A report on

Ysgol Y Castell
Priory Street
Kidwelly
Carmarthenshire
SA17 4TR

Date of inspection: July 2019

by

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

About Ysgol Y Castell

Ysgol Y Castell is in the town of Kidwelly in Carmarthenshire. There are 258 pupils on roll aged from 3 to 11 years, including 11 who attend part-time in the nursery. The school organises its pupils into eight single-age and three mixed-age classes, plus the nursery.

Around 28% of pupils are eligible for free school meals, which is above the national average of 18%. The school identifies about 28% of pupils as having additional learning needs. This is above the national average of 21%. A very few pupils come from an ethnic minority background or have English as an additional language. A very few pupils speak Welsh at home.

The headteacher took up her post in September 2015. The school's previous inspection was in June 2014.

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

Most pupils enjoy attending Ysgol Y Castell. They have positive working relationships with staff and behave well in lessons and around the school. However, the school's arrangements to ensure pupils' safety are not robust enough.

Most pupils achieve suitable standards in English and mathematics during their time at the school. They make good progress in the development of their information, and communication technology (ICT) skills. However, as a result of insufficient challenge and a lack of consistently high expectations, too many pupils do not make sufficient progress overall. In many cases, teachers plan activities that interest and engage pupils. However, many lessons and much of the timetabled week consist of activities that are too adult led. This limits opportunities for pupils to develop wider skills and become capable independent learners.

A high proportion of the school's leadership team have left the school recently and there is a lack of clarity over roles, responsibilities and lines of accountability. Staff and leaders do not have a shared vision for school improvement. Fractured working relationships between staff mean that maintaining and improving the quality of the school's work is challenging. Self-evaluation and improvement work does not ensure that the school identifies and addresses the most important areas for improvement.

Inspection area	Judgement
Standards	**Adequate and needs improvement**
Wellbeing and attitudes to learning	**Adequate and needs improvement**
Teaching and learning experiences	**Adequate and needs improvement**
Care, support and guidance	**Unsatisfactory and needs urgent improvement**
Leadership and management	**Unsatisfactory and needs urgent improvement**

Recommendations

R1 Address the shortcomings in safeguarding and health and safety identified during the inspection

R2 Improve leadership at all levels and promote effective collaboration among all staff

R3 Improve the effectiveness of self-evaluation and improvement planning

R4 Ensure that staff have high expectations of pupil achievement and provide pupils with tasks and feedback that challenge them to make the progress of which they are capable

R5 Improve attendance

R6 Ensure a balanced curriculum that allows appropriate time for pupils to develop the full range of skills and greater opportunities to learn independently

R7 Ensure that the school's information about pupils' progress is accurate and used well to inform next steps in learning

What happens next

In accordance with the Education Act 2005, HMCI is of the opinion that special measures are required in relation to this school. The school will draw up an action plan to show how it is going to address the recommendations. Estyn will monitor the school's progress on a termly basis.

Main findings

Standards: Adequate and needs improvement

Most pupils enter the school with literacy, numeracy and social skills at the expected level for their age. As they move through the school, the majority continue to develop these skills appropriately. However, by the end of key stage 2, too many pupils of all ability levels, but particularly the more able, do not improve their literacy and numeracy skills well enough.

In the foundation phase, most pupils develop effective speaking and listening skills. As they progress through school, many pupils make valuable contributions to class discussions. For example, many Year 1 pupils make useful comments about the disadvantages of landfill sites and the benefits of recycling. By the end of key stage 2, many communicate clearly and use a good range of vocabulary when discussing their work or expressing their views.

Many pupils in the foundation phase develop an appropriate early understanding of letter sounds. They use this knowledge and a suitable range of other techniques to read unfamiliar words. Most make suitable progress with their reading skills over time and, by Year 2, many read with appropriate accuracy and fluency. In key stage 2, many pupils enjoy reading. By Year 6, they read with suitable expression and fluency, giving opinions about the plot and making sensible predictions about what may happen next in a story. However, across the school, the quality of pupils' understanding of what they read is variable and many older pupils do not use higher order reading skills well enough. For example, in many cases pupils copy information they find on the internet rather than extracting key information from the text.

