



Rhagoriaeth i bawb – Excellence for all

Arolygiaeth Ei Mawrhydi dros Addysg
a Hyfforddiant yng Nghymru

Her Majesty's Inspectorate
for Education and Training in Wales

A report on

**Ysgol Gymraeg Rhyd-Y-Grug
Aberfan
Merthyr Tudful
CF48 4NT**

Date of inspection: May 2011

by

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



During each inspection, inspectors aim to answer three key questions:

Key Question 1: How good are the outcomes?

Key Question 2: How good is provision?

Key Question 3: How good are leadership and management?

Inspectors also provide an overall judgement on the school's current performance and on its prospects for improvement.

In these evaluations, inspectors use a four-point scale:

Judgement	What the judgement means
Excellent	Many strengths, including significant examples of sector-leading practice
Good	Many strengths and no important areas requiring significant improvement
Adequate	Strengths outweigh areas for improvement
Unsatisfactory	Important areas for improvement outweigh strengths

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

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Context

Ysgol Gymraeg Rhyd y Grug relocated in September 2010 from Quakers Yard to Aberfan. The school admits children from Bedlinog, Trelewis, Treharris, Quakers Yard, Edwardsville, Merthyr Vale and Aberfan. At present there are 121 pupils of compulsory school age at the school and 30 pupils of three and four years of age. This number is lower than when the school was last inspected in 2005 but it is predicted that the numbers will increase in the years to come. The pupils are taught by six full-time teachers and one part-time teacher in six classes. The school is served by Merthyr Tudful Local Authority. All the pupils will transfer to Ysgol Rhydywaun, which is outside the county, at the end of their period at the school.

Seventeen per cent of the pupils are eligible to receive free school meals. Although this is lower than the county and national percentage the majority of the pupils come from homes that are in an area of economic disadvantage and come under Communities First. Eighty five percent of the pupils come from homes where English is the first language. Three children are of ethnic origin.

Twenty seven percent of the pupils receive support with additional educational needs. None of the pupils are statemented and the majority are on School Action. No suspensions, temporary or permanent, were recorded during the year before the inspection. There were a number of changes of staff since the last inspection including a headteacher who was appointed for September 2010. A little over half the staff were appointed after 2005.

The individual school budget in 2010-2011 per pupil for Ysgol Gymraeg Rhyd-Y-Grug is £3,593 which compares with a maximum of £6,431 and a minimum of £3,035 for primary schools in Merthyr Tudful. The school has the eighth highest budget per pupil of the 25 primary schools in Merthyr Tudful.

Summary

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

Current performance

The school's current performance is adequate because:

although;

- standards in all the skills, especially oral communication skills, show acceptable progress in comparison with the results of the original assessments in the Foundation Phase;
- achievement in learning and the pupils' progress in lessons across the school is generally good and is line with their ability;
- the percentage of pupils who achieve at expected levels is consistently higher than at similar schools at the end of key stage two;
- pupils with additional learning needs are making good progress and pupils who are receiving support in speech and language are making very good progress;
- the standard of care is good; and
- the standard of teaching is generally good.

- literacy standards and skills in Welsh are inconsistent, especially in key stage one;
- standards in mathematics and science are weak in teacher assessments at the end of key stage one;
- the provision for extending more able children is inadequate; and
- there is a considerable difference between the attainment of boys and girls with girls' attainment being higher than that of the boys.

Prospects for improvement

The prospects for improvement are good because:

- the new headteacher has given the school a definite direction and clear vision to the school within a short period and has managed change very effectively;
- the self-evaluation report is comprehensive and includes a detailed analysis of data which shows that the school knows itself well;
- the school's development plan has correctly identified the school's true needs in raising standards and has prioritised them appropriately over a period of three years;
- clear and practical managerial processes are being implemented consistently across the school;
- local and national priorities are developing well; and
- rapid progress has been made in important areas such as the school ethos, curriculum planning and the quality of the learning environment.

