



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

A report on

Ysgol Emrys Ap Iwan

**Faenol Avenue
Abergele
Conwy
LL22 7HE**

Date of inspection: May 2022

by

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

This report is also available in Welsh.

About Ysgol Emrys Ap Iwan

Name of provider	Ysgol Emrys ap Iwan
Local authority	Conwy
Language of the provider	English Medium
Type of school	Secondary
Religious character	
Number of pupils on roll	971
Pupils of statutory school age	796
Number in sixth form (if applicable)	174
Percentage of statutory school age pupils eligible for free school meals over a three-year average <i>(The national percentage of pupils eligible for free school meals over a three-year average in the secondary sector is 18.7%)</i>	29.1%
Percentage of statutory school age pupils identified as having additional learning needs (a) <i>(The national percentage of pupils identified as having an additional learning need in the secondary sector is 21.7%)</i>	32%
Percentage of statutory school age pupils who speak Welsh at home	3.2%
Percentage of statutory school age pupils with English as an additional language	1.5%
Date of headteacher appointment	
Date of previous Estyn inspection (if applicable)	08/10/2013
Start date of inspection	09/05/2022
Additional information	

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

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

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

Overview

Ysgol Emrys ap Iwan offers pupils a wide range of opportunities to experience learning within the school day and beyond, particularly at Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form. The breadth of the extra-curricular offer, 'engage@emrys', positively impacts on the cultural development of pupils. Many pupils participate in the after-school sessions, including a high take up by disadvantaged learners. As a consequence of these opportunities, most pupils say they enjoy coming to school and feel that staff are caring and interested in their welfare. Although most pupils say they are engaged with school life, only a very few have the chance to take on leadership roles.

The well-being and additional learning needs teams have put in place well-thought through and personalised provision and support. This ensures all pupils can access the curriculum, although the use of individual education plans by teachers is variable. The school works effectively with a broad range of outside agencies to support pupils and their families well.

The headteacher and senior leaders provide considerate leadership, with high levels of support for the wellbeing of pupils, staff and families, particularly during the time of the pandemic. The school has also begun to robustly tackle long standing financial challenges. Although they work well together, the roles and responsibilities across the senior team are not equitable, and therefore the workload is not balanced well enough. In general, middle leaders carry out their roles appropriately, although the support from their line managers is variable. Leaders are beginning to gather information about the school's work following the pandemic, although evaluation and improvement processes are not sufficiently precise. Professional learning has contributed to strong care, support and guidance, but it has not focused closely enough on developing classroom practice. As a result, although the school has considered and acted on important aspects, such as well-being, the school has not prioritised key areas such as the development of teaching and assessment or the provision for pupils' skills to support improvement. In general, although the majority of pupils make appropriate progress in lessons, teachers' feedback does not have enough impact on improving pupils' work.

Recommendations

- R1 Improve the quality of teaching and assessment
- R2 Strengthen provision for the progressive development of pupils' skills, including Welsh
- R3 Strengthen leadership at all levels and improve self-evaluation and improvement planning
- R4 Address the health and safety issues identified during the inspection

What happens next

The school will draw up an action plan to show how it is going to address the recommendations. Estyn will work with the local authority to review the school's progress.

Main evaluation

Learning

In general, the majority of pupils across the school, including the more able, make sound progress in their knowledge, understanding and skills. Many pupils recall prior learning suitably and can apply this to new tasks, such as when they use line and pencil tone techniques to complete bottle drawings.

In the most effective lessons pupils make strong progress. For example, in religious education, they consider with interest the impact of the Varda system on individuals. In a minority of instances, pupils do not make as much progress as they should. This is largely due to shortcomings in teaching and in particular the lack of suitable challenge.

Many pupils listen attentively in lessons. They provide brief contributions when they are asked questions by the teacher, and participate suitably in classroom discussion. In a few lessons pupils listen carefully to each other and engage enthusiastically in group work. A few more able pupils provide extended responses when questioned. However, in general pupils lack confidence and remain passive when asked to share their opinions or ideas or provide only brief underdeveloped responses that are not challenged by the teacher.

The majority of pupils skim read texts at a suitable pace to draw out relevant information and scan longer pieces appropriately to identify key themes. Pupils use their reading skills successfully in a few subjects to summarise information, for example, by locating and extracting facts about catalysts. In literacy lessons low prior attaining pupils make good progress when supported to read unfamiliar words. A few pupils show high levels of confidence in reading aloud, accurately pronouncing complex vocabulary.

