



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

A report on

Ysgol Gymraeg Abercynon

**Greenfield Terrace
Glancynon
Abercynon
Rhondda Cynon Taf
CF45 4TH**

Date of inspection: October 2023

by

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

About Ysgol Gymraeg Abercynon

Name of provider	Ysgol Gymraeg Abercynon
Local authority	Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council
Language of the provider	Welsh
Type of school	Primary
Religious character	
Number of pupils on roll	273
Pupils of statutory school age	200
Number in nursery classes (if applicable)	30
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 primary sector is 23.0%)</i>	17.1%
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 primary sector is 16.1%)</i>	3.5%
Percentage of statutory school age pupils who speak Welsh at home	7.0%
Percentage of statutory school age pupils with English as an additional language	0.0%
Date of headteacher appointment	March 2022
Date of previous Estyn inspection (if applicable)	18/05/2015
Start date of inspection	09/10/2023

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

The acting headteacher at Ysgol Gymraeg Abercynon is working diligently with leaders to identify the school's strengths and areas for improvement. Recently, she has allocated responsibilities to staff purposefully and encourages regular co-operation to support her in beginning to respond to inconsistencies across the school. This is beginning to have a positive effect on developing provision and supporting pupils to make progress in their skills.

Teachers and teaching assistants work together effectively to provide an inclusive and supportive learning environment for pupils. They know the pupils well and develop a caring and secure working relationship while supporting their learning. Staff encourage pupils to nurture their well-being and positive attitudes to learning, which motivates many to achieve well. In the best teaching practice, many teachers have high expectations of pupils and support and challenge them effectively to develop their skills in rich activities across the curriculum. In the less effective practice, a few teachers over-direct learning, which limits pupils in terms of making decisions about what to present in their work and how. This slows their progress as they develop their skills suitably in an appropriate range of activities.

Many pupils have positive attitudes to learning. They are proud to communicate in Welsh and encourage their friends to speak and use the language in their learning and play. Many behave respectfully and support each other to learn well. Overall, they enjoy using their skills to be enthusiastic and creative learners, for example in art and expressive arts activities. Many pupils develop their literacy and digital skills consistently across the curriculum. Although pupils' mathematics skills are developing soundly, provision does not support the majority to develop and apply their numeracy skills effectively enough in meaningful learning experiences. On the whole, pupils are beginning to demonstrate suitable perseverance and resilience as they begin to foster their independent learning skills.

Recommendations

- R1 Ensure that teachers have high and consistent expectations to support and challenge pupils to achieve high standards in stimulating activities
- R2 Provide valuable opportunities for pupils to develop and apply their skills, particularly numeracy, independently across the curriculum

What happens next

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

Main findings

Learning

Most pupils make swift progress from their starting points on entry to the school, particularly in their understanding of Welsh. As they mature, many make consistent progress in developing their Welsh and English communication skills. By the end of their time at the school, they communicate confidently in both languages. They develop their mathematics and digital skills appropriately in activities that deepen their knowledge and understanding of different areas of the curriculum. Many pupils with additional learning needs (ALN) and those who are eligible for free school meals achieve well.

Many pupils listen well to adults, which supports them to use vocabulary and language patterns with increasing accuracy over time. Staff's expectations and skilful teaching methods help most pupils to acquire and use the Welsh language naturally. Pupils in the nursery class develop suitable vocabulary when learning about the autumn, for example. As pupils move through the school, Year 3 pupils use good adjectives to describe Celtic symbols and patterns. At the top of the school, many pupils use relevant language in both languages, for example to present information about the effect of the Blitz.

One of the school's notable qualities is the highly attractive learning environment that promotes a culture of reading successfully among pupils. Many of the youngest pupils come to recognise the sounds of individual letters and combine them skilfully to read simple words. By Year 2, many use a good range of methods to read suitable texts, which supports them to vary their tone of voice when reading with increasing fluency. The oldest pupils identify features such as the title, author and blurb correctly, on the whole, and enjoy becoming engrossed when reading books and various digital texts in Welsh and English. Many use their higher order reading skills to gather and collate information about different themes, for example about famous people such as Louis Braille. However, across the school, a few pupils have difficulty understanding the content of Welsh texts, which slows progress in their reading skills.

Across the school, many pupils develop their writing skills soundly. The youngest pupils use a range of resources to make marks to develop hand-eye co-ordination effectively. By Year 2, many use a good range of vocabulary in a series of interesting sentences, for example when writing instructions for building a house. The youngest pupils write independently in the marking area and work together diligently to write a list of family members, for example. As pupils' skills mature, they write clearly and methodically in a good range of creative and factual genres. For example, Year 6 pupils write a portrayal of a coalminer in English by using creative openings and interesting similes in coherent paragraphs. On the whole, most pupils present their work respectfully and use neat handwriting.

