



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

A report on

**Ysgol Friars
Lon y Bryn
Bangor
Gwynedd
LL57 2LN**

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by

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

About Ysgol Friars

Ysgol Friars is a bi-lingual 11-18 mixed comprehensive school maintained by Gwynedd local authority. There are 1,234 pupils on roll compared with 1,328 pupils when the school was last inspected in September 2011. There are 211 pupils in the sixth form.

The school serves the university city of Bangor and the surrounding area. Around 11% of pupils live in the 20% most deprived areas of Wales. Just over 12% of pupils are eligible for free school meals, which is lower than the Welsh average for secondary schools of 17%.

Most pupils come from English-speaking homes. However, almost 70% of pupils can speak Welsh to some degree and about 16% of pupils are fluent in Welsh. Fourteen per cent of pupils currently learn English as an additional language.

The school's intake represents the full range of ability. Twenty-one per cent of pupils have additional learning needs and two per cent of pupils have statements of special educational needs. Both these figures are close to the national averages.

The headteacher took up his post in 1997. The senior leadership team comprises the headteacher, two deputy headteachers and three assistant headteachers.

The school is currently a pioneer school and is working with the Welsh Government and other schools to take forward developments relating to the curriculum.

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

Summary

Ysgol Friars is a school that focuses closely on ensuring that all pupils achieve well and gain the qualifications and experiences that will enable them to progress further in life. It is particularly effective in setting high expectations for pupils' behaviour, their attitudes to learning and the standard of their work. Most pupils behave very well and many are committed learners who make strong progress in their studies and display a clear sense of ambition.

Over the past two years in particular, leaders have worked effectively to secure improved outcomes and provision for pupils. A notable feature is the consistently high quality of teaching across the school. Leaders at all levels understand the school's strengths and weaknesses well and what needs to be done to ensure further improvement.

Inspection area	Judgement
Standards	Good
Wellbeing and attitudes to learning	Good
Teaching and learning experiences	Good
Care, support and guidance	Good
Leadership and management	Good

Recommendations

- R1 Improve the provision for pupils' toilets and ensure that there is a sufficient number of toilets for the number of pupils
- R2 Ensure that the provision for Welsh matches all pupils' abilities and previous academic experience of the language
- R3 Ensure that self-evaluation and improvement planning are consistently strong across the school, that activities focus appropriately on pupils' skills and leaders take sufficient account of pupils' views on a wide variety of issues

What happens next

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

Main findings

Standards: Good

During their time in school, many pupils make consistently strong progress and achieve well in relation to their age and ability. Over the past two years, the school's performance in most of the main indicators at key stage 4 has compared favourably with that of similar schools.

Many pupils have a sound understanding of key concepts in the subjects that they study and recall prior learning accurately. They apply their skills and knowledge effectively to new concepts, such as when they combine their understanding of the properties of triangles and algebra to calculate angles. The ability of many pupils to apply their skills across the curriculum and to make perceptive links between different subject areas are notable features. For instance, they understand how the word 'primary' can be used to describe colours in art and to classify sources of information in history. Similarly, they make links between musical and grammatical terminology, such as conjunct and conjunction.

Nearly all pupils listen attentively and with respect to adults and their peers. Many speak confidently and fluently when working in pairs or small groups. They offer well-considered responses when debating the arguments for and against the execution of King Charles I, for example. However, in general, pupils are less confident when speaking in whole class situations and a few are reluctant to contribute to class discussions.

Pupils' reading skills are a strength of the school. Most locate information efficiently and many use a range of reading strategies, such as skimming and scanning, proficiently and in the appropriate context. Many analyse texts and infer meaning well, and a majority embed quotations skilfully when explaining their points. For example, sixth form students are particularly sensitive in their analysis of Charlotte Bronte's 'Jane Eyre' and make intelligent links between the text and its historical context. A majority of pupils are also able to identify opposite viewpoints in texts skilfully and then use this information to support different sides of an argument, for instance when they discuss literalist and non-literalist views of the creation or the views of different historians on the Luddites.

Many pupils across the ability range produce well-organised extended written pieces in a variety of subjects. They have a broad general vocabulary and use subject specific terminology appropriately. For example, in geography they write factually and analytically about the different ecosystems and biodiversity of an area of local land that has been left fallow. Many also demonstrate a sound understanding of tone and register. When speaking and writing, they are thoughtful in their choice of words and adapt their language to suit different purposes and audiences deftly.

A majority of pupils improve the accuracy of their work effectively as a result of careful proof-reading. However, a few pupils make frequent spelling errors and do not paragraph or punctuate their written work appropriately.