A majority of pupils structure their work appropriately and use a variety of sentence structures to interest and engage the reader. These pupils write with accuracy and use punctuation correctly. In a few subjects, pupils use varied vocabulary of increasing complexity such as when justifying the existence of war. However, a minority of pupils make frequent spelling, punctuation and grammatical errors. Around half of pupils have clear handwriting and write confidently at length.

In mathematics and a few other relevant subjects, many pupils demonstrate sound number skills. For instance, they calculate the efficiency of devices that use electricity in science or work out the value of money for holidays using exchange rates, for example pounds to dollars, or Euros to pounds. Across a few subjects, particularly science, a majority of pupils construct appropriate line graphs when given the scales and axes and label the axes appropriately. In general, these pupils plot points and draw lines of best fit with suitable care. A minority of pupils make effective use of data in graphs across the curriculum. For example, in personal and social education sessions they analyse and interpret the effects of increasing the number of cigarettes smoked on the probability of developing lung cancer.

When given the opportunity, many pupils develop their creative skills well, such as when changing the genre of well-known compositions to create their own versions, for example by altering the tempo, dynamics, texture and structure of the original. In the sixth form, pupils use and develop their enterprise skills innovatively to design a new festival, 'GlastonGele', to meet the dual requirements of local people and tourists.

In general, pupils develop their digital skills suitably through a narrow range of straightforward tasks. For example, pupils use backgrounds and images in presentation slides to inform their peers about digital resilience.

In a very few subjects across the curriculum and in registration pupils use simple sentences and key subject specific phrases in Welsh appropriately.

In the sixth form nearly all pupils work independently and show resilience when faced with challenging questions and actively respond, for example when demonstrating their understanding of and ability to manipulate different tenses in German.

Well-being and attitudes to learning

Most pupils feel safe in school. They consider that adults in the school care for their welfare and respect their views. Pupils benefit from accessing a wide range of well-being support, for example from the school nurse, counsellor and external providers. Pupils value highly the support for mental health in particular.

Most pupils understand the benefits of making healthy choices relating to diet and emotional well-being. They are confident in their own abilities to keep safe on-line and feel informed as a result of the opportunities offered through enrichment days. They engage well in sessions focused on e-safety, cyberbullying and online friendships. In addition, whole year assemblies focus on the dangers of social media and sexting.

In general, pupils across the school are polite and respectful to their peers, teachers and visitors. Most pupils behave appropriately in lessons and at break and lunchtimes.

A minority of pupils show resilience when working independently and, when suitable challenge is provided, they demonstrate grit and determination. These pupils are confident, capable learners, who are ready to learn. However, in many lessons, pupils are too passive and, in a few lessons, do not behave well. When pupils are less engaged or are not challenged sufficiently the quality of their work is poor. These pupils do not demonstrate pride in their work.

In lessons, nearly all sixth form pupils engage fully in their learning, sustaining concentration throughout. They actively participate in whole class discussion and freely volunteer their own ideas and questions.

Many pupils have a well-developed understanding of the school's rewards and sanctions systems. Pupils are motivated by the rewards system, which encourages them to improve their attendance, punctuality, engagement, and progress. The '12 days of Christmas' and 'Eggcellent' initiatives, which reward pupils with prizes, boosted pupil engagement at times when, in the past, engagement waned.

A very few pupils take on leadership opportunities at Ysgol Emrys ap Iwan. The school council has planned improvements to the school environment, such as securing outdoor benches to support pupils' well-being, raising money for charities and contributing to school's anti-bullying policy. These few democratically elected pupils carry out their roles with enthusiasm and maturity and develop their personal and social skills successfully. Despite this, overall, most pupils have limited opportunities to develop their leadership skills.

Pupils enjoy a wide range of extra-curricular clubs and wrap around care provided through the inclusive 'engage@emrys' programme. Participation rates are high across all pupil groups in a wide range of extra-curricular clubs such as dance, pottery and board games. The school ensures that all pupils, including the most vulnerable, have opportunities to participate in these activities. Pupils in Year 8 and Year 9 also attend outward bound weeks in Aberdovey. Sixth form pupils have opportunities to develop their leadership skills when assisting staff on the trips.

Owing to the coronavirus pandemic, inspectors will not report pupils' rates of attendance during the academic year 2021-2022. Inspectors will, however, consider the school's provision for monitoring and improving attendance as part of inspection area 4 (care, support and guidance).

Teaching and learning experiences

The school provides a comprehensive range of pathways to engage pupils' interests and cater for all abilities across the curriculum. In the sixth form, collaboration with other local providers ensures that learners have access to an extensive suite of qualifications at level 2 and level 3. For example, the Beauty Therapy Techniques and Women's Hairdressing courses suitably cater for the needs of individual learners. Similarly, at Key stage 4, pupils make choices from a broad and balanced set of options which include courses for example in Animal Care.