As they move through school, most pupils make appropriate progress in developing their writing skills. For instance, more able pupils in Year 1 use persuasive language well when writing a detailed letter to a local supermarket to express disappointment about the shop's use of plastic. However, by the end of the foundation phase, few write at sufficient length independently. In key stage 2, pupils write using a suitable range of fiction and non-fiction text types. However, too many pupils do not spell familiar words correctly or use punctuation well enough to ensure the meaning of their writing is clear. A few more able pupils use a good range of imaginative vocabulary and creative ideas in their writing. For example, when creating a diary entry about Captain Scott's adventures. However, many pupils across key stage 2 do not write creatively and at sufficient length well enough. The standard of presentation of pupils' work, particularly in key stage 2, is inconsistent and many pupils do not take enough pride in their work.

Many pupils enjoy learning Welsh and are proud of the famous Welsh nursery rhyme 'Hen fenyw fach Cydweli'. Most pupils develop their Welsh oracy skills appropriately as they progress through school. For instance, most pupils respond confidently in Welsh as part of daily routines. Many pupils develop their Welsh reading and writing skills appropriately. By Year 6 pupils write extended descriptions of a friend and are begin to read short story books with understanding and fluency. However, pupils do not use Welsh outside of dedicated Welsh lessons frequently enough.

Many pupils develop their mathematical skills appropriately as they move through school. In the foundation phase, most pupils develop a sound understanding of number and many begin to apply their numeracy skills well in independent tasks. For example, Year 1 pupils use their counting skills to create an obstacle course in the outdoor area, which requires pupils to jump, skip and catch in fives and tens. In key stage 2, most pupils continue to develop their knowledge of number and a range of mathematical concepts, such as shape, measure and data handling appropriately. For example, when calculating the mean number of different types of tortoises that are endangered on the Galapagos Islands. However, pupils do not apply their numeracy skills across the curriculum frequently or consistently enough to the same standard as in their mathematics lessons.

Many pupils develop their ICT skills appropriately as they progress through school. Younger pupils think logically to program toy robots to move across a grid to Tedi Twt. By the end of key stage 2, most pupils create suitable databases and graphs, for example to record the time it takes ice to melt. Most pupils access online accounts, save and organise their work in folders with appropriate independence.

Wellbeing and attitudes to learning: Adequate and needs improvement

Most pupils are respectful and courteous towards each other, staff and visitors to the school. They demonstrate confidence, for example when contributing their ideas to discussions in class. Most behave well in lessons. Many move around school in a calm and orderly manner. Older pupils are clear about the school's expectations of their conduct and motivated well by its system for recognising positive behaviour and attitudes. Nearly all pupils feel safe and secure in school and they know whom they can speak to if they are worried or have a problem. They are aware of how to stay safe online. For instance, they understand that they must not share passwords or personal information with others.

A suitable range of pupil groups, such as the school council and eco-committee, help to improve aspects of the school environment. Most members of these groups feel that teachers and leaders listen carefully and act upon their suggestions. For example, teachers worked with the criw Cymraeg to establish a system to create areas on the playground for different types of play. However, whilst these initiatives are beneficial, overall, pupils do not have a sufficient voice in influencing the work of the school.

Nearly all pupils know how to stay healthy and understand the value of exercise. For example, they take part enthusiastically in a variety of physical activities including the daily mile. Older pupils approach physical challenges confidently and understand how climbing both Snowdon and Pen-y Fan benefited their fitness levels and ability to persevere. Nearly all pupils know how to make sensible choices about healthy eating and make good use of the school's fruit tuck shop. Pupils who attend gardening club further develop their knowledge of healthy foods by growing their own vegetables.

Most pupils demonstrate they are ready to learn at the start of lessons. They engage well with activities and generally enjoy their learning. They sustain concentration for a suitable amount of time when working independently or in small groups. For instance, in lower key stage two pupils work well collaboratively as they persevere to

create a video of a treasure hunt as part of their independent 'mission'. However, in too many lessons pupils are overly reliant on adult direction and support and do not take enough responsibility for their learning. Many pupils do not have a clear understanding of how well they are progressing or what they need to do to improve. As a result, their ability to improve their own work is limited. Pupils in the foundation phase contribute useful and imaginative ideas about things they would like to do in their classroom areas. However, in key stage 2 pupils do not express opinions about what and how they learn often enough.

The declining trend of pupil attendance over the last four years is of considerable concern. When compared to similar schools, rates of attendance have placed the school consistently in the lowest 25% for the last three years. In addition, rates of persistent absence show an upward trend over the last four years.

Teaching and learning experiences: Adequate and needs improvement

All staff strive to ensure positive working relationships with pupils. In general, they manage behaviour well and have high expectations of how pupils should conduct themselves. They reward positive behaviour effectively. Staff deal with instances of poor behaviour gently but firmly.

