



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

A report on

Ysgol Y Plas

**Llanelian
Old Colwyn
Conwy
LL29 8YY**

Date of inspection: May 2022

by

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

About Ysgol Y Plas

Name of provider	Ysgol y Plas
Local authority	Conwy
Language of the provider	English Medium
Type of school	Primary
Religious character	
Number of pupils on roll	77
Pupils of statutory school age	65
Number in nursery classes (if applicable)	*
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 21.3%)</i>	16.7%
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 20.6%)</i>	38.5%
Percentage of statutory school age pupils who speak Welsh at home	13.8%
Percentage of statutory school age pupils with English as an additional language	*
Date of headteacher appointment	April 2004
Date of previous Estyn inspection (if applicable)	23/04/2013
Start date of inspection	03/05/2022
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

Pupils at Ysgol Y Plas show high levels of kindness and consideration for each other. They generally enjoy school and behave well. During their time at school, most pupils enjoy opportunities to create music and artwork and make good progress in developing these skills. Overall, they make appropriate progress in developing their literacy, numeracy and digital skills, but progress in specific aspects of literacy, particularly writing, is not always as good as it could be.

Teachers and other adults at the school create a caring atmosphere where nearly all learners feel safe and are confident that the grownups will help them when they need support. They use a good range of strategies to help pupils to participate positively in lessons. Teachers are beginning to take account of pupils' ideas when planning learning experiences. Increasingly, they use innovative real-life scenarios as a stimulus for learning. Pupils respond very well in these instances and make good progress as a result. However, learning experiences do not always provide the right level of challenge for learners or match their developmental needs well enough. For example, younger pupils do not have enough opportunities to learn through play and exploration and the school's arrangements to develop pupils' literacy skills do not always support learners to develop their skills progressively.

School leaders provided effective leadership during the pandemic. Quite rightly, they focused on caring for the school community and on supporting pupils to continue to learn and develop. Leaders work in partnership with parents and the local high school successfully to improve resources, broaden pupils' learning experiences and support transition to the next stage of learning.

Leaders generally identify worthwhile priorities for improvement and support these with appropriate actions. In a few instances, such as the school's work to support pupils with additional learning needs, this work is making a positive difference. The school's arrangements to monitor its own work have been hindered by the recent pandemic. Positive strategies, such as the involvement of governors and pupils in learning walks, have had to be suspended. Leaders have drawn upon information from national tests to inform their improvement strategy but, even when giving due consideration to the recent pandemic, they have not looked closely enough at the quality of teaching and the progress that pupils make over time. Consequently, they have not identified important aspects of the school's work that need to be better, including provision for pupils from nursery to Year 2.

Recommendations

- R1 Ensure that provision for three to seven-year-olds meets their developmental needs effectively, including through opportunities to learn through play and exploration
- R2 Improve provision to develop pupils' literacy skills, especially writing
- R3 Improve the strategic leadership of teaching and learning through the targeted use of evaluation activity and professional learning
- R4 Address the safeguarding issues identified during the inspection

What happens next

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

Main evaluation

Learning

When they first join the school in nursery or reception class, most pupils have good speaking and social skills. As they progress through the school, they generally make appropriate progress in developing their skills, knowledge and understanding in a variety of contexts. Most pupils that join the school at a later stage make good progress in their development as individuals and as learners. Pupils with additional learning needs make good progress overall from their individual starting points.

Most pupils from nursery to Year 2 talk with confidence about their learning and use a good range of vocabulary, for instance when learning about the different parts of plants. They follow instructions well, including in Welsh. They have a good understanding of familiar Welsh vocabulary such as the names of colours and of instructional language that supports their school routine.

Most pupils from nursery to Year 2 make appropriate progress in developing their literacy skills. They develop a suitable awareness of phonics, the relationship between letters and sounds and of how letters combine to make words. By Year 2, most pupils read well as part of their learning. For example, they read their work aloud or read challenge task cards accurately. They develop an enjoyment of books, including non-fiction books, and engage with these resources with friends or independently. Most develop appropriate early writing skills, including the ability to form letters. Over time, they begin to write sentences that include verbs and adjectives as part of teacher directed exercises. However, their confidence and capacity to have a go at writing independently are limited by the opportunities presented. Very often, these opportunities consist of completing worksheets.

