



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 Aberconwy
Morfa Drive
Conwy
LL32 8ED**

Date of inspection: April 2012

by

Mr Peter Harris

for

**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 Aberconwy is an English medium 11-18 mixed comprehensive school of 975 pupils, including 181 in the sixth form compared, with 1140 pupils when the school was last inspected. Over this period numbers in the sixth form have doubled.

The school is situated in the town of Conwy.

Just over 15% of learners are eligible for free school meals compared with the Welsh average of around 17% for secondary schools. One per cent of learners currently learn English as an additional language.

The school's intake represents the full range of ability. One and a half per cent of pupils have statements of special educational needs. This figure is just below the average for Wales as a whole. The school houses the local authority dyslexia support unit.

Twenty-four per cent of learners have reading ages of more than six months below their chronological age on entry to the school.

The headteacher took up his post in 2004. The present senior leadership team is comprised of two deputy headteachers and four assistant headteachers. Of the present senior leadership team, the headteacher and three assistant headteachers were in post at the time the school was last inspected.

In 2004, the school was provided with new accommodation, built as part of a Private Finance Initiative project.

The school works in collaboration with the other secondary schools and the local further education college to enhance provision at key stage 4 and in the sixth form.

The 2011-2012 individual school budget per pupil for Ysgol Aberconwy is £4,779 which compares with a maximum of £5,070 and a minimum of £4,268 for secondary schools in Conwy. The school has the third highest budget per pupil of the seven secondary schools in Conwy.

Summary

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

Current performance

Ysgol Aberconwy is a good school because:

- overall standards of attainment are good and improving;
- innovative curriculum planning enables pupils to succeed;
- assessment and tracking of pupils' progress is very effective;
- guidance and mentoring of pupils is very good;
- the learning environment is positive, and
- the school is well led.

Prospects for improvement

Prospects for improvement are good because :

- leaders and managers have a clear awareness of areas for improvement;
- a culture of monitoring and self evaluation is well embedded in school routines;
- data is used well to set and monitor targets;
- planning for improvement is of good quality;
- of the recent track record of improvement, and
- of progress made since the last inspection.

Recommendations

In order to improve, the staff and governors of Ysgol Aberconwy need to;

- R1 continue to improve the standards achieved by pupils;
- R2 address the shortcomings in teaching identified in this report;
- R3 continue to improve levels of attendance, and
- R4 increase the opportunities for pupils to use their Welsh language skills around the school.

What happens next?

Ysgol Aberconwy will produce an action plan that shows how it will address these recommendations.

All these recommendations feature in the school's current plans.

Main findings

Key Question 1: How good are outcomes?

Good

Standards: Good

Outcomes are improving and the school performs above expectations in key stage 3 and in key stage 4.

In key stage 3 pupils' performance is good. In 2011 in key stage 3, the core subject indicator was above the average of similar schools on the free-school-meal benchmark. The school's performance in the non-core subjects at key stage 3 is also good and was above average when compared to similar schools.

Pupils' performance is also good in key stage 4. In 2011, performance in all major indicators as well as in each of the core subjects was above average.

At post-16, pupils' attainment reflects a continuing upward trend over the past three years. Performance at the level 3 threshold is now in line with the national average.

In key stage 3, girls outperform boys in the core subject indicator and in the three core subjects individually. In English the school has successfully narrowed the gap in relative performance. In key stage 4, on the whole boys outperform girls apart from English at level 2.

Increasing proportions of pupils in receipt of free school meals gain the core subject indicator in key stage 3 and in key stage 4.

In the last two years no pupil has left school without a qualification.

Most pupils make good progress in each key stage in acquiring the skills and knowledge needed to move on to the next stage of learning. In the majority of lessons observed, nearly all pupils achieved good standards, and in a few of these lessons they achieved excellent standards. Pupils with additional learning needs make good progress.

Most pupils of all ages and abilities have well developed communication skills. They have good reading and writing skills. The majority of pupils speak confidently. Many express themselves clearly and thoughtfully using appropriate general and subject-specific vocabulary.

Many pupils write well. Many of the more able pupils write to a high standard. Their work is accomplished and many make well-considered and extended responses. In many areas of the curriculum pupils use numeracy and information technology skills effectively.

On the whole pupils make valuable progress in developing the skills they need to learn effectively. The majority of pupils demonstrates good listening skills and responds well to questions from their teachers. However, in a small minority of classes observed, pupils' ability to listen had shortcomings.

Most pupils work well in pairs and in groups to explore ideas and to develop their understanding. Many develop their analytical skills well and transfer skills fluently from one context to another.

Most pupils reflect very well on their learning. With the help of their teachers they assess their own work accurately and carefully. They are aware of their own strengths and weaknesses and know how to improve their work. Most pupils set themselves challenging goals in response to the high expectations and targets most teachers set.

