



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

A report on

Ysgol Garndolbenmaen

**Garndolbenmaen
Gwynedd
LL51 9SZ**

Date of inspection: February 2024

by

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

This report is also available in Welsh.

About Ysgol Garndolbenmaen

Name of provider	Ysgol Garndolbenmaen
Local authority	Cyngor Gwynedd
Language of the provider	Welsh
Type of school	Primary
Religious character	*
Number of pupils on roll	21
Pupils of statutory school age	19
Number in nursery classes (if applicable)	2
Percentage of statutory school age pupils eligible for free school meals over a three-year average <i>(The national percentage of pupils eligible for free school meals over a three-year average in the primary sector is 23.7%)</i>	28.4%
Percentage of statutory school age pupils identified as having additional learning needs (a) <i>(The national percentage of pupils identified as having an additional learning need in the primary sector is 13.2%)</i>	*
Percentage of statutory school age pupils who speak Welsh at home	63.0%
Percentage of statutory school age pupils with English as an additional language	0.0%
Date of headteacher appointment	01/09/2023
Date of previous Estyn inspection (if applicable)	16/11/2015
Start date of inspection	05/02/2024

Data reported is sourced from the latest available Pupil Level Annual School Census. These figures may be slightly different from those observed during the inspection.

Further information is available from the Welsh Government My Local School website:
mylocalschool.gov.wales

- a. The term 'additional learning needs' is being used to describe those pupils on the SEN/ALN register of the school.

Overview

Ysgol Garndolbenmaen is a caring and inclusive school that nurtures well-being and supports pupils' learning successfully. The new headteacher leads the school effectively and, in the short period since being appointed, she has succeeded in forging a close working relationship between all stakeholders. She sets high expectations of herself and her commitment and enthusiasm have ensured that the school is making good strides towards meeting its priorities. The close relationship between staff and parents contributes effectively towards pupils' pride in their society and their strong sense of belonging to the local community. The sense of belonging to one big family is a strong element of this school.

Staff identify pupils' well-being needs very well. They provide continuous opportunities for pupils to discuss their feelings and share their emotions. This has a positive effect on their self-confidence and their willingness to take risks. Teachers provide a range of exciting and interesting experiences that stimulate pupils' enthusiasm and curiosity towards their activities. As a result, pupils make good progress in their skills, particularly their problem-solving and digital skills. Teachers listen well to pupils' views and comments and parents' contributions to plan a curriculum that supports pupils to apply their skills across the curriculum. This contributes well to all pupils' full development.

Teachers are beginning to use assessment findings to plan purposefully for pupils' further development. They gather initial information from an increasing number of sources. However, they do not always use this information incisively enough to ensure that pupils make the best possible progress.

A strong feature of the school is the respect and courtesy that pupils have for each other and adults. Many show an infectious pride in their work and make sound progress in their understanding of the local area, Wales and the wider world.

Recommendations

- R1 Ensure that feedback for pupils and the information that derives from assessing and tracking their progress has a better impact on the next steps in their learning
- R2 Ensure an appropriate level of challenge in pupils' learning activities

What happens next

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

Main findings

Learning

On entry to the school, a majority of pupils have skills that are appropriate for what is expected for their stage of development. As they move through the school, nearly all pupils make sound progress from their starting points. Pupils with additional learning needs (ALN) make good progress during their time at the school, particularly in the area of well-being. Across the school, most pupils use and apply their knowledge and skills well.

Nearly all pupils' digital skills develop very well across the school; this is a strength. They use a variety of software confidently to complete coding tasks, analyse data, record and edit a film. They use and apply their digital skills as an integral part of their work, which prepares them very well for the world of work and the future.

Most pupils listen very well. They follow staff's instructions purposefully and listen to each other effectively when working in the areas and during play times, for example when creating and analysing 2D shapes and working together and solving problems in regular outdoor lessons on the school field. As pupils move through the school, they speak Welsh and English with increasing accuracy, with a wider range of purposeful spoken vocabulary. At the top of the school, nearly all pupils speak confidently with adults, respond politely and are enthusiastic when discussing their work.

Most pupils' reading skills are very good. They discuss their reading books with increasing confidence and speak intelligently about the characters and the main events. Most pupils use an appropriate range of reading techniques well to interpret less familiar words. The oldest pupils make good use of punctuation to guide their reading. They develop their higher-order reading skills purposefully to read different texts in Welsh and English and when gathering information from different sources, for example when finding facts about different quarries.