Recommendations

In order to improve the school should:

- R1 raise standards in key stage one in science and mathematics and standards of reading and writing in Welsh across the school;
- R2 decrease the gap between the achievements of boys and girls;
- R3 raise the attainment of more able pupils so that they can reach their full potential;
- R4 ensure more opportunities for pupils to undertake extended writing;
- R5 develop the role of the governing body further as a critical friend; and
- R6 respond to issues concerning health and safety that were identified in the feedback meeting at the end of the inspection.

What happens next?

The school will produce an action plan that shows how it will address the recommendations. The progress against the recommendations will be monitored by Estyn.

Main findings

Key Question 1: How good are outcomes?

Adequate

Standards: Adequate

The results of the foundation assessments as children start school consistently show that their skills are lower than the national average. This is especially true of their language, literacy and communication skills. At the end of the Foundation Phase, standards in all the skills, especially oral communication skills, show acceptable progress in comparison with the results of the original assessments.

By the end of key stage one at seven years of age, nearly most of the pupils can communicate effectively in Welsh. Their oral skills are developing well and they make use of their reading and writing skills across the curriculum. When the pupils leave the school at the end of year six, most show good progress in every aspect of their literacy skills in English, but their progress in Welsh is adequate. They use language appropriately in discussions and they are able to read in more than one language, using the information in the other language. The majority read meaningfully and show a good understanding of the text in English but this is not as consistent in Welsh. Standards of writing are generally good in both languages by the end of year six and the work is presented neatly.

However, literacy skills are not consistent throughout the school. The range and volume of work varies and consistent examples of extended written work are rare.

Achievement in learning and the pupils' progress in lessons throughout the school are generally good and in line with their ability. Many pupils can recall previous learning for a purpose, while being able to build upon it appropriately. In general, pupils work together well and respond appropriately to the tasks set and to the questions asked by the teachers. By the end of year six the pupils' thinking skills and their ability to work independently have developed well. Pupils use their information and communication technology skills confidently throughout the school but the modelling skills in using spreadsheets and interrogating a database have not developed adequately.

Pupils' awareness of Welsh artists and the history of their area through the Cwricwlwm Cymreig is good. Their awareness of Welsh authors is not as good.

In 2010, 82% of key stage one pupils succeeded in reaching the expected level in Welsh, mathematics and science and through that achieved the core subject indicator. This percentage was higher than the results of the family of schools to which the school belongs and also higher than the Welsh average. However, in comparison with similar schools across Wales in terms of free school meals, the results for the core subject indicator have declined over the last two years and the school is now in the bottom 50% in terms of performance. Mathematics has also been fairly consistently in the bottom 50% and science in the bottom 25% over four years.

The percentage of pupils who reach level three, that is the level that is higher than expected in Welsh, mathematics and science, are significantly higher than the family and fairly consistent over the last three years.

The results in key stage two are better than those of key stage one. In 2010, 88% of pupils succeeded in achieving the core subject indicator. This percentage was higher than the results of the family and Wales and has been higher for the last four years. In comparison with similar schools across Wales in terms of free school meals, the results for the core subject indicator place the school in the highest 25% in terms of performance for three of the past four years. The percentage of pupils who reach level five, that is a level higher than expected, in science and mathematics is higher than the family. However, the percentage is lower than the family in Welsh and English and consistently significantly lower in Welsh.

There is a definite difference between the performance of boys and girls in every subject in key stage one, with the boys underperforming. This is especially true for science and mathematics, where the situation is worsening from year to year. None of the boys reached level three in Welsh or science. The picture is similar in key stage two, where the boys underperform in English, Welsh and mathematics.

In 2010, there was not much difference between the performance of pupils who have free school meals and those who do not. In key stage two, the picture is not as good because there is a significant difference between the performance of pupils who have free school meals and those who do not. The gap between them is more than that of the school family and Wales.

Pupils with additional learning needs make good progress whilst at school. Pupils who receive support in language, speech, reading and mathematics make very good progress and benefit significantly from the stimulating provision.

