



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

A report on

**Ysgol Gynradd Dolwyddelan
Ffordd Tŷ Isaf
Dolwyddelan
Conwy
LL25 0SZ**

Date of inspection: September 2019

by

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

About Ysgol Gynradd Dolwyddelan

Ysgol Gynradd Dolwyddelan is situated in the village of Dolwyddelan and is maintained by Conwy local authority. There are 25 pupils between 3 and 11 years old on roll. Welsh is the main medium of the school's life and work.

Over a three-year-period, around 7% of pupils have been eligible for free school meals. This is significantly lower than the national percentage of 18%. Twenty four per cent (24%) of pupils come from Welsh-speaking homes. The school has identified around 32% of its pupils as having additional learning needs, which is significantly higher than the national percentage of 21%.

The school was last inspected in March 2013. Since 2016, the school has been part of a formal federation with Ysgol Betws-y-coed and Ysgol Capel Garmon, which share one executive headteacher and one governing body.

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 Dolwyddelan is a welcoming and caring school. Staff create a supportive and stimulating learning environment for pupils. Nearly all pupils behave well and take care of each other. They treat others with respect. The school provides an interesting curriculum that succeeds in stimulating all pupils and ensuring that they make good progress from their starting points.

The Welsh language and Welsh identity are at the heart of the school's work. Pupils take pride in their local area and close links with the local community. They have a good understanding of life in the valley. All staff, including the site manager, work closely together for the benefit of pupils.

The headteacher was appointed formally to the role as head of the federation in March 2016. She has a clear vision for Ysgol Dolwyddelan and its place within the federation. As a result, pupils are given regular and valuable opportunities to network with pupils in other schools. However, staff roles and responsibilities are not defined clearly enough across the federation in order to maintain and improve provision and raise standards further.

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

Recommendations

- R1 Strengthen leadership at all levels in order to promote close co-operation between all staff in the federation
- R2 Strengthen self-evaluation procedures and planning for improvement across the federation
- R3 Ensure that governors discharge their statutory duties in full
- R4 Share the best features of teaching across the federation in order to ensure that all pupils are challenged consistently to achieve to the best of their ability
- R5 Ensure that teachers' feedback enables pupils to improve their work

What happens next

The school will produce an action plan to show how it will address the recommendations from the inspection. Estyn will review the school's progress.

Main findings

Standards: Good

During their time at the school, most pupils make sound progress in their learning. They gain new knowledge and understanding effectively and apply it successfully to their day-to-day work.

On entry to the school, many pupils' Welsh skills are lower than the standard expected for their age. During their time at the school, they make good progress in developing sound Welsh communication skills. Most develop oral skills successfully and use the Welsh language confidently when responding to questions or completing challenges. For example, many children in the foundation phase recall the story of the three little pigs and act confidently in a group of peers.

Most pupils make good progress in developing their reading skills. In the early years, most make sound progress in identifying letters and sounds, and a majority are beginning to recognise words successfully. By Year 2, most are skilled readers. They give due attention to punctuation and pronounce clearly and correctly. In key stage 2, many pupils talk enthusiastically about their favourite authors and book series. Most read with increasing accuracy in both languages, and many change their tone of voice purposefully in order to create effect.

Most foundation phase pupils make good progress in their writing skills. They form letters correctly and write sentences with suitable syntax, for example when responding to questions about local castles or recording the story of Gelert. In key stage 2, many pupils develop their writing skills effectively in different contexts, for example by writing a formal letter to express concern about the flooding of the Tryweryn valley and selecting appropriate vocabulary. Around half of pupils show pride in their work by presenting it neatly, and a minority use their cursive writing skills regularly.

In the foundation phase, many pupils have good numeracy skills. The youngest pupils recognise numbers to ten and form them correctly. By the end of Year 2, most add numbers up to twenty confidently on paper and mentally, and many succeed in subtracting with a good level of accuracy. Many count forwards and backwards confidently in ones, twos, threes and fives. In key stage 2, most pupils succeed in building on these skills in order to become confident at solving mental mathematical problems. They use written strategies confidently, particularly when considering addition and subtraction.

Most pupils in the foundation phase develop appropriate information and communication technology (ICT) skills. They make suitable use of a roamer to develop early control skills and use a data-handling package to create a simple block graph. They use a simple app to animate objects effectively, for example by taking a picture of an imaginary 'wolf' that they have created in the outdoor area and making it 'talk'. By the end of key stage 2, most pupils use a few ICT programs confidently. However, they do not apply these skills regularly in their work across the curriculum.

Wellbeing and attitudes to learning: Good

All pupils enjoy coming to school and are aware of the importance of regular attendance. The school is a happy community and everyone works well together. All pupils have great pride in the school.

Most pupils feel very safe at school and know whom to approach if they have any concerns. If anything is worrying them, they are able to leave a note in the feelings box and are confident that teachers will deal with the issue in a timely and sensitive manner. Nearly all pupils' behaviour, both during lessons and outside the classroom, is one of the school's strengths. They treat each other, their teachers and visitors with respect. This is evident in the way in which they support each other while working or when presenting their ideas or strategies to the class. Most pupils have a good awareness of the importance of online safety.