Many pupils have good writing skills in line with their level of development. They develop their ability to write at length effectively and gain increasing confidence to structure various genres. Most pupils use a good range of mature vocabulary when writing creatively, for example when writing a letter to Bendigeidfran from Branwen. By the end of their time at the school, most pupils write effectively in Welsh and English. On the whole, pupils' presentation of work and handwriting are good across the school.

Pupils in the youngest class develop good numeracy skills. They are able to respond to written and oral questions confidently and explain intelligently what they have done to reach the result. In this class, most pupils have a good understanding of number patterns and place value and use this knowledge appropriately to solve problems. They handle different measurements purposefully when measuring capacity in practice and deal with simple fractions successfully by dividing a pizza. They are able to tell the time in analogue and digital format and show a good understanding of the properties of regular shapes, 3D shapes and symmetry.

Through a number of practical activities, most pupils in the older class apply their numeracy skills well across the curriculum, for example by planting, growing, estimating, weighing and measuring potatoes in the school garden. Most pupils use a range of measuring tools skilfully, enter data correctly in tables and develop their ability to create different graphs. Most pupils apply their skills effectively when working together to solve problems, for example when designing and creating Christmas trees from old wood in the wood workshop.

Nearly all pupils develop sound creative skills by planning, recording and performing a rap about life in the quarry. They take pride in their creative work and discuss it confidently. Nearly all pupils develop their creative skills further by completing detailed, high quality and original artwork. Most pupils' physical skills develop well through a variety of appropriate activities in lessons, when they play and when they go for walks around the local area.

Most pupils' problem-solving and co-operation skills develop well across the school, for example by experimenting with circuits and conducting a fitness experiment. As a result, they apply their science and technology skills well.

Well-being and attitudes to learning

The school's caring ethos ensures that nearly all pupils feel safe and eager to learn. They show a natural excitement towards their activities and display enthusiasm when contributing intelligently during learning sessions. They interact maturely and respectfully with their friends and visitors, which contributes successfully to the sense of belonging to one big family at the school. As a result, nearly all pupils attend school regularly, take pride in their work and demonstrate pride when talking about their learning and the variety of experiences that are provided for them.

During learning sessions and break and lunchtimes, nearly all pupils behave very well. They are polite to others and treat each other inclusively. They show sensitive and kind attitudes towards pupils who receive additional support. Nearly all pupils consider and value the feelings of others, are very aware of the meaning of empathy and contribute maturely to moral discussions in school assemblies. The oldest pupils assume their responsibilities skilfully, which contributes towards promoting their confidence. They support the youngest pupils purposefully and supportively when learning outdoors.

The youngest pupils settle quickly at the school. They develop curiosity and excitement while playing happily alongside their friends. By the end of their time at the school, all pupils speak to each other maturely in class activities. They contribute particularly well to their learning, for example when expressing an opinion skilfully about the suggestion to reduce the summer holidays. They listen well to each other's points of view, show due respect and are prepared to change their minds following a discussion. Most interact with each other happily and naturally in the different learning areas. On the whole, they benefit from the purposeful opportunities to use the variety of resources that are available to them to develop their skills independently. However, they do not always make appropriate decisions when choosing the challenge level of their activity.

The respectful working relationship between staff and pupils is a strong element of provision. Nearly all pupils demonstrate co-operation and perseverance when completing tasks, for example in their determination to finish creating a shelter during an outdoor activity. At the top of the school, pupils listen attentively and respond skilfully to activities in the classroom and in outdoor sessions. They show an interest in all areas of the curriculum and respond well to the verbal support of staff. However, they do not respond consistently enough to teachers' written feedback in their books.

Pupils take their role as members of the school councils seriously and use their voice effectively to influence decisions within the school. Through their work on the councils, they contribute effectively to aspects of school life by organising fundraising activities, for example by organising an Easter party, a crazy hair day, a Christmas fair and a summer fair.

Nearly all pupils enjoy taking part in physical activities during their lessons and in extra-curricular sessions, including the Urdd club, a football tournament and Our World Cup. They are aware that maintaining a healthy body is important to maintaining their well-being. They take part in activities such as children's mental health day and promote this culture successfully. They explain the benefits of eating healthy foods effectively and why they should not eat too much fat and sugar.