Most pupils from Year 3 to Year 6 use their English speaking and listening skills well to support their learning, for instance during drama activities based on the work of Shakespeare. Most respond to questions in Welsh about their families and their interests. They use a suitable range of sentence patterns and vocabulary. However, pupils do not tend to initiate conversation using Welsh outside of Welsh lessons.

Many pupils from Year 3 to Year 6 make appropriate progress as readers. They read from texts that normally present the right level of challenge and use a suitable range of strategies such as re-reading to check their accuracy. A few older pupils explain the meaning of terms such as inference and intrigue when evaluating story openers that famous authors have used. They read with appropriate levels of understanding when completing comprehension activities. During guided reading sessions and when reading in front of others, pupils generally read with suitable accuracy and expression.

Many pupils in Year 5 and Year 6 write independently for a good range of authentic purposes. For example, they write letters to high street retailers to request information about sustainable packaging. Their letters received a response, and this developed a greater understanding of the benefits of writing for a specific purpose and audience. Overall, pupils make good vocabulary choices to add flavour to their writing, their spelling is generally accurate. However, pupils use a limited range of

punctuation with variable accuracy. The standard of presentation is also variable. Pupils in Year 3 and Year 4 complete comprehension activities and grammatical exercises. They generally do these well but do not write independently at length often enough to apply their learning in meaningful contexts.

By Year 2, many pupils work well with number operations and use appropriate strategies to help them with their work. For example, they use number lines to subtract from two-digit numbers and to help with challenging addition problems. They develop a sound understanding of place value and of concepts such as larger and smaller. Most engage enthusiastically in practical learning experiences, such as using real coins to make different totals up to the value of £1. Pupils develop a sound understanding of time, the properties and names of two-dimensional shapes and of concepts such as symmetry. The completion of basic worksheets by the youngest age groups at the school adds little value to their mathematical development.

Most pupils in Years 3 to Year 6 work hard and make good progress in mathematics. They develop a good understanding of large numbers and place value. They use strategies well to solve challenging multiplication and division problems. They use data handling and numeracy skills appropriately, for example in the context of work on climate change and in science experiments to monitor cooling temperatures. In practical activity, they successfully convert millilitres to litres and explain that 200ml is the same as 0.2l.

Across the school, most pupils make appropriate progress in learning and using digital skills. Younger pupils work successfully with programmable toys and tablet devices to support their learning. Nearly all pupils from Year 3 to Year 6 use a variety of applications to present their work including slide shows and multimedia presentations. They use the internet appropriately and safely to carry out searches and gather information to support their learning. For example, pupils in Year 5 and Year 6 interpret data from the National Resources Wales website during their work on water and present their findings.

When given the opportunity, younger pupils show creativity and independence, for example when working with blocks to create enclosures for animals. This play presents opportunities for them to use their speaking skills to describe why they have designed their buildings in a particular way. However, opportunities to engage in purposeful play and exploration are limited. Pupils enjoy opportunities to be creative, for example when mixing paints to make and name new colours, such as 'rocket blue' and 'water green'. Most older pupils engage positively in creative activities such as music and art. They produce good work, for instance when composing and performing music using percussion instruments and creating their own musical score to record the tempo.

Well-being and attitudes to learning

Nearly all pupils feel safe in school and know who to talk to if they have any worries or problems. They show compassion for their peers and support each other well in lessons and around the school. For example, older pupils naturally support younger pupils to enjoy playtimes. Older pupils develop a strong sense of the importance of good mental health.

Pupils in leadership roles have a keen interest in environmental issues and sustainability. They work diligently to improve the school grounds and attract a greater variety of wildlife, for instance by planting wild meadow. Pupils use the recently refurbished poly tunnel to plant and grow a range of vegetables that they then use.

Most pupils are developing well as ethical informed citizens. They successfully interpret bar charts and line graphs focused to deepen their understanding of issues associated with climate change. Through this work, pupils have a good understanding of the impact of human actions on the wider world. They have a strong awareness of the importance of healthy eating and physical exercise. They engage positively in physical activity such as rugby and rounders sessions as part of their weekly lessons. They record and reflect on their food choices using healthy snack charts in classes.

