and skills effectively. For example, in history pupils use subject specific skills well to gain a secure understanding of bias by examining the reasons for the rise of the Nazi party.

A minority of pupils do not challenge themselves to achieve highly enough. They spend too long completing low level tasks or provide simple responses and are reticent to develop their work further, even when encouraged to do so by teachers. In these cases, pupils do not make the progress expected of them. A few pupils do not sustain their focus well enough. In a few cases, pupils complete only low level tasks such as copying from the board or following modelled answers. In these instances, pupils make limited progress and do not develop their thinking skills well enough.

Many pupils have effective listening skills. They listen with concentration and respond thoughtfully to comments by other pupils. Many pupils speak with fluency and coherence. They enjoy engaging in discussion thoughtfully, sharing their views with confidence. A minority express their views particularly eloquently. These pupils offer thoughtful and perceptive answers to questions using a wide range of vocabulary. For instance, in English lessons, pupils offer insightful points when discussing the way in which an audience might respond to the end of Macbeth. However, a minority of pupils do not extend their responses sufficiently. They provide simplistic answers and do not expand on their ideas. Often this is because of a lack of challenge from their teachers. A few pupils have weak listening skills. In these instances pupils are not sufficiently attentive and do not listen carefully enough to advice from teachers. As a result, they are unclear about what is expected of them.

Most pupils locate information and facts in a range of texts swiftly and accurately. Many show empathy with characters. This helps them develop their responses to the themes and issues that are explored in texts. For example, they respond thoughtfully to the character of Carlson in *Of Mice and Men*, showing understanding of how his background has shaped his unpleasant approach to life. A few pupils use inference and deduction very well to draw conclusions from a range of texts. For example, in history pupils draw thoughtful conclusions from a range of texts that explore the ethical issues of slavery. When given the opportunity, a minority of pupils read aloud fluently and with dramatic expression. However, a few pupils do not develop their responses to texts well enough. They provide simplistic answers when interpreting meaning, relying on basic comprehension skills rather than, for instance, reflecting on the intention of the writer.

Many pupils write suitably for a range of purposes and audiences. They produce extended writing that is well structured and communicates meaning coherently. A few pupils craft their writing in a highly effective way, using subject specific vocabulary confidently. However, a minority make repeated basic errors in their work. These tend to be related to inaccurate use of punctuation rather than spelling.

Many pupils apply their general number skills well in context and broadly in line with age and ability. A minority of pupils independently interpret and use data well. For example, they look for relationships between data to answer questions in geography when exploring the micro-climate around the school. However, a few pupils make elementary mistakes, for example, when applying graph skills or when completing basic number tasks such as multiplication.

When provided with opportunities many pupils use information communication technology appropriately. In a few instances, they draw on a range of ICT tools to help them solve problems and find solutions. For example, in ICT pupils use data bases and create websites appropriately and in design technology pupils use a range of digital skills to help them with their practical work.

When given the opportunity, the majority of pupils demonstrate a range of useful skills in creativity. They show that they are willing to try out new ideas without being certain of the end result and use their knowledge and intuition to trust their own judgement. For example, in design technology, pupils test out their programming skills to discover the best ways to manipulate the movement of a robot. The majority of pupils develop original ideas imaginatively when they are required to reflect the style of particular artists. In art, pupils create original work that is inspired by Tim Burton, drawing on his style of graphics and caricature.

The majority of pupils are confident to undertake tasks that require them to work independently and problem-solve. These pupils often have valuable research skills and demonstrate that they are able to use the key points from information to draw conclusions. For example, in the Skills Challenge Certificate, pupils research information about child poverty rates and consider how these are effected by political, social and economic influences. Furthermore, the majority of pupils apply their scientific knowledge well. For instance, pupils utilise their knowledge of particle movement to understand the theory of osmosis.

Many pupils apply their physical skills to a range of contexts well. Key stage 4 pupils use a range of valuable transferable physical skills associated with personal fitness well. In design technology, pupils apply their fine motor skills to carefully create fabric motifs. Pupils in the school production show an awareness of physical presence, stillness and control of movement when performing on stage.

During the last three years performance at the end of key stage 4 has not compared well with that in other schools and pupils have not made as much progress as expected. In 2019, performance is closer to that in other similar schools. In the Skills Challenge Certificate pupils perform slightly better than expected. The performance of the small number of pupils eligible for free school meals has been variable over the past three years. In 2019, these pupils performed better than similar pupils in similar schools in the majority of indicators.