The school ensures that a suitable range of additional learning needs and well-being provision: 'Access' and 'Inclusion' spaces give pupils sufficient opportunities to access an adapted curriculum for pupils who require additional support. Valuable guidance is also provided for pupils in making sensible careers' choices. Purposeful use of external providers within enrichment days broadens pupils' understanding of a range of vocations. These worthwhile days give pupils valuable opportunities to develop their personal and social skills. For example, a local bank supported pupils in managing their finances and a BBC journalist spoke to pupils about how she has overcome challenges to realise her ambition to work in the media. The school is effective in providing pupils with further appropriate and well-attended enrichment opportunities through its 'engage@emrys' programme. A particular strength is the engagement of disadvantaged learners in this extensive range of activities.

The vision for Curriculum for Wales is clear, and appropriate planning is in place to fully embed this vision across the curriculum. However, the wider curriculum does not sufficiently support the progressive development of pupils' skills. The literacy programme for low prior attaining pupils in Years 7 and 8 "Building Reading Power" provides comprehensive bespoke support for individual learners. In these literacy lessons, pupils demonstrate greater confidence in their reading fluency and in writing more accurately. However, meaningful opportunities to improve and build upon

literacy and numeracy skills in curriculum areas other than in English and mathematics is under-developed. Curriculum design and planning, in readiness for 2023 does not sufficiently focus on learner progression in skills within and across areas of learning and experience. Plans to develop and progress pupils' digital competency skills across the curriculum are in the early stages of development and do not give sufficient focus to effective teaching and learning practice. The extent and quality of the provision for pupils to practice Welsh language skills in both formal teaching activities and informal situations is also underdeveloped.

In most lessons teachers demonstrate good subject knowledge and develop positive working relationships with their pupils. They make effective use of subject terminology and are good language role models. They adopt suitable classroom management strategies and create an appropriate learning environment.

Many teachers provide clear instructions and explanations to support pupils' progress appropriately. They plan their lessons with care and prepare suitable activities and teaching strategies which engage many pupils well. For example, teachers in physical education lessons set out a circuit of activities including boxing, strength and conditioning, and spinning. Many teachers use a suitable range of questions to check pupils' recall. However, in the majority of lessons questioning does not effectively probe and develop pupils' understanding. The majority of teachers provide regular, broadly appropriate feedback but this does not always help pupils make suitable progress in their work. They also make use of positive praise and encouragement to ensure many pupils engage well in lessons.

In a very few cases, where teaching is more effective, teachers have high expectations of what pupils can achieve. They provide robust challenge to the learners and ensure work is well matched to pupils' prior attainment. Through strong questioning techniques, they probe understanding and develop pupils' knowledge, skills and understanding. For example, in history the teacher's questioning explored and developed pupils' knowledge and understanding of the ambition behind creating "a land fit for heroes". As a result, pupils also develop their confidence and resilience. In general, most teaching in the sixth form also reflects these strengths.

In a minority of lessons there are shortcomings in teaching and, as a result, pupils make insufficient progress. In these lessons teachers do not have high enough expectations of what pupils can achieve. As a result, pupils are not challenged appropriately. Teachers' modelling does not always ensure pupils are clear about what is expected of them. In general, teachers over structure sessions and this hinders pupils' ability to be independent and creative in their learning. Overall, these lessons do not provide sufficient opportunities for pupils to develop their literacy and numeracy skills.

In a few lessons, teachers do not plan well enough to engage pupils. They have poor expectations of behaviour and ineffective behaviour management strategies. As a result, a very few pupils lose focus and disrupt the learning of others.

Many teachers provide suitable feedback on the strengths and areas for improvement on specific pieces of pupils' work. There is variation in the quality of feedback within and across subjects. The comments tend to be over generous and

do not give sufficient detail on how to improve. The pupil response to the teacher feedback is varied and inconsistent.

The school has a strong, comprehensive tracking system that identifies underachieving pupils adeptly. Individual departments have also developed their own parallel systems to identify pupils' strengths and areas for improvement. This information is used to provide suitable targets and support for pupils. However, the school does not have a sufficient understanding of the standards of pupils' skills to plan for progression. The school reports to parents provide appropriate information on pupil progress and identify suitable targets for improvement.

Care, support and guidance

The well-being team provide a comprehensive range of purposeful support for pupils with a wide range of needs. This work is underpinned by a strong mission to secure consistent engagement with mainstream education by these pupils.