The basic number skills of many pupils are strong. They interpret and handle data well. Many produce accurate graphs and are able to choose appropriate charts to represent the results of data collecting activities. Particular strengths are many pupils' numerical reasoning and mathematical problem solving skills, for example when estimating the number of descendants of someone born 100 years ago or when evaluating the relationship between taxi fares and petrol prices.

In information and communication technology (ICT) lessons many pupils develop their skills suitably and use databases and spreadsheets appropriately. However, many pupils do not develop their ICT skills well enough across the curriculum.

Many pupils display strong creative skills. For example, they write imaginative and original character descriptions and short stories in English, and create striking masks in art and 3D models of cliff erosion in geography.

Performance in the level 2 threshold including English and mathematics has generally improved over the past four years and has been in line with or better than that in similar schools for the three most recent years. Performance in the capped points score has also improved steadily over the past four years. Performance in this indicator has been below that in similar schools over time, but is above in 2017.

Over the past two years, the performance of girls in most of the indicators at key stage four is strong, and above that of girls in similar schools. The performance of boys also compares well with that of boys in similar schools in many indicators.

The proportion of pupils gaining five or more GCSEs or equivalent at grades at A*-A has improved over the past four years and is particularly high in 2017. Performance in this indicator has been consistently above that in similar schools in recent years. The proportion of girls gaining this indicator is especially high, and significantly better than the performance of girls in similar schools.

The performance of pupils who are eligible for free school meals is above the average for the same group of pupils in similar schools in nearly all indicators in 2017 but has been variable over time.

Performance in the sixth form improved significantly in 2017 and is above the average for similar schools in nearly all indicators. Performance in the indicator that includes three A level grades or equivalent at A*-A has been particularly strong over the past four years. However, in the two years prior to 2017, the school's performance in other key stage 5 indicators has not compared as well with that in similar schools.

At the end of Year 11, nearly all pupils remain in education, employment or training.

At key stage 4, nearly all pupils achieve a level 2 GCSE qualification in Welsh as a second language and a few pupils achieve a GCSE qualification in Welsh. However, a minority of pupils do not achieve qualifications in Welsh that are in line with their ability or their previous experience of the language. Many pupils speak Welsh confidently, using a natural idiom. Many pupils' command of basic vocabulary is sound but their written work contains too many inaccuracies.

Wellbeing and attitudes to learning: Good

Most pupils behave very well in lessons and around school, and are courteous and mature in their interactions with school staff and visitors. They are punctual to lessons and sustain concentration well. Many pupils are very committed to their studies and are eager to succeed. They display a genuine interest in learning, and are resilient and determined when faced with challenging activities. Many have strong independent learning skills. Most work productively in groups and pairs and support each other effectively, such as when pupils lead groups and demonstrate skills in physical education lessons.

Most pupils enjoy school, value the diversity of the school population, and show a high level of respect and care for their peers. They are proud of the school's inclusive ethos. Nearly all pupils feel safe and know where to go for help. They feel well supported by teachers and support staff, and believe that the school deals well with the very few incidents of bullying.

Many pupils display positive attitudes towards healthy lifestyles and have a sound understanding of how to eat and drink healthily. They participate in a range of physical activities including samba, climbing and kayaking. A majority of pupils develop useful life skills and contribute beneficially to their local community, for example by competing in the 3-Peak Challenge to raise money for Anglesey Autism Youth Club, and raising money for Tŷ Gobaith.

Pupils develop their leadership and social skills well by taking on roles that include peer mentors, buddies and Anti-bullying Ambassadors, and by leading groups such as the eco-club and the school council. The school council makes an appropriate contribution to school life. For example, it has influenced changes to the assessment policy and was instrumental in the establishment of picnic benches on the school grounds.

Teaching and learning experiences: Good

Overall, the quality of teaching is good. Nearly all teachers have strong working relationships with their classes and provide a safe and positive learning environment, which is conducive to strong progress. Most demonstrate consistently high expectations of pupils' behaviour, engagement and the standard of work of which they are capable.

In many instances, teaching is consistently effective. In these lessons, teachers plan carefully sequences of demanding activities that secure progressive development in pupils' skills, understanding and knowledge. They deploy carefully-prepared resources and a wide variety of approaches that engage pupils successfully. For example, teachers bring learning to life by getting pupils to create models of DNA using sweets. Many teachers plan activities that are matched closely to pupils' abilities and interests, providing valuable support for pupils' learning where necessary and stretching the most able. In a few lessons, teachers are effective in developing pupils' bilingual skills alongside their subject understanding.