Teachers demonstrate good subject knowledge and plan many activities that engage pupils well and stimulate their interest. For example, pupils in Year 6 enjoy investigating how different materials result in varying levels of friction when used as the cable for a model zip wire. However, in too many cases, particularly in key stage 2, activities are overly adult led. This limits opportunities for pupils to develop their independent, collaborative and thinking skills. In addition, teachers too frequently plan activities that do not challenge pupils to achieve at the level at which they are capable and do not demonstrate consistently high expectations of pupils. As a result, too many pupils present their work carelessly and do not make sufficient progress during lessons and over time.

In a few classes, teachers provide pupils with effective feedback that indicates clearly the actions they need to take to improve their skills and the quality of their work. They arrange beneficial opportunities for pupils to respond to their comments and to make improvements. However, this is not consistent across the school and in too many cases teacher feedback does not result in improvements to pupils' skills or knowledge.

The school's planned curriculum provides a suitable breadth of learning experiences that engage and meet the needs of most learners. Most teachers plan appropriate opportunities for the development of pupils' literacy, numeracy and ICT skills. They ensure that pupils learn the features of a good range of fiction and non-fiction text types. However, they do not plan for pupils to write at length and at a sufficiently challenging level frequently enough. Teachers plan appropriately for pupils to apply their literacy and ICT skills across the curriculum. However, opportunities for pupils to apply their numeracy skills in other subjects are less well developed.

In the foundation phase, teachers provide pupils with suitable opportunities to contribute their ideas to topic planning. Teachers use pupils' ideas creatively to modify areas within the enhanced and continuous provision areas. For example, the

Frog Prince story inspired Year 2 pupils to create a potions shop in their role-play area. Teachers have recently provided the opportunity for pupils in Years 3 and 4 to contribute ideas for independent missions. However, this is at an early stage of development and, overall, teachers in key stage 2, do not give pupils enough opportunities to contribute to what and how they learn.

Provision for foundation phase pupils is generally appropriate. Staff make good use of the classroom and outdoor environment to create interesting areas designed to develop pupils' independent learning skills. However, the significant allocation of timetabled adult led activities, particularly during the morning, restricts the time available for pupils to access this provision. As a result, this does not give pupils sufficient opportunities to develop as independent, capable and ambitious learners.

The school makes effective use of links with the local community to enhance the curriculum through rich and relevant experiences. For example, visits to Kidwelly Castle, the local church and parks. The school provides opportunities for pupils to work alongside local artists to develop their creative skills. For example, they work with a graffiti artist to create a mural that promotes friendship among pupils.

Provision to develop pupils' Welsh language skills within specified Welsh lessons is effective. It enables pupils to develop their Welsh language skills progressively as they move through the school. Teachers promote aspects of Welsh heritage and culture successfully, for example by working with a local Welsh author and learning about the historical link between Wales and Patagonia. Weekly Welsh assemblies and the annual school Eisteddfod provide pupils with beneficial opportunities to perform traditional dancing and to sing and recite poems in Welsh.

Care, support and guidance: Unsatisfactory and needs urgent improvement

The school has a good range of provision, including specific intervention programmes, to support the wellbeing of pupils with additional social and emotional needs. For example, the designated pupil wellbeing space known as the 'Cwtch' gives pupils a safe space and a known point of contact where they can discuss any concerns or issues they may be facing. As a result, these pupils feel well cared for and make suitable progress in the development of their social skills. Teachers identify pupils they believe to be more able. However, the school provides limited additional provision for these pupils to ensure they achieve at the level at which they are capable.

Staff work well with a wide range of specialist services, including educational psychologists and speech and language therapists to provide beneficial advice and support for pupils. However, the targets set by teachers in pupils' individual education plans are not specific or measurable enough. As a result, the school cannot evaluate robustly pupils' progress towards achieving these targets and is unclear if interventions and additional support are working successfully.

The school keeps parents of pupils with additional learning needs involved and well informed. It provides suitable information on how parents can support their child at home. For example, staff deliver workshops on reading and numeracy. The school provides limited information on the progress of other groups of pupils. For example, end of year reports tend to be generic and do not reflect the strengths and areas for improvement of each pupil well enough.

The school's system for tracking and evaluating pupil progress is limited. The school does not have effective processes in place to ensure that the information teachers enter into its tracking system is accurate. In addition, leaders do not plan opportunities for staff to discuss pupil progress and reflect on the effectiveness of provision. As a result, the school does not have a secure understanding of whether specific groups of pupils, such as pupils with additional leaning needs, are making enough progress over time and whether new initiatives are leading to improvements in outcomes for pupils. Too often, teachers do not use assessment information well enough to inform the planning of learning experiences.