Nearly all pupils have a good understanding of the school rules and of the consequences of breaking them. Older pupils discuss how rules and laws play an important part in all people's lives. They develop a good understanding of important issues such as the impact of racism and climate change. They confidently discuss key role models such as Marcus Rashford and Greta Thunberg and describe their impact on the United Kingdom and wider world.

Generally, pupils have positive attitudes to learning and try hard to complete their work. They settle quickly to tasks and are ready for learning. Most pupils develop the confidence to talk about their learning and suggest how they might improve their work. Many pupils show confidence and resilience when faced with challenging tasks, for instance when solving a variety of mathematical problems to complete an orienteering course. Most pupils behave appropriately and allow learning to continue without any disruptions. They respond positively to teachers' instructions. However, a few pupils are occasionally reluctant to engage with the learning experiences on offer.

Many older pupils develop entrepreneurial skills successfully, for example by making soap to sell at the Llanelian Spring Fair. Through this project, pupils have a variety of positive experiences including the opportunity to investigate packaging used by a national soap company. This allowed pupils to fully understand the ethical decisions surrounding sustainable packaging in their own project.

Owing to the coronavirus pandemic, inspectors will not report pupils' rates of attendance during the academic years 2020-2021 and 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

All staff have effective working relationships with pupils. This fosters an inclusive, supportive environment for learning. Respect between pupils and adults is strong and adults manage pupils' behaviour well. All teachers and support staff encourage pupils to try their best and engage positively with their learning.

From Year 3 to Year 6, nearly all teaching has a clear learning purpose and regularly includes a range of interesting resources to engage pupils' interest. For example, pupils in Year 5 and Year 6 explore a wide range of substances when learning about the properties of materials. Teachers develop pupils' thinking and understanding through skilful questioning such as when they challenge pupils' perceptions about whether materials such as foam and bubbles are a solid, liquid or gas. This promotes beneficial discussion and develops pupils' understanding about the properties of materials well.

Generally, teaching develops at an appropriate pace. This helps most pupils to retain their interest in learning. Across the school, many support staff play an important role in supporting the progress of pupils. However, in a minority of instances they provide too much support for pupils. This limits opportunities for pupils to overcome challenges themselves and develop independence.

Provision to enable pupils to develop numeracy and digital skills is effective overall and supports pupils to make appropriate progress in using and applying these skills in meaningful contexts. Pupils have a range of worthwhile opportunities to develop and use their literacy skills. However, this provision does not always match pupils' needs well enough or ensure that pupils build progressively on prior learning. As a result, pupils do not always make the progress of which they are capable, for example in their written work.

Systems for tracking pupil progress are appropriate. This information supports staff to identify pupils who may need extra support with their learning. Nearly all teachers provide pupils with useful verbal feedback and give pupils opportunities to reflect upon and improve their work. For example, pupils in Year 2 are prompted to read back their sentences to identify any improvements they can make. This results in pupils beginning to refine and improve their work successfully. The impact of teachers' written feedback is more variable.

Leaders and staff have worked well with pupils to develop a shared vision as they work towards a curriculum that matches the principles and ethos of the Curriculum for Wales. In general, opportunities for pupils to contribute to what and how they learn are developing appropriately. For example, a group of older pupils have designed an outdoor learning area, which is currently under construction. This includes a potting shed and outdoor classroom. Additional opportunities for pupils to influence the curriculum are at an early stage of development and include the use of 'big questions', a strategy that involves pupils in deciding the key things they would like to learn during each topic.

At this point in its development, the school's curriculum provides a suitable breadth of learning experiences. Planned themes such as 'Jungle Jamboree', with an emphasis on expressive arts, and 'Patagonia', which has a humanities focus, engage pupils' interests well. In Year 4, pupils enjoy taking part in role play sessions facilitated by a visiting actor to learn about the experiences of Welsh people who travelled to Patagonia on the Mimosa.