Results for Welsh are good in reaching the expected level in key stage one but this is not consistent across the three aspects that are assessed. Whilst oral standards are consistently high in comparison with the family, this is not as true for reading and writing. Key stage two results are consistently good, significantly more consistent across the three aspects, and the school is consistently high within the family of schools.

Wellbeing: Good

Most of the pupils at Rhyd-Y-Grug develop their awareness of the requirements and expectations of eating healthily and developing healthy personal habits. Key stage two pupils benefit by taking part in a variety of physical education and fitness activities after school. Talented individuals succeed at county, national and British levels.

Almost every child feels safe here and most are very happy at the school and know who to turn to for assistance and advice. Courtesy, co-operation and the children's behaviour are some of the school's strengths. Personal, social and cultural development is generally good.

The pupils' attendance rates have improved consistently over the last four years. Now at 94%, it is higher than Merthyr's county rate and very similar to that of Wales. Pupils' punctuality is generally good.

Following the relocation to Aberfan from Quakers Yard at the beginning of this academic year, the children have started to play a part in the life and activities of the local community. They benefit from the links with organisations and with individuals in order to reinforce their knowledge of local history, social skills and life skills.

Through the School Council the children are given good opportunities to express an opinion, take responsibility and make decisions. This has resulted in improving provision for them in the school. Nearly every older pupil contributes towards the everyday life of the school and takes on responsibilities well. The school's officers and the 'buddies' are very conscientious in looking after the younger pupils at lunch time and help to develop other pupils' reading skills.

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

The school provides a wide range of stimulating learning experiences for all ages and abilities in order to satisfy pupils' needs. Teachers co-operate purposefully to plan detailed programmes of work, and by including the pupils in the planning they ensure interesting and relevant learning experiences. However, the planning does not consistently identify enough opportunities for teachers to develop extended writing, nor to challenge the more able and talented pupils.

The provision for developing communication skills is good throughout the school.

Good use is made of targeting pupils who underachieve at school. They receive purposeful additional support in order to ensure progress in their numeracy and communication skills in both languages. They succeed in including the pupils effectively in the reading support by using 'Buddies' where older pupils support year three and four pupils. The school now targets boys' underachievement and raises standards throughout the school through a number of appropriate activities. The thorough plans prepared by the teachers have not had sufficient time yet to have a positive impact on the pupils' standards of achievement across the school.

The school provides appropriately for developing sustainability and global citizenship and has received a second green flag in addition to fair trade status.

The provision and planning for developing Welsh is generally good.

The school promotes the Cwricwlwm Cymreig successfully across the subjects.

Teaching: Good

Most of the teaching in the school is good and ensures that pupils are motivated and show interest in their learning. Teachers have good subject knowledge and they use a wide range of methods and activities to stimulate the pupils.

By fostering a caring and positive ethos, the children's behaviour is managed very well. The effective collaboration of the teaching and support staff enriches and adds to the valuable experiences within the class.

In the lessons where the teaching is best, the pupils are constantly encouraged to work independently and to produce work of a good standard. The teachers have a thorough knowledge of the curriculum, they explain new concepts clearly, they challenge pupils effectively and almost all lessons have a good pace. In very many of the lessons the teachers set differentiated tasks in order to support the pupils, including those that have additional learning needs. The questioning is not probing enough nor the expectations regarding the standard of written work high enough in a very few of the lessons.

The school works effectively to develop assessment for learning methods and, in the best practice, the marking and comments give the pupils clear targets for improvement. The outcomes of the assessment process are used in order to plan activities effectively from day to day. The quality of assessment for learning is good.

Care, support and guidance: Good

Ysgol Rhyd-Y-Grug is a warm, close and inclusive society that offers special care to every one of its pupils, without exception. The arrangements for personal and social education and the counselling system are used very effectively to help the pupils to share problems with their peers and an adult who has had appropriate training. This prepares them very well for life outside school in the future and is a specific strength of the school's caring provision. This provision contributes greatly to ensuring the pupils' emotional and physical health.