The school examines pupils' attendance closely and identifies pupils whose attendance is a cause for concern. However, strategies for reducing the frequency of pupils' absence are not sufficiently robust and have limited impact.

There are appropriate arrangements to encourage healthy eating and drinking. The school provides pupils with a range of opportunities to consider their health and wellbeing through regular physical activities, such as the 'daily mile' and dedicated weeks with a whole school focus on healthy living. An appropriate range of extra-curricular activities provide pupils with opportunities to engage in sports including football and cricket.

The school organises a suitable range of groups for pupils to develop their leadership skills. For example, teachers arrange for digital leaders to support younger pupils in developing their ICT skills. However, although pupil groups make a good contribution to the day-to-day running of the school, leaders do not provide sufficient opportunities for pupils to influence decisions about teaching and the curriculum.

The school provides appropriate opportunities to support pupils' moral and social development through its personal and social programmes of learning. This supports pupils to develop a secure understanding of right and wrong, for example during assemblies that focus on children's rights. The school works appropriately to develop pupils' sense of community. For instance, younger pupils work with the local community and school council to develop a sensory garden in the village.

The school's arrangements for safeguarding pupils do not meet requirements and give serious cause for concern.

Leadership and management: Unsatisfactory and needs urgent improvement

The headteacher and staff strive consistently to provide engaging learning experiences for pupils and place a high priority on ensuring that pupils feel happy and enjoy their time at school. However, fractured working relationships between staff members hamper significantly the effectiveness of the work of the school and limit its ability to maintain and improve the quality of education for its pupils. For example, it hinders the sharing of existing good practice, such as elements of effective foundation phase teaching. In addition, leaders have not established effective systems to safeguard pupils.

A high proportion of the school's senior leaders have left their posts recently. The headteacher has begun to work with the governing body to implement a new leadership structure. However, there is uncertainty over roles, responsibilities and lines of accountability and leaders and staff do not have a shared vision for school improvement or high enough expectations for pupils' progress and attainment.

Governors are supportive of the school. Many are regular visitors who assist with aspects of the school's work, such as taking pupils on educational visits. However, their knowledge of the work of the school is limited and they rely too heavily on the information provided to them by the headteacher. They do not provide effective challenge or follow up decisions with sufficient rigour. For example, by ensuring that leaders implement agreed actions to address safeguarding concerns in a timely and effective manner.

The headteacher works with a limited range of staff to undertake self-evaluation activities to make judgements about the quality of the school's work. These include lesson observations, the scrutiny of pupil books and information from pupil and parent questionnaires. Leaders also consider a range of teacher assessment and test data. However, they do not include a wide enough range of staff in self-evaluation activities or carry them out with sufficient rigour. As a result, self-evaluation does not provide leaders with an accurate picture of the school's strengths or its most important areas for improvement.

In a few instances school improvement work is beneficial. For example, leaders recognised the need to improve Welsh language skills among pupils and implemented a range of initiatives to address this issue. However, overall school improvement actions do not include the in-depth involvement of a wide enough range of staff. As a result, too many staff members do not see themselves as part of school improvement processes and this reduces the effectiveness of new initiatives. In addition, self-evaluation activities do not link clearly with the school's priorities for improvement. Leaders place an emphasis on implementing actions to ensure and improve pupil wellbeing, but do not balance this against other areas that may require urgent improvement. For example, pupil attendance has declined considerably over the last four years, yet the school has not acted effectively to improve this.

Leaders place a suitable emphasis on ensuring professional learning opportunities for staff. They arrange whole staff training sessions that impact appropriately on the quality of teaching and learning in a few areas. For example, training for all staff on the use of materials to support the development of pupils' understanding of number has ensured a consistency of approach in the foundation phase. The school is at the early stages of introducing a system of peer observations that enable teachers to work with colleagues to reflect and improve aspects of their teaching. However, it is too early to identify the difference that this work has on improving the overall quality of teaching. In general, professional learning lacks a strategic approach. Arrangements to identify training needs are unclear and there is insufficient evaluation of the impact that professional learning has on outcomes for pupils. Arrangements to share aspects of good practice are underdeveloped and hampered by poor relationship between staff.

The headteacher works with governors well to manage the school's resources. The school has sufficient equipment and resources to support learning effectively in most areas of the curriculum. Leaders make good use of internal and external areas and provide an attractive learning environment for pupils. However, the school does not plan strategically for the use of grant funding to support vulnerable pupils.

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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