Most pupils are aware of the importance of making the right choices when eating and drinking, and of regular exercise. This is reinforced effectively in a wide range of sports activities, for example in regular physical education sessions and when competing in friendly games with schools in the catchment area. This contributes successfully towards developing their fitness and social skills.

Nearly all pupils show positive attitudes to learning. They concentrate and persevere, and complete work enthusiastically and successfully. Pupils appreciate the opportunities they are given to plan class activities and the term's theme, for example when planning a study of the eisteddfod. As a result, they have more ownership of their learning, which leads to a positive effect on most pupils' standards.

Many pupils' knowledge of global citizenship and understanding of cultures are developing soundly through the work of the eco council and their classroom studies, for example the effect of growing palm oil on rainforests. A majority of pupils have a good awareness of different religions.

The school has an enthusiastic school council and eco council. Their ideas are sought and discussed in regular meetings, for example when agreeing on the school's motto, "Gyda'n gilydd, llwyddwn" ("Together, we succeed"). They organise activities to raise money for charities. This has a positive effect on most pupils' awareness of the needs of others in their community and the wider world. However, the school's councils do not operate freely enough from staff guidance, which limits pupils' ability to develop as independent learners.

Teaching and learning experiences: Good

The school's teachers and support staff have a positive working relationship with pupils, which enables them to develop successfully. They maintain good behaviour, manage their classes and support learning effectively. As a result, most pupils make good progress during their time at the school.

Teachers plan interesting lessons that succeed in engaging pupils' interest. They present clear learning objectives and ensure that pupils understand what they need to do in full. They often use local prompts, and the way in which they promote the valley's history and culture is a strong feature of provision. Teachers ensure regular

opportunities for children to visit places in the local area, which adds to their enthusiasm towards their work. For example, arrangements were made for them to visit Dolwyddelan castle, Tŷ Isaf farm and Moriah Chapel.

During lessons, teachers set firm expectations, which ensure that pupils work on a task. They use effective questioning strategies in order to encourage all pupils to make progress. The philosophy of the foundation phase has been implemented clearly, and learning areas are attractive areas that are planned purposefully. Pupils are given valuable opportunities to contribute towards planning themes, and the outdoor areas are used effectively and regularly. The foundation phase assistant supports teaching very effectively, particularly by contributing towards setting a firm linguistic foundation for the youngest pupils. In key stage 2, teachers plan interesting learning activities that respond to all pupils' needs. Pupils are given opportunities to work in various different forms, which includes working individually, in pairs and in groups.

Teachers give suitable feedback on pupils' work. They give praise or intervene effectively in learning, where appropriate. In the best practice, pupils are given either oral or written feedback that leads to improving their work. However, in a few cases in the foundation phase, pupils do not understand the written comments and, in key stage 2, the focus is too often on correcting rather than improving the content and quality of pupils' work.

On the whole, provision to promote pupils' language skills is good. Throughout the school, teachers and support staff succeed in creating and maintaining a Welsh ethos. They introduce the language very successfully to non-Welsh-speaking pupils and take advantage of every opportunity to enrich pupils' language. There is a clear emphasis on developing pupils' oracy skills. They are given regular opportunities to practise their communication skills through acting, for example when key stage 2 pupils perform scenes from the legend of 'Llyn yr Afanc'.

Teachers succeed in developing pupils' writing skills successfully in both languages. In the few less successful activities, occasional over-use of ready-made worksheets limits learning. As a result, these activities do not always provide an appropriate level of challenge in order to enable pupils to make the best possible progress. Teachers provide beneficial opportunities for pupils to apply their numeracy skills in work across the curriculum, for example as pupils in the foundation phase create simple block graphs to record the number of visitors at Dolwyddelan castle. In the foundation phase, teachers ensure that pupils are given some valuable opportunities to develop their ICT skills. In key stage 2, the school has an effective arrangement to work with other schools in the federation to provide weekly sessions in this area. As a result, pupils are given some valuable experiences in order to develop new ICT skills. However, planning for ICT is not purposeful enough to enable pupils to apply their skills fully across the curriculum.

Care, support and guidance: Good

The school has a warm and welcoming ethos, which promotes the importance of respect and commitment successfully. As a result, pupils feel safe within the school's happy community. Nearly all pupils behave positively towards each other on the playground and when undertaking all of their activities.

The Welsh ethos and use of the local area is one of the school's strengths. Teachers organise a wide range of visits and experiences to increase pupils' awareness of local and Welsh history, for example when visiting Llyn Brenig Education Centre and their studies of the flooding of Capel Celyn. Ambassadors lead successful activities to encourage the use of the Welsh language in the classroom and socially.