A notable strength of many lessons is the way in which teachers are successful in developing pupils' problem-solving skills and independence in their learning. In addition, these teachers use real-life situations and personal experiences effectively to engage pupils and strengthen their understanding.

Many teachers use effective questioning techniques to develop pupils' thinking and to assess their understanding. These teachers monitor pupils' progress carefully and are adept at modifying activities to address any misconceptions. However, in a few instances, teachers do not use questioning well enough to challenge pupils' thinking or to involve the whole class in discussion. Many teachers provide pupils with valuable feedback on the quality of their work and standard of their literacy and numeracy skills. They ensure that pupils make beneficial improvements to their work in light of their comments. In a few instances, teachers do not make sure that pupils respond well enough to their guidance.

The curriculum is effective in meeting the needs of most pupils. At key stage 4 and in the sixth form the school works well with local schools and colleges to offer a wide variety of vocational and academic courses. The school works closely with its partner primary schools to ensure that key stage 3 learning builds successfully on previous key stages.

The school provides a wide range of extra-curricular activities. This includes local and foreign visits, sports teams and a variety of clubs such as those for Mandarin, geology and science. In addition, the school supports the development of pupils' social and life skills well through activities such as the Duke of Edinburgh award scheme and the numeracy peer mentoring programme.

The school has effective provision for developing pupils' literacy and numeracy skills across the curriculum. Most departments plan a range of worthwhile activities to develop pupils' literacy skills alongside their subject knowledge. In addition, subjects such as geography and science support the development of pupils' numeracy skills effectively through a well-coordinated approach to, for example, the construction and interpretation of graphs. The school monitors closely pupils' progress in their skills development and plans valuable interventions for those with weaker skills. A few subjects other than ICT provide suitable opportunities for pupils to practise their basic ICT skills. However, plans for the progressive improvement of pupils' ICT skills across the curriculum are at an early stage of development.

The school supports the progress of more able and talented pupils well. It offers a wide range of activities that enrich their experiences and broaden their horizons. This includes 'master classes' at the local university, and creative writing and engineering competitions. This has had a positive impact on outcomes for these pupils, for example the proportion gaining the highest grades at key stage 4 and in the sixth form.

At key stage 3, the school has recently taken appropriate steps to strengthen provision for the development of pupils' Welsh language skills. However, a minority of key stage 4 pupils do not follow a Welsh language course that is appropriate to their previous educational experience of the language. The school provides a valuable range of opportunities for pupils to develop their understanding of Welsh history and culture. This includes well-attended residential trips to Glanllyn and the 'Cymraegathon', a themed day to promote and celebrate the use of the Welsh language. In addition, pupils make a valuable contribution to the Welsh ethos of the school through the work of groups such as 'Camau Mawr' and 'Camau Bach'.

Care, support and guidance: Good

The quality of care, support and guidance provided at Ysgol Friars is strong. The school has a robust and effective tracking system, that allows staff to monitor academic progress, attendance and behaviour closely across all key stages. Staff use this information well to identify pupils who require support and to plan effective interventions. As a result, many of these pupils exceed the expected progress in reading, spelling and number skills.

There is a clear and well understood behaviour policy, which is applied consistently by most staff. This has a positive impact on standards of behaviour. The school works well with a range of external agencies and parents to support pupils' social, behavioural and emotional needs.

There is sound provision for pupils with additional learning needs and the school adapts provision well to meet the learning and physical needs of individual pupils. The school works with these pupils and their parents to set suitable targets and to monitor pupils' progress closely. Learning support assistants provide valuable help for pupils with additional learning needs in lessons and intervention groups. A strong feature of this support is the knowledge staff have developed about specific individual pupils' needs and their ability to adapt the learning to best suit the pupil.

A comprehensive well planned transition process helps pupils to settle in quickly to Year 7. This includes a valuable nurture group to support identified vulnerable pupils.

Annual and interim reports keep parents well informed about their child's progress at school. They include useful strategies for improvement and appropriate subject specific targets. The school provides valuable information and guidance regarding options and careers through a range of activities such as 'World of Work Spotlight' event and the annual careers fair. These events support pupils effectively in making informed decisions regarding future choices.

The school makes appropriate provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development through assemblies and a useful personal and social education programme. Enrichment activities, such as the robotics club, develop pupils' social and creative skills well. Sixth form pupils contribute well to the local community by providing a senior citizens' Christmas party.