The school has well defined processes for encouraging good attendance and behaviour, and for supporting the well-being needs of vulnerable pupils. Data is used well in weekly pastoral meetings. The team take a holistic view of each pupil's attendance and behaviour in light of any social, emotional and educational needs to identify relevant actions and support. These pupils are monitored carefully, and a well-considered graduated response ensures that they re-engage with learning. For example, the staff in the 'Cherish' room, support the small numbers of learners who access the provision with mental health and emotional needs well. Where required, appropriate curriculum adjustments are made to meet pupils' needs and to secure their continued engagement in worthwhile educational experiences within the school.

The school works with a wide range of agencies and providers to support the work of the well-being team. For example, in the family centre pupils and their families are able to access wider support. The "Youth Shed" provides creative and valid learning experiences for pupils to develop self-esteem and resilience. The school nurse and medical area provide comprehensive first aid, mental and sexual health support for learners.

Through the curriculum, assemblies and enrichment days, the school develops pupils' understanding of equality, diversity, and safe relationships suitably. These opportunities help pupils to develop the values of respect, empathy and compassion effectively, as well as explore different spiritual and ethical beliefs.

Pupils have a suitable range of opportunities to develop their imagination, physical and creative arts skills through their studies, extra-curricular activities and educational visits. For example, pupils benefit from a wide range of sports clubs, as well as choir, drama, and valuable educational visits to theatres. It uses grant funding purposefully to ensure that disadvantaged pupils benefit from these opportunities.

The school council provided valuable input into the school's anti-bullying policy to improve ways in which pupils can report any incidents, and the school deals sensitively and effectively with the very few incidents that occur. As a result, most pupils feel safe in school.

The school audits its safeguarding provision suitably to identify gaps. While the information from the school's monitoring and tracking systems is used well to tailor interventions, it is not used comprehensively enough to secure enhancements to provision. Staff have been involved in beneficial training on de-escalation strategies and on support for pupils suffering trauma and anxiety post lockdown. Some staff at the school have valuable expertise in restorative approaches, but this is not shared and used widely.

On the whole, the school buildings provide a safe and secure space for learners. There are strong systems in place for referring and supporting children in need or at risk of significant harm, and those pupils who are looked after by the local authority. Staff have received the appropriate training and generally understand their safeguarding duties well. In addition, a few health and safety matters have been brought to the attention of the school.

The school's 'Access' provision ensures that pupils with special educational and additional learning needs receive a wide range of valuable support and interventions. In 'Access', the school provides beneficial opportunities for pupils to develop a wide range of skills or receive bespoke support for autistic spectrum disorder (ASD), anxiety and learning needs. For example, 'The Zone' is a safe space in which small numbers of ASD learners are supported effectively to reintegrate into mainstream lessons.

Pupils with moderate learning difficulties in the specialist resource have similar experiences to those with other additional learning needs. This provision successfully enables these pupils to attend mainstream lessons with their peers for part of the school week. This effective strategy aims to ensure that the provision for learners with moderate learning difficulties is equitable to those without while receiving relevant interventions to support their needs.

Overall, across the various designated areas, the school provides a valuable hub for vulnerable learners to meet and socialise during break and lunchtime. Pupils can choose to have some quiet time or develop friendships through a range of activities supported by staff.

Pupils with additional learning needs have useful one-page profiles that explain how they would like to be supported and they contribute meaningfully to this process. Individual education plans (IEPs) provide appropriate strategies for use in class with long-term success criteria. However, IEPs do not include short-term targets. As a result, this limits their usefulness in helping staff to identify the most appropriate teaching and learning strategies. Teachers do not use IEPs well enough to inform their teaching. While the school has a useful tracking system to monitor suitably the academic progress made by learners with additional learning needs, these monitoring activities are not used well enough to further enhance provision or identify professional learning needs. The arrangements for annual reviews are sufficiently robust.

Leadership and management

Since her appointment in September 2020, the headteacher has provided sound leadership and ensured that the school functioned effectively during a challenging

period of the COVID-19 pandemic. The senior leadership team supported the headteacher appropriately when responding to the pandemic and focused on ensuring that pupils gained the best outcomes on leaving the school. The headteacher has a clear vision that every pupil at Ysgol Emrys ap Iwan have equal opportunities to achieve their full potential. This is reflected in their motto, 'Dare to achieve' which is communicated regularly to staff, pupils and parents and permeates suitably through the school's work.