There are clear and organised arrangements for all aspects of school life and, as a result, the pupils have a very good idea of the high standards of behaviour that are expected. The pupils are given good opportunities to take an active and positive part in school life. Across the school, learning experiences offer stimulating opportunities to promote the learners' social, moral, spiritual and cultural development. The school promotes healthy eating and develops healthy ways of living well.

The provider has an appropriate policy and procedures for safeguarding. However, the attention of chair of the governing body and the headteacher was drawn to the fact that the arrangements for dealing with health and safety issues on the new school site have not been developed in full.

A close and beneficial relationship has been established by the school with a number of external organisations that are of effective support in satisfying the needs of the pupils. The school supports and provides well for pupils with additional learning needs in mainstream classes and in special groups. The pupils with additional learning needs contribute to setting targets in their individual education plans and they are aware of what they need to improve.

Learning environment: Good

A very stimulating learning environment is provided for the pupils and the classrooms provide an appropriate learning space. There are colourful displays in the classes and along the many corridors, which celebrate the good work and achievements of the pupils and which raise the pupils' awareness of the importance of appreciating other varying backgrounds. The outside area is large and it is used well to offer suitable learning experiences for the children in the Foundation Phase. Effective use is made of the all the resources, including the computer room, to satisfy the pupils' needs and to enrich the curriculum. The building is maintained to a very high standard and the caretaker contributes greatly to the provision by creating appropriate resources for the classes.

The building and facilities are generous for the number of pupils and appropriate for the activities offered.

A very happy and friendly ethos exists in the school, which encourages the children to respect others, to treat them fairly and to be tolerant. Every pupil has an equal right to the curriculum and the pupils state through the questionnaires that they are treated equally in school.

The pupils appreciate other people's contributions and work well together as they do during the meetings of the School Council and in learning skills lessons in persuading others to come to a decision.

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

Since the appointment of the headteacher in September 2010, rapid progress has been made in a short time and change has been managed very well. The headteacher succeeded in working together with the school staff including the senior management team in order to create a positive ethos for the school on its new site. As a result, there is improvement in the strategic planning which now focuses appropriately on interpreting data to raise learners' standards and improve the quality of provision and the learning environment. Although all the activities have not had enough time to have a full impact on the pupils' standards throughout the school, firm foundations have been laid for the prospects of future improvement.

The governors have had to reserve much of their energy and attention during recent years in order to ensure a new site that is suitable for education in the twenty-first century. As a result, although they are aware of curriculum areas that need improvement, their role as critical friends has not been fully developed.

A number of local and national initiatives are developing well. The school is appropriately developing the pupils' bilingual skills. The school has won the green flag for Eco Schools and it is a fair trade school. The teaching staff are adapting the National Curriculum planning in order to adopt the six learning areas of the Foundation Phase for children of five to seven years of age from September 2011. They are also implementing the principles of the School Effectiveness Framework

through effective collaboration with its secondary school and a Welsh medium primary school in a neighbouring authority to share and benefit together from their expertise.

Improving quality: Good

The self-evaluation report is comprehensive. It includes a detailed analysis of data and other relevant evidence such as monitoring for identifying strengths and areas to be developed within the school. The self-evaluation report was linked very appropriately with the school development plan. There is an appropriate focus in the school development plan document on raising standards and improving the provision. As a result, the school has a clear strategic direction for continual improvement in the short, medium and long term.

The school has responded appropriately to the recommendations in the last inspection report.

The teachers belong to a number of networks of professional practice within the school and more widely with other schools in the cluster. These networks have a positive influence on planning, for example for improving the pupils' communication skills. The record of individual reading progress created for each pupil in the school as a result of appropriate collaboration between the school and the secondary school is a notable example of this.

Partnership working: Good

A number of beneficial partnerships have been established in order to support the life and work of the school. These good partnerships include ones with the parents, the local community, other primary schools, the secondary school, the local authority's additional learning needs service, in addition to a number of other agencies. They all contribute greatly to enriching the provision and improving outcomes for the benefit of the pupils.

The school works closely with the schools in the catchment area and with Ysgol Uwchradd Rhydywaun in order to level examples of pupils' work. This led to ensuring the accuracy and the reliability of the levels put on pupils' work in teachers' assessments at the end of year six.