Nearly all pupils are entered for a GCSE qualification in Welsh 2nd language and many gain a level 2 qualification. Most pupils have an appropriate grasp of phrases to express simple opinions in Welsh. Many pupils make suitable progress in developing their Welsh language skills in their Welsh lessons. A minority of pupils who follow the GCSE Welsh first language qualification make appropriate progress in lessons. Although many of these pupils communicate suitably in Welsh, their

responses are brief using a limited range of vocabulary. A minority have weak writing skills and do not structure their writing well. A minority of pupils gained a level 2 qualification in Welsh first language in 2019.

Over the last three years, performance in the sixth form has been strong with pupils following advanced level courses performing better than expected. However pupils do not achieve as well as expected in vocational courses.

Wellbeing and attitudes to learning: Good

Most pupils feel safe and secure in school and know where to get help when required. They take pride in their school and their local community. Most pupils believe that the school responds well to their concerns. When there are instances of bullying or disagreements, most pupils believe that teachers deal with these in a timely and sensitive manner.

Most pupils behave well in the school during assemblies, lessons, break times and lunchtimes. They are polite and courteous and demonstrate good manners to visitors, staff and each other.

Most pupils arrive to lessons punctually, settle quickly and are ready to learn. However, a few pupils arrive late to lessons and a very few do not have the appropriate equipment. Most pupils sustain concentration successfully in lessons and show an interest in their work. They listen to the teacher and to each other well and have a positive attitude towards their learning. Many pupils work well independently, in pairs and small groups. For example, they acknowledge each other's contributions when discussing the social, environmental and economic impact of the global fashion industry. However, a few pupils do not listen attentively to the teacher and cause some low level disruption, which interrupts their own learning and that of others.

Many pupils complete tasks thoroughly, taking pride in the presentation of their work. A majority of pupils demonstrate suitable resilience and perseverance. For example, they use trial and error effectively to solve complicated problems such as when calculating the perimeter of complex shapes. Most pupils willingly and spontaneously support each other well. For example, during physical education lessons in the gym, they provide encouragement and feedback to support each other to improve their performance when exercising.

Most pupils show an appreciation for the importance of eating healthily and undertaking regular physical activity. A majority participate in regular physical activities at lunchtime and after school. For example, they use the school gym regularly to improve their physical fitness.

Most pupils develop their social and emotional skills well. Older pupils mentor younger pupils effectively to support them in their learning and to help them settle in the school. In addition, a notably high number of pupils complete their Duke of Edinburgh awards at bronze, silver and gold levels.

The school's sixth form led charity committee supports a range of local, national and international charities. The committee has coordinated a range of events

successfully. As a result, nearly all pupils willingly support charitable organisations and have raised money for the local food bank and the international charity 'Shelter Box', which provides emergency disaster relief for families across the globe. Through involvement in these activities, pupils demonstrate a secure awareness of what it means to be an ethical, informed citizen.

Teaching and learning experiences: Adequate and needs improvement

Most teachers have a strong subject knowledge and convey their depth of this knowledge appropriately to engage and interest pupils. Most develop a strong rapport with pupils which fosters engagement with learning in a positive and supportive environment.

Many teachers offer clear explanations of concepts and have suitable expectations of what pupils can achieve. The majority of teachers plan their lessons well to capture pupils' imagination and curiosity. In these lessons, teachers sequence learning activities suitably to ensure a progressive level of challenge. They conduct lessons at a suitable pace which ensures that pupils maintain their interest and commitment to learning. For example, in physical education, teachers make effective use of fitness equipment to capture pupils' interest throughout the lesson. However a minority of teachers do not have sufficiently high expectations of pupils and do not plan activities that challenge pupils. In these lessons, pupils make limited progress.

A minority of teachers have high expectations of pupils and plan learning activities meticulously. They are sensitive to pupils' needs and adapt their teaching accordingly. For example, in French lessons, teachers ensure that pupils know how to use learning resources to extend their vocabulary and develop their grasp of syntax when preparing for an oral exam. A minority of teachers create and use attractive learning resources to stimulate pupils' interest. For example, in geography when discussing the flooding of Tryweryn, skilful use of visual stimulus enables pupils to have a strong insight into real events. In a minority of instances, teachers provide a clear balance between their input and time for independent learning. However, a minority of teachers do not provide enough opportunities for pupils to work independently.