Across the school, many pupils' mathematics skills develop soundly. Consistent teaching methods and relevant resources support pupils to deepen their understanding of number and value in an appropriate range of activities, such as mathematics games. The youngest pupils use the correct terms when describing the

features of 2D shapes, while the oldest pupils transform shapes in four quadrants successfully. Pupils' data-handling skills develop consistently. Overall, a minority of pupils make appropriate progress in developing and applying their numeracy skills across the curriculum. For example, Year 2 pupils develop their understanding of patterns effectively by designing and printing shapes as part of their learning about the art patterns of William Morris. Overall, provision does not support a majority of pupils to build and apply their numeracy skills in authentic learning experiences effectively enough.

Many pupils build on their digital skills successfully during their time at the school. The youngest pupils develop their early coding skills to give instructions to a device to follow a specific path. By Year 2, most log in to their accounts confidently and use a good range of programs and apps to develop their literacy and numeracy skills and present creative work. Year 4 pupils develop their understanding of formulae well, for example by gathering data and interpreting weather features across the world. As pupils develop their skills appropriately, many present information through multimedia methods, for example to present information about the Aberfan disaster.

Most pupils develop their creative skills effectively in an interesting range of learning activities. For example, the youngest pupils develop their skills by emulating a photograph of family members by using different paint colours skilfully. Pupils enjoy performing a range of co-ordinated movements as part of dance performances; for example, Year 5 pupils convey walls toppling in a creative presentation accompanied by music.

Well-being and attitudes to learning

Most pupils are happy within the inclusive and supportive environment. They are proud to speak Welsh in a variety of situations, for example as the oldest pupils encourage and support the youngest pupils to learn and play by using the language. Pupils feel safe at the school and know whom to approach if anything is worrying them. They express their feelings regularly by noting any concerns in the '*Post Pryder*' box and are glad to receive effective support from staff through the '*sudd a sgwrs*' talking approach in Cwtsh Cynon. The emotional well-being of most pupils is robust which, in turn, supports them to apply themselves well to their learning.

Many pupils show empathy towards each other's learning needs. They support their peers effectively and are willing to help them and include them in the school's activities. For example, Year 2 pupils present the story of The Three Little Pigs enthusiastically by using sign language highly successfully. By doing so, pupils develop to become creative and skilful learners who are proud to be unique and valuable members of the school community.

Many pupils behave politely and treat each other, adults and visitors with respect. For example, Year 1 pupils work together respectfully when matching numbers to the correct number of objects when solving problems in a mathematics game. Pupils enjoy talking about their work and respond suitably to feedback, which provides them with relevant support to succeed. Overall, many apply themselves appropriately to their tasks and are proud to present good work, for example as pupils in the reception class use a variety of creative resources to create picture frames. However,

in a few classes, provision does not always support pupils to apply themselves enthusiastically, confidently and ambitiously to their work.

On the whole, many pupils listen appropriately to presentations, concentrate for extended periods and work together effectively to complete activities. They attempt new tasks that challenge them suitably, for example as Year 6 pupils persevere to present secret Morse codes in a scientific activity. Many pupils persevere appropriately and show suitable resilience in activities that begin to nurture their independent learning skills.

Most pupils are aware of the importance of making healthy choices and keeping fit. Many apply themselves well to activities that develop their physical skills successfully, for example as the youngest pupils balance when following a zig-zag path on the school playground. The oldest pupils apply themselves consistently in extra-curricular clubs, such as sports and performing. They develop their ball-control skills skilfully and take part enthusiastically in local and regional competitions and tournaments.

The ambassadors and the health and well-being council take responsibility for the fruit shop during break time and support pupils to play together happily by using the new playground games. Nearly all pupils are aware of the importance of staying safe online and understand the importance of not sharing passwords and other digital information with others. This is reinforced well as pupils design a poster promoting online safety.

Most pupils develop their leadership skills successfully through different groups, which is beginning to have an influence on developments and the school environment effectively. For example, the ambassadors choose the right of the month and Year 6 pupils decide on the value of the month, which contributes successfully to developing their peers' understanding of being moral and knowledgeable citizens. Members of the *senedd* are keen to act on the aims of their action plans to enrich the experiences of their peers further at the school.

The gap in the attendance of a very few pupils who are eligible for free school meals is increasing in comparison with other groups.

Teaching and learning experiences

Recently, the school has had a clear vision to develop the Curriculum for Wales. Through appropriate provision, all staff are beginning to contribute enthusiastically towards delivering learning experiences that are based on the school's values. Teachers provide a balanced curriculum, on the whole, which builds well on pupils' knowledge, understanding and skills, overall. Recently, teachers have begun to provide opportunities for pupils to take more responsibility for their learning by suggesting ideas for learning experiences. However, this has not had enough time to become embedded or to have a consistent effect on the progress of pupils across the school.