The pupils who need additional support with their communication skills in Welsh and English benefit significantly from following specific programmes. The school is supported well in the use and monitoring of these programmes by the local authority's additional learning needs service. The older children act as reading 'buddies' to pupils who need reading support in years three and four. They receive appropriate training from the local authority's basic skills agency for the support and the work is accredited by the county co-ordinator.

Resource management: Good

The school's staffing resources are managed and used efficiently to improve learning. There are enough experienced teaching and support staff to deal with every aspect of the school's work. The teachers and support staff work effectively in order to ensure appropriate support for the pupils.

The teachers make effective use of their planning, preparation and assessment time and this has a positive impact on the standard of planning. The specialisms of staff are used in order to support within curriculum areas and offer appropriate internal training.

The school building is maintained to a high standard and the range and quality of the learning resources is good. Financial resources are allocated appropriately against the priorities the school has identified.

The school effectively links its financial resources to priorities for raising standards and improving provision through the school development plan. As a result, the school offers good value for money.

Appendix 1

Stakeholder satisfaction report

Responses to parent questionnaires

Twenty-four responses to questionnaires were received from parents and they were unanimous:

- that their children like school and are making good progress;
- that the children are safe in school and receive support to settle well;
- that their children are encouraged to be healthy and to do physical exercise regularly;
- that they feel comfortable asking the school questions, making suggestions or identifying a problem; and
- that the school helps the children to become more mature and to shoulder responsibility and that their children are prepared well for moving on to the next school.

Nearly all of them believe that:

- the school is run well and they are satisfied with the school generally;
- the teaching is good and the staff expect the children to work hard and do their best;
- the homework builds well on what is learnt in school and that they have regular information about their children's progress;
- pupils behave well; and
- there is a good variety of activities, including trips or visits.

Most believe that:

- staff treat all the children fairly and with respect.

Some believe that they do not:

- understand the school procedure for dealing with complaints; or
- know if their child is receiving appropriate extra support in relation to any specific individual needs.

Responses to learner questionnaires

Sixty-four responses were received from key stage 2 pupils and they were unanimous:

- that the teachers and other adults at school help them to learn and make progress.

Almost all:

- feel safe at school and that the school deals well with any bullying; and
- know what to do and who to speak to if they find the work difficult or if they are worried about something.

Most believe that:

- the school teaches them how to stay healthy; and
- that they have enough books, equipment and computers to do their work.

Some believe that:

- they are not doing well at school and that the homework is not helping them to understand and improve their school work;
- there are not many opportunities to do physical exercise regularly;
- other children do not behave well and so prevent them from working; and
- not all the children behave well at playtime and lunch time.

Appendix 2

The inspection team

Maldwyn Pryse	Reporting Inspector
Jeff Jones	Team Inspector
Ruth Rhydderch	Lay Inspector
Meirwen Watts	Peer Inspector
Alun Williams	School Nominee

Copies of the report

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

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Year groups and key stages

Schools use a common system of numbering year groups from the start of compulsory schooling to 18 years of age. This system emphasises the importance of continuity and eases communication among schools, governing bodies, parents and LEAs.

The term 'Reception' (R) refers to the year group of pupils in a primary school who reach the age of five during the academic year. Year 1 refers to the year group of pupils who reach the age of six during the academic year and so on. Year 13 is the year group of students who reach the age of 18 during the academic year.

Primary phase:

Year	R	Y1	Y2	Y3	Y4	Y5	Y6
Ages	4-5	5-6	6-7	7-8	8-9	9-10	10-11

Secondary phase:

Year	Y7	Y8	Y9	Y10	Y11	Y12	Y13
Ages	11-12	12-13	13-14	14-15	15-16	16-17	17-18

The four key stages cover the following year groups:

Key stage 1	Year 1 and Year 2
Key stage 2	Year 3 to Year 6
Key stage 3	Year 7 to Year 9
Key stage 4	Year 10 and Year 11