Pupils' performance in Welsh second language at key stage 3 is very good and good in key stage 4. In key stage 3 it has been in the top quarter of similar schools over the past three years. In Welsh in key stage 4 a large majority of pupils make good progress. However, outside of Welsh lessons, pupils make very little use of incidental Welsh.

Wellbeing: Good

Nearly all pupils report that they feel safe in school as a result of the very good personal support they receive. The school deals well with the few incidents of bullying. Levels of participation in physical activities are high and most pupils show a positive attitude to healthy living.

On the whole, behaviour in class and around the school is good. Most pupils are courteous and show high levels of respect to others. However, in a few lessons, a minority of pupils engage in off task chatter.

Though attendance rates have improved over the past three years, when compared to similar schools, attendance is below average. Nearly all pupils are punctual to lessons.

Pupils' regularly participate in community activities and successfully raise substantial sums of money for charities. These pupils gain a wide range of experience, which develops their confidence effectively.

A significant number of pupil representative groups make valuable contributions to school life. They actively participate in all levels of decision making.

Most pupils display very good social and life skills. The majority have a very positive attitude to work. Pupils possess the skills necessary to move confidently to the next stage in their development.

Key Question 2: How good is provision?

Good

Learning experiences: Good

The curriculum is broad, balanced and meets all statutory requirements, including learning pathways 14-19. At key stage 3 the curriculum builds systematically on the work of the partner primary schools.

From Year 9 onwards the needs of learners are met in a very innovative way. Along with studying the core subjects, all pupils study and complete two GCSE level courses in each of Years 9, 10 and 11. This successfully engages, challenges and stimulates pupils to achieve well.

Each half-term the school suspends its normal curriculum for a whole day in order to provide learners with worthwhile experiences that enhance and develop their skills. This is a good feature that enables pupils to take part in out-of-school learning. In addition, there is a good range of extra-curricular opportunities. Beneficial work experience and community placements broaden and enrich the experiences on offer.

Increased numbers in the sixth form are a result of successful consortium working that allows the school to offer students a very wide range of pathways.

In key stages 3 and 4 comprehensive arrangements enable pupils to develop skills of communication, numeracy and information and communication technology successfully across all their subjects. In the sixth form, about half of the students develop these skills as a part of their Welsh Baccaalaureate Qualification.

Arrangements for developing education about sustainable development are appropriate. The provision for the understanding of global issues is consistently good.

The school makes satisfactory arrangements to teach the Welsh language and the Welsh dimension of the curriculum.

Measures to encourage learners to use their Welsh outside their language lessons are not pursued with sufficient vigour.

Teaching: Adequate

In the majority of lessons good subject knowledge and attention to the needs of individual pupils ensure that planned activities proceed at a brisk pace. Teachers promote good and sometimes very good levels of motivation, engagement and concentration through a variety of well structured and challenging tasks in which pupils are active participants. They have high expectations of effort and behaviour. Teachers continually monitor pupils' learning and provide quality individual support where necessary. Well distributed probing questions require the pupils to think, apply what they have learned and justify their reasoning. In these successful lessons pupils are confident and independent learners.

In a minority of lessons there are important shortcomings. Teachers fail to cater for the needs of all pupils. There is a lack of challenge, a limited range of approaches and activities and a slow pace of learning. Classroom management is insecure, and off task talk is allowed to impact negatively on the learning of others.

Most teachers mark books regularly and provide pupils with precise feedback on how to improve. Pupils are provided with frequent opportunities to self assess their work and establish improvement targets.

Pupils are very well informed of their progress. Most pupils know their individual targets and what they need to do to achieve them. Very effective systems track progress, promptly identify underachievement and inform the good quality monitoring and support provided for all pupils. This frequent reviewing of targets with pupils has a significant impact on pupil achievement.

Half termly interim reports provide parents with regular, concise information on progress and effort. Parents are also kept well informed through annual parents' meetings and end of year reports. Specific pointers for improvement are provided in most subjects.

Care, support and guidance: Good

Worthwhile activities and experiences promote pupils' personal development including their social, moral, spiritual and cultural development.

The school successfully promotes pupils' health and wellbeing through a wide range of fitness related activities.

Outstanding supportive strategies provide very good guidance and personal mentoring. These strengths contribute significantly towards improving achievement, confidence and relationships.

External agencies provide extensive support to pupils to enable them to make informed choices.

The school has an appropriate policy and has procedures for safeguarding.

Pupils with additional learning needs receive well planned individual support through specific programmes planned to meet their needs. An effective range of tests is used to identify attainment and assess progress.

Pupils attending the local authority dyslexia provision based at the school receive well planned work adapted to meet their needs.