The school's provision for expressive arts is a strength of the curriculum. Teaching to develop pupils' music skills is effective and supports them to make good progress in this aspect of their learning. For example, the school's younger pupils use the garden

as a stimulus to compose relaxing music using percussion instruments. They develop their own gestures to prompt friends to play louder or quieter as they take turns to conduct. In key stage 2, pupils in Year 3 and 4 develop their understanding of rhythm well as they work together to create drumming music inspired by the Aztecs.

The curriculum reflects the nature of the school's context successfully through the use of traditional Welsh stories, celebrations and learning about local landmarks such as Conwy Castle. Most members of staff are positive Welsh language role models and use incidental Welsh consistently well. Teachers encourage pupils to develop their Welsh speaking skills appropriately during planned Welsh language activities. However, they do not readily engage pupils in speaking Welsh during lessons or throughout the school day.

Teachers ensure that pupils learn about the importance of healthy lifestyles and good mental health. They provide beneficial opportunities for pupils to relax and reflect to improve well-being. For example, the visiting rector prompts older pupils to be thankful during periods of reflection. The outdoor areas are used appropriately to enhance the curriculum and lessons such as music are regularly taught outside and there are regular opportunities for practical activities such as planting vegetables. However, overall, the use of the school's outdoor areas is underdeveloped.

The learning environment for younger pupils is enhanced with useful practical resources such as building blocks and a mud kitchen. However, overall, the learning environment for younger children does not enable pupils to access or select their own resources and develop their independence consistently. School staff do not always reflect an understanding of child development in their approach to teaching younger pupils. For example, learning experiences are generally directed by adults and over-reliant on worksheets and templates. There are not enough opportunities for free play as a part of the learning process. This limits opportunities for children to explore, try things out and develop their own ideas.

Care, support and guidance

The school is a caring and nurturing environment where pupils feel safe happy and secure. An ethos focused towards positive well-being and mental health is evident and most pupils feel that they can easily access help and support from members of staff and fellow pupils.

All staff members have strong working relationships with all pupils and treat pupils with equality. This ensures that pupils have a good understanding of right and wrong. The school effectively monitors behaviour over time and implements timely actions to improve pupil behaviour across the school. This has developed pupils' understanding of the impact that their behaviour has on others. The annual anti-bullying week allows the school to reaffirm its values and this promotes high levels of respect for all stakeholders.

When pupils join the school, they are provided with effective transition and, where necessary, appropriate interventions. This ensures that most pupils settle well. The school identifies pupils for emotional literacy support in a timely manner, positively impacting on pupils' emotional well-being. All staff regularly talk about a variety of well-being strategies both during lessons and at more unstructured times. This

supports most of the pupils in developing kind and caring attitudes towards each other.

Leaders and staff use pupil tracking information effectively to plan and provide appropriate support for all pupils. Confident staff lead purposeful literacy, numeracy and emotional interventions to support pupils' skills development. The school makes suitable provision for pupils with additional learning needs (ALN) and this is successfully led by the ALNCo. The school quickly identifies the needs of ALN pupils and these are successfully matched to worthwhile targets. It tracks the progress of all pupils with ALN comprehensively and works with a range of external agencies to support a very few pupils. The school has made good progress with ALN reform and is in the process of setting up IDPs for identified pupils. However, a few older pupils have an over reliance on staff support, and this negatively impacts on their independence skills.

Through worthwhile assemblies, the school promotes strong aspects spiritual guidance and how the school values, including honesty, fairness and justice, are promoted through pupils' behaviour when in school. The Prayer Garden and tepee provide a quiet space for all pupils, allowing them to relax and reflect to gain a positive mental state.

The school's provision supports pupils to recognise the needs and rights of others through pupils raising funds for local and national charities such as the local foodbank 'Children in Need' and 'Comic Relief' giving pupils a sense of empathy and diversity. Most recently the school choir has recorded 'We are the World', which raised money for the Ukraine.

The school supports pupils to be proactive in the local community. For example, during recent periods of 'lockdown', pupils wrote letters, Christmas and birthday cards to residents of LLanelian to spread a little happiness and optimism in a challenging time.

The school makes suitable opportunities for a majority of pupils to access a range of sports both competitive and non competitive, for example pupils competing in the Urdd Mabolgampau.