Many pupils have a good awareness of the importance of equality and fairness. They use their knowledge of children's rights effectively to create a series of rights to improve the living standards of quarrymen in the 19th century. Most understand how to keep themselves safe online, for example through their work with the police and their work in the classroom. By the top of the school, they develop their ability to differentiate between bullying and cyberbullying effectively.

Teaching and learning experiences

Staff have a good understanding of the curriculum and plan for it purposefully. They develop a wide range of interesting learning experiences which provide effective opportunities for pupils to become independent and creative learners. Teachers plan the curriculum jointly in a skilful manner and provide a balanced curriculum that reflects the school's local context very effectively, for example through a visit to a local quarry and a further visit to an outdoor centre.

Teachers use an exciting variety of themes to present learning activities across the curriculum. On the whole, the range of activities promotes good progress in terms of pupils' skills, confidence and creativity. Activities are well planned and build appropriately on pupils' existing knowledge, understanding, skills and experiences. In the best practice, pupils' linguistic and numeracy skills are reinforced well in other areas across the curriculum.

Staff work well with pupils, parents and governors as they plan class themes and tasks which engage the enjoyment and enthusiasm of nearly all pupils. Staff consult with parents as they reconsider the school motto, as well as working closely with the local community to plan, build, create and maintain the school garden. This has a positive effect on creating a close-knit and community feeling within the school.

Teachers provide activities that promote independence across a range of areas within the classroom, such as areas for animating in the youngest class and a wide variety of digital tasks in the oldest class. They plan a range of interesting opportunities for pupils to write in different genres and apply their numeracy skills across the curriculum. In the best practice, they provide good opportunities for pupils to build on their digital skills, for example by using different hardware to reinforce their numeracy skills. However, activities across the curriculum are not always challenging enough and do not build sufficiently on previous learning.

The school takes pride in its Welshness. Teachers reinforce this by providing regular opportunities for pupils to celebrate the Welsh language and culture, for example as they plan, create and display traditional Welsh love spoons and by composing music through digital software. They make very good use of local visits and Welsh visitors, such as artists and film experts, to develop the pupils' sense of belonging to their *cynefin*, or local area, and Wales.

Staff give pupils regular oral feedback on the standard of their work and, on the whole, provide pupils with timely written feedback. In the best practice, pupils are given an opportunity to re-draft and make grammatical corrections to their work. However, feedback does not always provide pupils with enough guidance to improve the content of their work and there are not regular enough opportunities for pupils to respond to feedback to show improvements. Teachers and assistants ask probing questions, which is effective in helping pupils to recall previous learning. Teachers use suitable strategies to enable pupils to evaluate tasks and their own work in an oral classroom activity through '*Dewch i Asesu*' ('Come and Assess') sessions.

Staff track pupils' progress by assessing specific tasks and making use of standardised tests, in addition to monitoring attendance rates closely. However, they do not always use the findings effectively enough to plan the next steps in pupils' learning.

Care, support and guidance

The school is an inclusive, familial community that supports the emotional, health and social needs of all pupils extremely effectively. Staff work closely with parents and hold regular informal conversations about issues relating to the well-being of their children. As a result, staff have a thorough understanding of the emotional needs of all pupils and their care and support of them is excellent. Staff set high expectations for pupils' behaviour and encourage them to foster respect for each other well. This is highlighted in the excellent behaviour and natural courtesy of all pupils.

Staff track the progress of all pupils, including those with ALN, effectively. They have begun to analyse pupils' progress against their skills and are beginning to use this information purposefully in planning. This contributes to ensuring that the majority of pupils make appropriate progress.

Under the guidance of the additional learning needs co-ordinator (ALNCo), the assistants, who are new to their work, are beginning to show a good understanding of the most appropriate methods to support pupils. The school has taken firm steps, in co-operation with the local authority, to implement the new ALN act. They discuss pupils' needs regularly and receive clear guidance about effective support methods.

Staff have productive links with a wide range of external agencies to support provision.

Staff plan to ensure that nearly all pupils are very aware of the need to stay healthy and improve their fitness. Members of the school council have organised the sale of fruit kebabs to raise money for the school and visits to a local centre to undertake yoga, breathing and relaxation activities contribute effectively to this understanding.