In a few lessons, teachers are extremely skilful at securing progressive development in pupils' skills and knowledge. For example, in history, when discussing the rise of Hitler and the Nazi party pupils analyse and synthesise sources very effectively to explain and interpret the motives and actions. In these lessons teachers encourage pupils to reason and explain their answers fully, referencing previous work in their books, to deepen their understanding. In the best examples, teachers model effective practice to inspire and engage pupils to achieve high standards of work. For example, teachers make effective use of the work of previous pupils to demonstrate successful use of pencil tone in portraits. In addition, in a few lessons teachers provide valuable opportunities for pupils to reflect and refine their work to develop their independence in a structured and supportive environment.

In a few lessons, teachers do not have sufficiently high expectations of pupils. They do not plan activities carefully enough to match pupils' abilities. In these lessons, pupils make insufficient progress.

Overall, the impact of assessment and feedback to pupils is too variable. In many lessons, teachers offer valuable verbal feedback and ensure pupils refine their work or correct their own misconceptions. In a majority of cases, teachers offer pupils useful written feedback and additional tasks that provide opportunities for them to improve their work. However, in many cases, teachers do not ensure that pupils respond to their suggestions. Many teachers use effective questioning techniques to develop pupils' thinking and to assess their understanding. These teachers monitor pupils' progress carefully and are adept at modifying activities to address any misconceptions. However, in a minority of instances, teachers do not use questioning well enough to challenge pupils' thinking or to involve the whole class in discussion. In addition, in a few instances, teachers do not consolidate pupils' learning before moving on to the next stage in the lesson. As a result pupils do not have a strong enough grasp of subject knowledge and skills to make effective progress.

The school provides a broad curriculum that aims to stimulate and challenge its pupils. In Year 7, the very recent introduction of the 'We Can' curriculum is designed to support the pupils in becoming ambitious and well-informed individuals. However, it is too soon to evaluate the impact of this initiative.

At key stage 4, the school provides a suitable range of academic and vocational courses that meet the needs of pupils. For example, the school has recently introduced a construction course to respond to the needs of the pupils and the local community. The options process is well managed at both key stage 4 and sixth form, including a useful informal consultation process that provides insight into the interests of pupils. More able pupils are given a range of worthwhile learning experiences, such as the learning of Mandarin, to further enrich their education.

The school offers a valuable programme of enrichment opportunities that supports pupils in extending their learning outside of the classroom. This includes a wide range of sporting activities, and access for all pupils to the Duke of Edinburgh award scheme. In addition, the school provides worthwhile educational visits to literary festivals, local businesses and countries such as Italy and Iceland. All of these opportunities enable pupils to apply their learning to authentic contexts. The school also promotes the Welsh language and culture through the curriculum effectively. For instance, in History pupils visit the local old age pensioner's home to interview people about their memories of the effect of World War 2 in the Carmarthenshire area. Pupils in the Welsh-medium stream study a minority of their subjects through the medium of Welsh.

The school's effective planning for the delivery of the Welsh Baccalaureate has secured strong outcomes for pupils. This has included beneficial opportunities to develop work-based skills such as the setting up of small businesses to raise money for charities.

The school plans appropriately for the development of pupils' literacy skills. Schemes of work identify suitable opportunities for pupils to apply their skills in reading, writing and oracy. However, a minority of teachers do not plan effectively for the progressive development of pupils' literacy skills in lessons.

In a few subjects, for instance in geography, pupils have relevant opportunities to practise their numeracy skills. However, planning for the development of numeracy skills in subjects other than mathematics is underdeveloped.

Pupils have suitable opportunities to practise their literacy and numeracy skills in registration time. Furthermore, the school's library provides highly creative ways of developing reading skills and promoting reading for pleasure such as the reading surgery, visits from professional story tellers and 'celebrate a writer day'. The school has purposeful approaches to providing interventions for pupils with weaker literacy and numeracy skills that support their progress well.

In a minority of instances, pupils have useful opportunities to use their ICT skills such as in three-dimensional design in design and technology and web design in history. However, planning for pupils to develop their ICT skills across the curriculum is at an early stage.