Pre-COVID-19, the school was effective in developing pupils' understanding of their cultural and heritage by celebrating St David's Day and participating in the Eisteddfod. Using a stimulus poem, the pupils created and performed a piece of music at the Urdd depicting the journey of the river Conwy - Mor a Mynydd - and used a variety of tuned and untuned instruments to represent the stages of the river journey from source to mouth. This allowed the pupils successfully to use their imagination and express a creative thought process, whilst working as a team.

Many pupils can talk about their local area and their place within society. Older pupils can discuss the wider Welsh links with respect to Patagonia and make appropriate comparisons to the Welsh culture and related to their own experiences.

The school has appropriate policies and procedures for recording and monitoring attendance and absence. It has a range of effective systems to support and challenge low attendance. The school works well with outside agencies where pupil

attendance is below the school target, and a range of strategies are used to support and engage families to improve pupil attendance.

Generally, arrangements to safeguard pupils meet requirements. However, issues related to site safety were brought to the attention of the school during the inspection.

Leadership and management

The school aims to serve its community by providing education of the highest quality within the context of Christian belief and practice. Overall, the school achieves aspects of its vision well, particularly those that relate to developing a nurturing and caring community. The quality of education supports pupils to make appropriate progress overall, during their time at school. The headteacher ensures a consistent focus on securing the well-being and happiness of pupils through nurturing a sense of belonging. This has supported the school community well through the recent pandemic.

Staff have clear job descriptions. They undertake their roles conscientiously and in accordance with the expectations set out by the headteacher, for example in relation to the care, support and guidance provided for pupils. However, an issue relating to arrangements to keep learners safe was brought to the attention of the school during the inspection. There are appropriate arrangements for the performance management of staff that support aspects of school improvement successfully.

The school's current improvement priorities generally match the needs of pupils and the school community well in many respects. There is a sensible focus on improving pupils' well-being and on improving important aspects of pupils' skills that have been adversely affected by the pandemic. There is also a suitable focus on national priorities including curriculum and additional learning needs reform. Staff collaborate well to implement aspects of their improvement strategy, and this supports them to make steady progress, for example towards developing and implementing the Curriculum for Wales. When presented with the opportunity to lead, staff make a positive difference. For example, recent leadership of provision for pupils with additional learning needs is improving classroom practice across the school.

The school's monitoring and evaluation processes have been limited by the recent pandemic. The school draws upon information from national tests to identify opportunities to improve teaching and pupils' learning. As a result, the school has introduced a new approach to reading sessions for pupils from Year 3 to Year 6. However, monitoring processes do not focus well enough on evaluating the difference that teaching and learning experiences make to pupils' progress. As a result, the school has not identified important aspects of its work that need improvement. These include provision for pupils from nursery to Year 2, which does not reflect the national strategy for education for this age range well enough, and the impact of the school's approach to developing pupils' progression in literacy.

School leaders seek out a few appropriate opportunities for professional learning, such as leadership courses and training to enable staff to support pupils with specific needs. Overall though, professional learning does not contribute well enough to improving teaching and learning.

Governors understand the school and its context well. Prior to the pandemic, they had good arrangements to gather first-hand evidence about the school's work, for example by undertaking learning walks with pupils. More recently, they have stayed in touch with developments through useful reports from the headteacher. Governors are clear about the school's current improvement priorities and of progress towards these goals. They balance support and challenge appropriately. Governors ensure that the school has appropriate arrangements to promote healthy eating and drinking.

The school generally has positive relationships with parents. Parents contribute to the life and work of the school regularly by raising money and supporting community activity. Funds raised by the friends of the school have contributed to the extensive range of outdoor play equipment. This aspect of the school's provision has been further enhanced through partnership with the local solar farm. The school works well with the local high school to support positive transition to the next phase of education. Teachers from the high school visit regularly to work with older pupils, for example to provide French and drama sessions.

The school uses grant funding, such as the pupil development grant, appropriately to provide additional support for pupils through a range of intervention strategies for basic skills and to support emotional well-being.

Evidence base of the report

Before an inspection, inspectors:

- analyse the outcomes from the parent/carer 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/carers 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' 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 (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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