The school's culture promotes pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development very effectively. The school takes advantage of morning assemblies to discuss current affairs, such as mental health week, where good opportunities are provided to develop pupils' understanding of methods for dealing with concerns. There is an effective spiritual feel to the morning assemblies which contributes appropriately to opportunities for pupils to develop robust values and examine beliefs beneficially.

The school promotes pupils' understanding of their identity, heritage and Welsh culture effectively. Staff enrich pupils' understanding by providing opportunities for them to learn about local places of significance, such as Llechwedd Quarry and the Ffestiniog Railway. Through this, pupils develop their understanding of the significance and importance of their community in comparison with the wider world. The school provides regular opportunities for pupils to take part in performances and events to foster their self-confidence and expressive ability. This includes taking part in shows and concerts in the community and in local eisteddfodau and the Urdd eisteddfod. The close link with the community is a strong element of the school's work.

The school has robust procedures to monitor pupils' punctuality and attendance and the school's attendance rate is very good. The headteacher and all staff understand their responsibilities in safeguarding pupils and there is a caring culture within the school. Arrangements meet requirements and are not a cause for concern.

Leadership and management

Since being appointed in September 2023, the headteacher has led the school enthusiastically and with complete dedication. Her vision contributes firmly towards fostering an inclusive ethos where pupils, staff and all of the school's partners feel like part of one big family. She is passionate about ensuring opportunities for pupils to develop their skills in a caring and exciting learning environment. She shows a willingness to make decisions to change the direction of the school, for example by improving the use of the outdoor area as a resource for outdoor learning. This enriches pupils' experiences as they work together and learn with their peers, in addition to developing their social skills. Together, staff motivate pupils to be confident and enthusiastic learners who take pride in their community and culture. They ensure that everyone understands and promotes the school's culture of safeguarding.

The headteacher's high expectations, together with the culture of regular co-operation between the small number of staff, are a strong feature of this rural school. The school operates effectively as a community that is ready to learn and is keen to make improvements to ensure that it offers the best possible provision. For

example, staff interact purposefully with staff from local schools and this is beginning to have an effect on their assessment procedures.

In a short time, the headteacher has established effective self-evaluation procedures which are based on collecting of first-hand evidence. Together, staff analyse attainment and provision by scrutinising pupils' work and by conducting learning walks and formal and informal observations. The process includes gathering information from a range of partners, including parents, governors and pupils. As a result, the headteacher and staff know their school well and address many of the improvements purposefully. Improvement processes are already beginning to have a positive effect, particularly in the area of well-being, attendance and pupils' extended writing.

Leaders plan purposefully to meet local and national priorities, for example in introducing the principles of Curriculum for Wales and implementing key elements of the Additional Learning Needs Act effectively. Staff promote the Welsh language and Welshness extremely successfully, which contributes firmly to developing pupils' pride in their identity and heritage.

Teachers are responsible for specific areas of learning and experience. Assistants are key members of the school team and contribute directly to improving pupils' standards of learning, well-being and social skills.

Governors know the school well and provide an appropriate balance of support and challenge. Under the headteacher's guidance, they develop their understanding of their role as a critical friend effectively. They are aware of the school's priorities and have an appropriate understanding of the school's strengths and areas for development. The headteacher and governors use the school's budget effectively to enrich the curriculum and raise pupils' standards. They link expenditure appropriately to the priorities in the development plan and make sensible and relevant use of the pupil development grant. The governing body ensures that the food and drink that are provided by the school comply with legislation and appropriate arrangements to promote healthy eating and drinking. Members of the governing body have recently influenced the school's decision to change the policy of eating fruit at break time by using an element of deprivation grant funding to provide free fruit to those pupils who need it.

Staff performance management procedures promote their professional learning well and provide valuable opportunities for them to develop at all levels. For example, they receive purposeful training on the developments of Curriculum for Wales, in addition to opportunities to learn more about methods to support pupils' well-being. This has a positive effect on pupils' well-being.

The relationship between the school and parents is an obvious strength. The regular co-operation and communication ensure that parents have a sound understanding of what is happening at the school. This contributes effectively to their ability to support their children at home, in addition to their ability to offer ideas that enrich pupils' learning experiences at school.

Evidence base of the report

Before an inspection, inspectors:

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

During an inspection, inspectors normally:

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

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

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

Copies of the report

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

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

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

Publication Section

Estyn

Anchor Court, Keen Road

Cardiff

CF24 5JW or by email to publications@estyn.gov.wales

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This document has been translated by Trosol (Welsh to English).