Care, support and guidance: Good

Ysgol Dyffryn Taf is a nurturing school at the heart of its community. Its caring, respectful and inclusive ethos puts pupils' wellbeing at the centre of its work.

A committed team of staff provide beneficial care and guidance for all pupils, particularly those who face significant barriers to learning. All staff know the pupils well and offer a close network of support to ensure their wellbeing. The school has strong links with a range of specialist, health and support services to strengthen support for vulnerable pupils.

Valuable transition arrangements and activities support pupils to settle quickly and effectively into school life. The peer mentoring scheme develops older pupils' leadership skills as well as helping pupils in Year 7 engage confidently with the opportunities available to them. In addition, the school provides pupils with special educational needs with an effective, enhanced programme of support on entry to the school. The school uses a wellbeing screening tool effectively during transition, and as pupil progress through school, to identify vulnerable groups for intervention. This enables pupils to access personalised support that has a positive impact on their emotional wellbeing.

The learning support team provide valuable support for pupils with special educational needs ensuring they make effective progress against their targets. These pupils access a comprehensive range of purposeful, targeted interventions in the school study centre to develop their specific and social, emotional and behavioural needs. For example, very effective paired reading, emotional literacy schemes and play therapy. This is captured effectively in the comprehensive special educational needs provision map. The learning support team provide all members of staff with a detailed and useful description of pupils' individual needs through the one page profile and pupil plans. However, a minority of teachers do not make enough use of this information, therefore planning to meet the needs of all pupils in lessons is not sufficiently effective across all subjects.

The school offers a range of opportunities for pupils to take on responsibilities and become active citizens within the school and wider community. Notable examples include the links with local old peoples' homes, the organisation of Christmas presents for the elderly in the community and involvement of pupils in the debating society.

The school makes a positive contribution to pupils' social, creative and cultural development through school productions, eisteddfodau, and activities such as the Duke of Edinburgh Award and the house system. A broad range of sporting activities are offered in an attempt to encourage a healthy lifestyle. Appropriate arrangements are in place to promote healthy eating and drinking including opportunities in food technology and wellbeing lessons.

The personal and social education programme provides useful guidance and information to prepare pupils for adult life on important aspects such as sex education, internet safety and mindfulness. Helpful advice is given to pupils relating to career choices in key stage 3 and key stage 4 in partnership with the careers service and local businesses.

The school has recently introduced a comprehensive tracking system that enables leaders and individual classroom teachers to track and monitor pupil progress and attitudes to learning appropriately. This has improved the schools ability to track and monitor the progress of individual pupils but it is too soon to comment on the impact of this on outcomes.

The school has suitable arrangements for communicating with parents and guardians using a variety of methods, including through mobile technology. The school provides beneficial workshops for parents to enable them to support their children through school. Interim and end of year reports provide suitable information for parents about pupils' progress and attitudes to learning.

The schools arrangements for safeguarding pupils meets requirements and give no cause for concern.

Leadership and management: Good

Since his appointment in 2018, the headteacher has established a clear vision with appropriate strategic aims that focus on meeting every pupils' needs. He provides assured leadership and true commitment to creating a school that fulfils the mission statement of 'We Can, We Care'/Gallwn, Gofalwn. The headteacher has communicated his vision clearly to staff and governors and he has built trust within the school community.

The senior leadership team, after a period of instability, provide purposeful support to the headteacher. They now work collegiately to deliver the school's strategic aims. The school has recently revised the roles of the senior leadership team. Their responsibilities are shared fairly and are understood by other staff. Senior leaders model and promote professional values and behaviours well. Most middle leaders understand their roles and responsibilities. They contribute suitably to delivering the school's strategic priorities of raising standards, improving teaching and developing leadership skills. Pastoral leaders are effective in securing high standards of pupil wellbeing.

Senior leaders hold middle leaders to account well. Through effective line management arrangements, they monitor improvement plans and focus suitably on pupils' standards. They follow up most action points successfully in subsequent meetings. In general, over the last year, leaders have secured modest

improvements in outcomes in key stage 4 and wellbeing. Pupils now perform closer to that expected and are extremely proud of their school. Other significant improvements include closer tracking of pupil progress and securing better outcomes in the skills challenge certificate at key stage 4.