The community is at the heart of school life, and pupils take part in a number of community activities, for example the local carnival and flower shows. Provision to develop pupils' creative skills is very effective. By studying local artists, providing music lessons, undertaking animation work, role-playing and competing in eisteddfodau, provision contributes successfully towards increasing many pupils' self-confidence and their ability to work together effectively.

Teachers know the pupils well and the school has an effective method for tracking pupils' progress. Teachers conduct regular assessments and analyse assessment information in detail. They use this information to plan early intervention, which ensures sound progress in the development of pupils' learning and wellbeing. The school has effective provision to support pupils with additional learning needs. Following input from parents, all pupils with additional learning needs have an appropriate learning plan, which includes the targets that they need to improve their work. These are reviewed regularly in order to ensure that pupils make sound progress. Teaching assistants are used effectively across the school to support pupils with their learning and implement intervention programmes. The school provides beneficial pastoral support for all pupils. Staff work carefully with a number of external services and agencies to provide specific programmes and guidance in this area. Staff use a specific programme to assess and support pupils with emotional problems. There is a valuable relationship between the school and the Cylch Ti a Fi, which promotes many pupils' early linguistic development.

The school promotes pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development well. Valuable periods of collective worship ensure opportunities for pupils to reflect, consider the views of others and promote the school's values. This is enriched further as the school invites members from the local chapels and churches to lead assemblies. There are good opportunities to nurture tolerance and equality in the school, and there is a beneficial relationship with the police officer, which supports this work sensibly.

Pupils are given productive opportunities to influence and provide direction for their class work. In the foundation phase, pupils make good decisions about what they learn. Across the school, pupils provide ideas at the beginning of themes to guide the direction of their learning. This develops a sense of ownership of their work and increases their enthusiasm.

The school's arrangements for safeguarding pupils meet requirements and are not a cause for concern.

Leadership and management: Adequate and needs improvement

Leaders have a clear vision that is based on ensuring that all pupils develop to their full potential in a happy, safe and stimulating learning environment. This is done by introducing all pupils to their Welsh heritage and developing them as full members of

society. The vision for the federation is shared effectively with pupils, staff and members of the governing body. A positive feature is that each individual school has kept its own unique ethos.

Staff have begun to support the headteacher by taking responsibility for developing elements of the school's life and work effectively. For example, arrangements and provision for pupils with special educational needs are now consistent across the schools in the federation. This has a positive effect on raising relevant pupils' standards. Foundation phase staff also come together to plan activities jointly in order to share good practice and ensure consistency in provision successfully. However, although the federation has existed for three years, these practices have not yet been established in full.

All members of staff have a sound understanding of their roles within their individual schools. However, there is no rigorous or agreed understanding about leaders' roles and teaching and learning responsibilities across the federation. This means that duties are not distributed fairly and lines of accountability are not robust enough. As a result, the current leadership and staffing structure is not sustainable enough to have a full effect on maintaining and improving provision and raising standards further.

The headteacher provides useful opportunities for all staff to report on strengths and areas that need to be strengthened within the school. On the whole, this is an effective tool for identifying the need for improvement across the federation. For example, when analysing staff's comments, the need to ensure consistency in pupils' ICT experiences was identified. Leaders arranged for all pupils in key stage 2 to visit Ysgol Betws-y-coed every week for ICT lessons. As a result, pupils' standards have increased across the federation.

However, the range of regular monitoring, evaluation and quality assurance activities is limited. As a result, processes are not always robust enough to address areas for improvement successfully; for example teachers use too many ready-made worksheets, which hinders pupils' creativity.

Leaders promote the professional development of all staff at the school effectively. They provide staff with regular training, which has a beneficial effect on provision and pupils' standards. For example, training on how to promote pupils' thinking skills in English has led to increasing pupils' confidence and standards of oracy, in addition to their thinking skills. Training is often linked to whole-school priorities.

Since being established as one unified body, the governors have been very supportive of the federation and have a good grasp of pupils' standards and achievement, and the schools' financial situation. They visit the schools regularly and receive useful information from the headteacher about the federation's life and work, which reinforces their knowledge and understanding well. They recognise the benefits of being in a federation and make decisions for the three schools, for example as they address the challenging financial situation. They see the potential of sharing staff expertise across the federation in the future. However, governors have not yet published an annual report for parents.

Leaders manage the school's resources effectively, and decisions about expenditure are included appropriately in targets for improvement. On the whole, leaders provide good quality resources that meet pupils' needs sensibly. Leaders manage the outdoor areas in the foundation phase effectively to improve pupils' learning experiences successfully. The school uses the pupil development grant effectively in order to provide additional support to work with vulnerable learners. This has a positive effect on ensuring that nearly all of these pupils achieve well.

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 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 and middle leaders (where appropriate) and individual teachers to evaluate the impact of the school's work
- meet pupils to discuss their work, to listen to them read 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 classes, including learning support groups 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 and in outdoor areas
- where appropriate, visit the specialist resource base within the school to see pupils' learning
- observe and speak to pupils at lunch and break times and at a sample of after-school clubs, where appropriate
- 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' wellbeing, 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 (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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