Leaders place a strong emphasis on the well-being of pupils. During the lockdown periods they communicated regularly with pupils to check on their well-being and followed up any issues appropriately, for example by providing food parcels for the most vulnerable pupils. Leaders also prioritised staff well-being and have been flexible when staff needed to work from home, even after most providers had returned to more usual school life. Senior leaders have carefully considered the balance between workload and holding staff to account for their work and supporting their well-being. In the last few years, leadership at all levels has secured improvements in a few areas of the school's work. This includes the provision for pupil inclusion and providing new extra-curricular experiences.

While the roles and responsibilities of senior leaders are generally defined and distributed suitably, they are not weighted appropriately. This means that a small group of leaders are shouldering significant responsibilities, which poses challenges in terms of maintaining quality and driving further improvements. Most middle leaders understand their roles to support and care for pupils and provide worthwhile learning experiences. There are suitable structures in place for line management. Regular "challenge and support" meetings allow senior leaders to assess progress of departments in improving performance and ensure accountability for actions. Most middle leaders hold those that they manage to account well through regular departmental meetings. However, the extent that senior leaders hold middle leaders to account varies and therefore does not ensure improvement at the same pace.

The headteacher and other leaders communicate effectively and build productive relationships with parents. The headteacher sends regular letters with updates on guidance and procedures to parents. The school celebrates pupils' successes well through, for example, a newsletter on the school's website and posts on social media.

Leaders at all levels pay due attention to many national priorities. The school is preparing for the implementation of the Curriculum for Wales through early planning and trialling activities. They have also focused on safeguarding pupils and staff through working with agencies, informing staff about the needs of pupils and their responsibility for safeguarding.

Leaders have reduced the impact of poverty on educational attainment, partly through altering provision. This includes deploying an attendance officer, school nurse and counsellors as well as developing the inclusion centre and using the family centre. 'engage@ emrys' ensures that vulnerable pupils have access to costly outdoor activities such as climbing, horse riding and water sports.

In recent years there has been a drive to encourage pupils to be more engaged in Welsh in their lessons and improve outcomes at Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4.

However, leaders do not promote the benefits of bilingualism well enough and do not encourage pupils to use Welsh informally outside the Welsh department.

Although individual teachers plan activities to develop pupils' skills in their lessons, leadership for the planning for progression of pupils' skills is not strong enough. As a result, leaders do not have a clear enough understanding of what pupils can do and what they need to develop.

Governors are generally supportive of the school whilst providing sufficient challenge based on the information they receive. They are aware of their responsibility to promote healthy eating and drinking and ensure that the school does this through the curriculum and enrichment activities.

The headteacher, business manager and governors work closely together to ensure that the financial situation is recovering slowly with sound planning and management. The school has a long term liability of a debt that is gradually reducing. This financial year, the school has set a balanced budget through using most of the residual from 2020-21. It makes purposeful use of grants including the Pupil Development Grant to support pupils' well-being.

There are suitable arrangements for managing the performance of staff. Progress against objectives is measured against success criteria that focus well on the impact on pupils' learning and well-being. Professional learning is suitably linked to performance management objectives, but it does not always meet the individual needs of teachers and leaders.

The school is developing a culture of improving teaching and assessment. It offers an appropriate range of training for staff including opportunities to attend courses from external providers and contribute to networks. The school ensures beneficial opportunities for staff to develop their leadership skills through internal support and a few external opportunities. For example, staff have worked together and visited other schools when considering priorities such as Curriculum for Wales.

The school has a calendar of appropriate activities for self-evaluation and quality assurance. Activities have gradually resumed after the pandemic and include collection of first-hand evidence through learning walks and scrutiny of pupils' work. Many leaders at all levels use these processes suitably to identify the main strengths and areas for improvement in teaching and learning. Leaders do not always consider the impact of provision on standards and progress well enough. They also tend to over rely on their internally generated data to evaluate learning.

Governors and staff have an appropriate awareness of the school's priorities. Improvement plans generally include suitable priorities based on evaluation of the school's work. The school improvement plan includes a large number of priorities of which a few have been selected to be addressed in the action plan. Progress against priorities is evaluated appropriately and the school adapts its approaches accordingly. In general, when planning for improvement, actions do not indicate how the school will bring about improvement in enough detail. Success criteria are not always measurable or specific enough to hold others to account. The cycle of self-evaluation and improvement planning is not cohesive enough at whole school level. Overall, leaders have not secured enough impact through improvement processes.

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 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, where appropriate
- visit a broad sample of lessons, 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' well-being, including the safeguarding of pupils, and records of staff training and professional development

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

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

Copies of the report

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

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

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

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