A comprehensive personal and social education programme and physical education lessons develop pupils' understanding of how to make positive healthy lifestyle choices effectively. The school has appropriate arrangements to promote healthy eating and drinking and has established a School Nutrition Action Group (SNAG), which meets regularly to discuss healthy eating issues in school.

The school's arrangements for safeguarding pupils meet requirements and give no cause for concern.

Leadership and management: Good

Effective leadership has been successful in improving outcomes for pupils. This has resulted in, for example, strong performance in most key stage four indicators and

improvements in attendance over the last two years. The headteacher has a clear vision for school improvement, which is communicated effectively and well understood by all staff. Supported by his senior leadership team, he has been successful in establishing a culture of high expectations and a strong focus on maximising the potential of every pupil.

Senior leaders' roles and responsibilities are well balanced, clearly defined and understood by all. Temporary appointments to the senior team have been effective in strengthening senior leadership and driving improvements, such as raising the attainment of vulnerable pupils. Leaders set themselves ambitious targets and monitor progress toward these targets closely. Line management arrangements are, generally robust, and ensure that senior and middle leaders are held fully accountable for their roles. There is a well-organised calendar of line management activities, which have a sharp focus on the progress of individual and groups of pupils.

Performance management arrangements are robust. Objectives have clear and measurable success criteria that focus well on raising standards and improving teaching. These objectives link closely to whole-school and departmental priorities as well as the ambitions and interests of individual staff. The school has developed a useful 'performance matrix', which uses a wide range of evidence to produce a rounded evaluation of staff's progress against their targets. The school deals robustly with underperformance at all levels.

Most middle leaders have a sound understanding of their role and provide effective leadership. Both senior and middle leaders have a thorough understanding of most aspects of performance data, and use this well to analyse pupil performance and identify areas in need of improvement.

The school has a well-established and effective cycle of self-evaluation activities. It draws on a wide range of first-hand evidence from lesson observations, scrutiny of pupils' work and the views of pupils, parents and staff. In general, leaders use this evidence, especially data, effectively to assess performance in their areas of responsibility.

The school's self-evaluation report is a frank document, which identifies most of the school's strengths and areas for improvement. However, it does not evaluate a very few important aspects of the school's work sufficiently well, such as the performance of pupils with additional learning needs. Most departmental self-evaluation reports are comprehensive and identify appropriate areas for development.

On the whole, the school has rigorous and effective processes to evaluate the quality and impact of teaching across the school. Senior and middle leaders use lesson observations well to evaluate pupil progress and support the development of individual teachers. This has had a positive impact on the quality and consistency of teaching across the school. Leaders at all levels regularly scrutinise pupils' books to monitor the impact of assessment. However, in these activities, leaders do not focus enough on the development of pupils' skills.

In general, the school has appropriate systems to gather the views of pupils. Many subject areas make particularly worthwhile use of pupil surveys to adapt and

enhance their provision. In addition, designated groups of pupils, for example 'curriculum hackers' and 'maths ambassadors', make a valuable contribution to the development of teaching and learning. However, the school does not take sufficient account of pupils' views regarding other aspects of school life

The whole school development plan identifies clearly the school's strategic priorities and is linked closely to self-evaluation findings. It includes a range of suitable actions, which are costed appropriately and have realistic timescales. However, in a few instances, the plan does not make sufficiently clear how progress towards targets will be monitored. Department development plans align well to whole-school priorities and match closely the areas for improvement identified through departmental self-evaluation. However, these plans do not identify specific strategies for improvement precisely enough.

Governors have a sound understanding of the school's strengths and areas for improvement. They provide a suitable level of challenge and support to the school. However, as they do not meet regularly, the work of the committees does not support the work of the full governing body consistently well enough.

The school has a range of effective strategies to share good practice among staff, such as training sessions, professional networks and peer observations. These activities have been successful in promoting effective teaching across the school. Many staff have been involved in school-to-school working, which has had a strong impact on the school's own provision as well providing valuable support for other schools.

The headteacher and bursar monitor school expenditure rigorously to ensure that spending is closely matched to the school's improvement priorities. The school makes effective use of grant funding. For example, its use of the Pupil Development Grant has secured greatly improved outcomes for pupils eligible for free school meals.

Staff are well qualified to carry out their roles and are deployed carefully and effectively. Teaching and support staff collaborate successfully to support pupils and to develop the school's provision. The school, in general, makes best use of its available accommodation to provide a safe, stimulating, positive working environment. However, despite the recent suitable improvements that the school has made to pupil toilets, there remains an insufficient number of toilets for the number of pupils in the school.

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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