Teaching assistants and specialist services provide valuable support.

Pupils' individual plans suggest suitable resources and strategies to meet clear targets. The majority of teachers carefully modify work to ensure that provision in mainstream classes matches pupils' identified needs. However, there is no regular formal process to evaluate the effectiveness and application of modified provision within mainstream classes.

Learning environment: Good

The ethos of the school is one of an inclusive caring community. There is a strong commitment to offering equality of opportunity and access to all aspects of school life regardless of gender, race or disability.

Concerted action is taken to improve the performance of pupils across all abilities and backgrounds. Nearly all pupils value the way in which their opinions are considered. Parents and learners appreciate the concern for individual pupil well being and success. The school works successfully to develop pupils' understanding of diversity, actively encouraging respect for human rights and value for different cultures. Relationships are very good and characterised by mutual respect.

The spacious accommodation is of excellent quality throughout. Classrooms and office accommodation are of a high standard. Facilities for sport and games are excellent.

There is a wide range of resources, particularly for information and communication technology. Displays of pupils' work and achievements across the school are of a high standard.

The school building and grounds are very well maintained throughout.

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

Leadership: Good

The headteacher and leadership team communicate high expectations and clear strategic direction which has impacted positively on raising standards. All staff share a common vision, values and purpose.

The roles and responsibilities of the senior and middle management teams are well defined and focussed effectively on school improvement.

Leaders and managers fulfil their roles well in setting challenging and realistic targets for themselves and others through consistent and detailed analysis of data.

Structured performance management arrangements identify suitable professional development opportunities for all staff.

Governors fulfil their statutory duties appropriately but are not sufficiently informed about standards of teaching in the school.

Finances are monitored and scrutinised thoroughly by both the school business manager and the finance sub-committee of the governing body.

The school takes good account of national and local priorities, particularly in relation to building effective partnerships within the 14 -19 learning pathways provision.

Leaders negotiate and cooperate well with internal staff and outside agencies.

Improving quality: Good

There is a thorough system of self evaluation that draws on a range of first-hand evidence to make judgements about the performance of the school. In particular senior leaders analyse examination and other assessment data in a very detailed way. As a result, senior leaders know the school very well and are aware of areas for development. Middle managers are increasingly focussed on what they need to do to improve their areas of responsibility.

The processes of self-evaluation and development planning are a regular part of school routines and senior leaders use information from self-evaluation to produce a detailed school improvement plan. This worthwhile document identifies specific targets, responsibilities and a timetable for action. It also notes the criteria for evaluating the improvement strategies.

The school's performance management process ensures that the year's achievements for all members of teaching and support staff are reviewed against challenging objectives and pupil progress targets.

The school has made good progress in addressing the key issues from the last inspection.

There is a beneficial culture of collaboration between teachers both within the school and with other schools and effective professional learning communities are addressing a number of staff development issues.

Partnership working: Good

Worthwhile strategic partnership working makes a positive contribution to widening the range of choices for pupils and has been successful in raising standards. The school has worked closely with neighbouring secondary schools and the local college to increase access to appropriate curriculum provision and resources. Appropriate procedures for quality assurance are in place.

Strong links have been established with partner primary schools. The school invests heavily in encouraging a collaborative approach to transition planning and curriculum delivery to ensure continuity and progression.

The school has good links with teacher training institutions and a range of multi-disciplinary agencies.

Communication with parents is effective and parents' evenings are well attended.

Resource management: Good

There are systematic and accurate budgeting arrangements within the school. Expenditure is monitored regularly and with rigour and allocated to meet identified priorities within the school improvement plan. Sufficient resources are allocated equitably to departments through a robust analysis of needs. These are well managed.

The site is managed very effectively and is well maintained. There is an efficient system for identifying and avoiding unnecessary expenditure on site management.

Staffing levels are appropriate to teach all aspects of the school curriculum. Teachers use their planning, preparation and assessment time effectively and this contributes towards raising standards.

The school meets statutory requirements regarding teachers' workload. Teaching assistants and associate staff support pupils successfully in their learning and are a valuable asset to the school.

In view of the outcomes achieved by learners the school provides good value for money.

Appendix 1

Commentary on performance data

In 2011, in key stage 3, the core subject indicator was above the average of similar schools on the free-school-meal benchmark. In science over the past three years, pupils have performed to a high standard and have been in the top half of similar schools both at level 5 and above. In English and mathematics pupils' performances were above average in two out of the past three years.

In English, mathematics and science, performance at level 6 and above was above average in 2011.

Over the past three years, the school's overall performance in the non-core subjects at key stage 3 is also good. In most subjects performance has been above average when compared to similar schools.

At key stage 4, pupils' performance is good. In 2011, the level 2 threshold including English and mathematics and the core subject indicator and the level 1 threshold were in the top half of similar schools on the free-school-meal benchmark. Performance at the level 2 threshold was in the top 25% of similar schools.