All staff establish a caring working relationship with pupils, which fosters a happy and safe learning environment. Dedicated teachers and supportive teaching assistants work together effectively to provide learning experiences that meet the needs of

many pupils appropriately. They encourage and motivate pupils to apply themselves to their learning consistently. On the whole, staff manage pupils' behaviour skilfully and support them well to concentrate and persevere to succeed in their learning.

In the best practice, many teachers present learning activities that stimulate pupils to develop their skills in a rich range of experiences. Teachers hold their interest well by challenging and questioning them skilfully and ensuring that lessons are well paced. They have high expectations of pupils, share the aims of tasks effectively through the Cerrig Camu Cynon method and support pupils to immerse themselves in their learning and achieve well. In less effective practice, the expectations of a few teachers are not always high enough to challenge pupils to achieve well. Overall, they over-direct learning, which hinders pupils' ability to develop as enterprising and independent learners. At times, this limits pupils in terms of making decisions about what they learn and how to present their work.

Staff know their pupils and their home situations well and meet the needs of different groups skilfully, including those with ALN, challenging behaviour and learners who are affected by poverty. Teaching assistants support learning very robustly and lead specific groups skilfully. For example, teaching assistants provide a good variety of programmes that gives valuable support for pupils to develop their well-being, literacy and numeracy skills.

Staff work diligently to create a learning environment that engages and holds pupils' interest well. They organise the classrooms effectively, including the attractive reading areas in each classroom. The beneficial resources and areas on the school playground are used suitably to support pupils' learning. Teachers enrich pupils' learning experiences appropriately through regular and valuable use of visitors and educational visits. For example, pupils enjoy educational shows at the school and visit local museums to deepen their knowledge and understanding of different areas of the curriculum.

The Welsh language is at the heart of the school's life and work and staff take advantage of every opportunity to model and support pupils' oral skills. For example, staff provide valuable opportunities for the youngest pupils to play oracy games to reinforce the '*Rydw i'n hoffi*' and '*Dydw i ddim yn hoffi*' patterns. The oldest pupils learn about Welsh legends, such as the legend of Branwen, in a creative presentation. This has a positive effect on pupils' enthusiasm to develop their literacy skills while learning about Welsh history and traditions. The youngest pupils take digital pictures of different homes for example, by using a device independently when visiting a local museum and display them attractively on the 'Hanesogram' mural in the classroom. However, teachers do not provide stimulating and regular opportunities for pupils to develop and apply their numeracy skills in stimulating experiences across the curriculum.

Recently, staff have used assessment information effectively and track the progress of individual pupils and specific groups skilfully to plan for them. This ensures that teachers respond promptly to pupils' needs and support them in a timely manner. On the whole, they provide constructive oral and written feedback and ensure that pupils understand what they need to do to move their learning forwards. Pupils use specific approaches to highlight good aspects and areas for development in their work

effectively. As a result, many pupils are beginning to discuss how they can improve their work and the progress in their learning.

Teachers develop valuable opportunities to engage proactively with parents as they support their children's skills. For example, teachers have recently presented useful information to parents as part of the '*Cwrdd gyda'r athro*' ('Meet the teacher') arrangements. This, along with presentations about reading, is beginning to strengthen the communication process between the school and home. Parents receive relevant information about their children's well-being and progress as part of the annual report arrangements.

Care, support and guidance

The school is a warm, caring and happy community that places a clear emphasis on safeguarding pupils and promoting their well-being effectively. For example, a group of pupils receive creative and practical sessions on a daily basis to support them to improve their emotional well-being. Staff encourage pupils to respect each other and value diversity effectively. This ensures that pupils settle quickly and become well-rounded members of the school community.

Staff place a strong emphasis on offering provision that meets the individual needs of pupils to develop them as well-rounded learners. They provide purposeful programmes for those who need additional support, including vulnerable pupils. Staff work appropriately with partnerships and nearby schools, including secondary schools, and with external agencies such as the speech and language team and the educational psychologist. Teachers provide individual education plans, which include well-being and learning targets to support pupils with additional learning needs to make appropriate progress. Teachers and parents produce plans together, which supports pupils to know what the next steps are in their learning. Teachers implement effective systems to track and monitor pupils' well-being and progress, and they now analyse this information skilfully. As a result, they have good knowledge of pupils' needs and use this information appropriately to plan the next steps in their learning.

Teachers provide beneficial opportunities for pupils to learn about the history of Wales, such as the area's coal industry and the effect both locally and on the wider world. Staff promote pupils' creative development effectively through musical and expressive performances at the school and in the community. Teachers also provide valuable art and design experiences for pupils, which include emulating the work of artists such as David Bowen and Will Evans. Pupils develop a good understanding of the sound of music while evaluating their performance when playing musical instruments, for example to the tune of the national anthem. This contributes well to strengthening their understanding of their identity, heritage and culture.