Performance management arrangements for teachers are suitable. They include relevant targets with measurable outcomes linked to the school's priorities. This has ensured consistency across the school. However, personal targets are not always sharp enough and the school does not manage the performance of non-teaching staff well enough.

Leaders collaborate well with other schools including partner primary schools. This has led to, for example, effective academic and pastoral transition for pupils from Year 6 to Year 7.

Processes for self-evaluation help staff at all levels to have a generally realistic view of the school's strengths and weaknesses. Middle and senior leaders evaluate pupil outcomes effectively and use this information to inform planning at whole school departmental and pastoral level. A comprehensive calendar of activities to evaluate the school's work includes useful lesson observations, work scrutiny and pupil surveys. This wide range of range of worthwhile activities provides helpful specific feedback and action points. Leaders share these findings effectively, especially around quality of teaching, with staff during 'teaching and learning' meetings or training days. However, until recently, leaders did not focus closely enough on the impact of teaching on pupil progress.

The school canvasses the opinion of pupils and parents effectively and acts upon them appropriately. For example, the school council created a useful pupil friendly version of the school development plan. In addition, the school made changes to the school uniform following consultation with pupils and parents.

The school uses outcomes from self-evaluation processes well to plan for improvements. They identify meaningful and relevant priorities with precise actions to address them. This includes attention to improving teaching, developing leaders and improving standards. Subject leaders identify suitable departmental specific priorities and align them successfully with those of the school.

Leaders have been successful in establishing a culture that promotes and values continuous professional learning for all staff. They have ensured that there are frequent activities for all staff to broaden and refine their professional knowledge. The school has a range of effective strategies to share good practice among staff, such as training sessions and peer observations. These activities have been successful in raising awareness of effective teaching across the school. However, they have not had enough impact on the quality of teaching overall.

The school has developed worthwhile links with other providers, including other secondary schools and higher education institutions. The school has a clear and structured programme to support newly qualified teachers and beneficial links with teacher training institutions.

Governors are experienced and provide useful challenge to the school through different committees. They are active in the life of the school and draw on their expertise to help with aspects of the school's work for example mock interviews and participation in the annual school production. The governing body has a secure understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses.

The headteacher, business manager and governors manage the budget well and make sure that money is spent wisely for the benefit of pupils and staff. The school maintains suitable staffing levels and careful management over time has secured a small surplus in budget. The school uses its available finances well to maintain a suitable learning environment for example, to refurbish the old gymnasium. The school uses its grant funding appropriately. It makes effective use of the pupil development grant to provide valuable support and coaching for pupils eligible for free school meals.

Evidence base of the report

Before an inspection, inspectors:

- analyse the outcomes from the parent and pupil questionnaires and consider the views of teachers and the governing body through their questionnaire responses

During an inspection, inspectors normally:

- hold a meeting with parents to hear their views on the school and its effectiveness
- meet the headteacher, governors, senior and middle leaders (where appropriate) and individual teachers to evaluate the impact of the school's work
- meet pupils to discuss their work, to listen to them read and to gain their views about various aspects of their school
- meet groups of pupils in leadership roles, such as representatives from the school council and eco-committee
- visit a broad sample of classes, including learning support groups and undertake a variety of learning walks to observe pupils learning and to see staff teaching in a range of settings, including classrooms, support groups and in outdoor areas
- where appropriate, visit the specialist resource base within the school to see pupils' learning
- observe and speak to pupils at lunch and break times and at a sample of after-school clubs, where appropriate
- attend assemblies and daily acts of collective worship
- look closely at the school's self-evaluation processes
- consider the school's improvement plan and look at evidence to show how well the school has taken forward planned improvements
- scrutinise a range of school documents, including information on pupil assessment and progress, records of meetings of staff and the governing body, information on pupils' wellbeing, including the safeguarding of pupils, and records of staff training and professional development

After the on-site inspection and before the publication of the report, Estyn:

- review the findings of the inspection alongside the supporting evidence from the inspection team in order to validate, moderate and ensure the quality of the inspection

Copies of the report

Copies of this report are available from the school and from the Estyn website (www.estyn.gov.wales)

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

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

The report was produced in accordance with Section 28 of the Education Act 2005.

Every possible care has been taken to ensure that the information in this document is accurate at the time of going to press. Any enquiries or comments regarding this document/publication should be addressed to:

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