At post-16, pupils' attainment reflects a continuing upward trend over the past three years.

At key stage 3, the difference in the performances of boys and girls is greater than the Wales and family averages in mathematics, science and the core subject indicator. At key stage 4, while boys outperform girls in mathematics and science girls outperform boys in English, where the difference is greater than the national average.

The difference in performance between pupils eligible for free school meals and those who are not has decreased over the period since the school was last inspected. Increasing proportions of pupils in receipt of free school meals gain the core subject indicator in key stage 3 and in key stage 4.

In 2011, 88% of pupils remained in full-time education at the end of key stage 4. This figure is above that for Wales.

Four per cent of pupils leaving in summer 2011 were not in education, training or employment. This figure is much better than the national average. In the last two years no pupil has left school without a qualification.

Many pupils, especially the more able make very good progress in developing their Welsh language skills. They read and write well at an appropriate level and pronounce the language with confidence. At key stage 3 the percentage of learners attaining level 5 or above in Welsh second language has consistently been in the top quarter of similar schools for the past three years. At KS4 all pupils follow the GCSE full course in Welsh GCSE second language and in 2011 all obtained the qualification.

Appendix 2

Stakeholder satisfaction report

Responses to parent questionnaires

Questionnaires were completed by 43 parents.

All agreed that staff at the school expect pupils to work hard and do their best.

Many parents report that their child likes school. Most report that their child is making good progress. Many report that appropriate support is given to particular needs. Many report that homework builds well on what is learned in school. Most parents are happy about the ways in which the school informs them about their child's progress.

Many parents agree that the school helps their child develop as a person, to take on responsibility and to become more mature. Their children are treated with respect and are prepared well for the next stage in their learning. Many report that the school is well run and feel comfortable in approaching the school with questions or suggestions.

Responses to pupil questionnaires

Questionnaires were completed by 239 pupils.

Most all report that they are doing well at school and that teachers help them do their best in their work and encourage pupils to take on responsibility. Nearly all report that school is a safe place to learn. Many report that they are taught to be healthy, and most that they are treated with respect and that they are respected by members of staff.

Many agree that the school gives good advice when choosing subjects and that they feel well prepared for the next stage in their learning. Most report that there is someone to listen to their point of view when they are worried.

The majority of learners feels that the school takes good account of their views.

Appendix 3

The inspection team

Peter Harris	Reporting Inspector
Glyn Griffiths	Team Inspector
David Hughes	Team Inspector
Andrew Herdman	Team Inspector
Gwynoro Jones	Lay Inspector
Amanda Harrison	Peer Inspector
David Young	School Nominee

Copies of the report

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

Under the Independent School Standards (Wales) Regulations 2003, the school must provide copies of the report to all parents of the school. Where a pupil is subject to placement by a local authority, a copy of the report should be sent by the school to each relevant authority.

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' (FPR) refers to the year group of pupils in a primary school who reach the age of five during the academic year. FYear 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	FPR	FPY1	FPY2	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:

Foundation Phase	Reception, 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

Glossary of terms

Core subject indicator (CSI)	This relates to the expected performance in English or Welsh, mathematics and science, the core subjects of the National Curriculum.
Families of schools	These have been created to enable schools to compare their performance to that of similar schools across Wales. Families include schools with similar proportions of pupils entitled to free school meals, living in 20% most deprived areas of Wales, having special education needs at school action plus or statemented and with English as an additional language acquisition less than competent.
Level 1	This represents the equivalent of a GCSE at grade D to G.
Level 1 threshold	This represents a volume of learning equivalent to five GCSEs at grade D to G.
Level 2	This represents the equivalent of a GCSE at grade A* to C.
Level 2 threshold including English or Welsh first language and mathematics	This represents a volume of learning equivalent to five GCSEs at grade A* to C including English or Welsh first language and mathematics.
Level 2 threshold	This represents a volume of learning equivalent to five GCSEs at grade A* to C.
Level 3	This represents the equivalent of an A level at grade A*-E.
Level 3 threshold	This represents a volume of learning equivalent to two A levels at grade A* to E.
Average wider points score	This includes all qualifications approved for use in Wales at the relevant age, for example at the age of 16 or at the age of 18.
Capped wider points score	This includes the best eight results from all qualifications approved for use in Wales at the age of 16.
All-Wales Core Data sets	Schools and local authorities may refer to performance relative to their family of schools. These families of schools have been created to enable schools to compare their performance to that of similar schools across Wales. Families include schools with similar proportions of pupils entitled to free school meals, living in 20% most deprived areas of Wales, having special education needs at school action plus or statemented and with English as an additional language acquisition less than competent.