Staff provide appropriate periods for pupils to develop spiritual, moral and social aspects. They provide beneficial opportunities for them to reflect and consider important values and aspects such as healthy relationships and equality, and about different religions and cultures. Teachers promote good behaviour between pupils through relevant sessions that deepen their understanding effectively of being valued and respectful members of the school community and beyond.

Pupils are given regular opportunities to take on responsibilities and develop their leadership skills through the different councils. For example, the school council has contributed effectively to one of the school's priorities by establishing an attendance raffle. This has improved pupils' desire to come to school and has led to an increase in attendance. The school's procedures to ensure regular attendance and punctuality for pupils are robust.

As part of the personal and social education provision, teachers plan a variety of experiences that deepen their knowledge of healthy lifestyle choices. For example, members of the well-being council apply their numeracy skills effectively as they calculate the fruit shop's weekly profit. A range of opportunities are organised to develop pupils' fitness and physical skills through the sports club and opportunities to participate and succeed in sports competitions.

The school has a strong culture of safeguarding and there are robust systems in place to ensure that pupils are safe at school. The school's arrangements for safeguarding pupils meet requirements and are not a cause for concern.

Leadership and management

Since the acting headteacher was appointed, she has worked diligently to establish and strengthen the school's leadership strategies. Recently, this has begun to have a positive influence on pupils' behaviour and progress. Her enthusiasm fosters a sense of co-operation among the staff and aims for consistency in teaching across the school. In a short period of time, the senior management team, some of whom are new to their responsibilities in general, have worked together meaningfully to identify the school's strengths and areas for improvement. As a team, they lead on strategic procedures that are beginning to bear fruit. For example, they hold termly meetings with teachers to develop provision and focus meaningfully on meeting pupils' needs. The acting headteacher has allocated responsibilities purposefully, which supports staff at all levels to understand and fulfil their roles effectively. This has raised the morale of staff and ignited their enthusiasm towards teaching, and has begun to respond to inconsistencies across the school.

Leaders have a clear vision that is based on the six 'Cs', which include '*Cymreictod, Cydweithio a Cheisio ein gorau glas*' ('Welshness, Co-operation and Trying our best'). The school's close-knit and inclusive ethos ensures that the pupil's voice is beginning to influence this vision on a regular basis. The vision has a prominent place in the everyday work of the school and staff now refer to it proactively in useful discussions.

Leaders model high expectations of themselves, staff and pupils. Overall, they demonstrate professional values and behaviour, which contributes firmly towards improving the school. In a short period of time, they have developed robust methods for establishing an effective self-evaluation process. These methods are beginning to have a regular influence on the well-being, behaviour and progress of many pupils. However, it is too early to measure the effect of these methods on the consistent quality of teaching and the sustained progress of pupils.

Governors understand and fulfil their roles and responsibilities well. They know the school well and are aware of the need for stability in the school's leadership. They

have begun to hold beneficial learning walks and join in with book scrutiny activities. As a result, they are developing a better understanding of the effect of provision on pupils' development and progress. They have an accurate understanding of the school's priorities and identify strengths and areas for improvement. They ensure that the school uses its resources effectively, including the pupil development grant, to promote and support learning. They ensure that the school has appropriate arrangements to promote healthy eating and drinking.

The governing body's 'community engagement' sub-committee forges good links with members of the community, who work together effectively to support the school. Older pupils benefit greatly from the relationship between them and the village allotment. In this outdoor area, pupils are given beneficial opportunities to work with members of the local community to develop their experimentation, discovery, risk-taking and problem-solving skills, for example. Together, they have created a multi-sensory area which is used effectively by the school for reflection sessions and is also enjoyed regularly by others in the community. As a result, pupils develop to become kind and respectful citizens.

Leaders work together purposefully to nurture pupils' well-being and develop their skills, ensuring that they are not adversely affected by poverty. For example, the ethos of support and assistance is a strong element of the school's culture and leads to purposeful opportunities to promote and support professional learning opportunities for all staff. For example, purposeful training is organised for teachers for each of the areas of learning and experience, as well as training to equip teaching assistants to support pupils to develop their skills more efficiently. These valuable opportunities are beginning to have a positive effect on ensuring consistency in provision to meet the needs of all pupils. Staff also co-operate with other schools to share and develop professional practice, particularly in literacy.

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/members of the management committee 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, middle leaders, 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
- visit a broad sample of lessons, including learning support groups and the specialist resource base (where appropriate), 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 (where appropriate) and in outdoor areas
- visit the specialist resource base within the school to see pupils' learning (where appropriate)
- observe and speak to pupils at lunch and break times and at a sample of after-school clubs
- 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 going to press. Any enquiries or comments regarding this document/publication should be addressed to:

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