



Rhagoriaeth i bawb – Excellence for all

Arolygiaeth Ei Mawrhydi dros Addysg
a Hyfforddiant yng Nghymru

Her Majesty's Inspectorate
for Education and Training in Wales

A report on

**Ysgol Gyfun Ystalyfera
Glan yr Afon
Ystalyfera
Swansea
SA9 2JJ**

Date of inspection: March 2013

by

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



During each inspection, inspectors aim to answer three key questions:

Key Question 1: How good are the outcomes?

Key Question 2: How good is provision?

Key Question 3: How good are leadership and management?

Inspectors also provide an overall judgement on the school's current performance and on its prospects for improvement.

In these evaluations, inspectors use a four-point scale:

Judgement	What the judgement means
Excellent	Many strengths, including significant examples of sector-leading practice
Good	Many strengths and no important areas requiring significant improvement
Adequate	Strengths outweigh areas for improvement
Unsatisfactory	Important areas for improvement outweigh strengths

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

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Context

Ysgol Gyfun Ystalyfera is a Welsh-medium community school for pupils aged 11-18, which has 1,001 pupils on roll. The school is situated in the village of Ystalyfera in the Swansea valley. It serves a large catchment area extending from Brynamman in the west to Cwmmavon in the east. The majority of pupils come from the towns of Neath and Port Talbot, and the remainder from a number of smaller towns and villages in the surrounding area. A few pupils travel to the school from south Powys and east Carmarthenshire. The catchment area includes vast industrial and post-industrial areas, along with rural villages. Twenty point seven per cent (20.7%) of pupils live in the 20% most disadvantaged areas in Wales.

Eleven point nine per cent (11.9%) of pupils are entitled to free school meals, which is below the national average of 17.4%.

The school admits children from the full range of ability. Zero point five per cent (0.5%) of pupils have a statement of special educational needs, compared with 2.7% nationally. Approximately 12% of pupils have additional learning needs, which is also lower than the national average. Approximately half of pupils are from homes where at least one parent speaks Welsh, but most can speak Welsh to first language standard. Teaching at the school is conducted mainly through the medium of Welsh; however, from Year 10 onwards, science is offered through the medium of English as well as Welsh.

The headteacher was appointed in September 2011. In addition to the headteacher, a deputy headteacher and three assistant headteachers complete the leadership team.

The individual school budget per pupil for Ysgol Gyfun Ystalyfera in 2012-2013 is £3,808. The maximum per pupil in secondary schools in Neath Port Talbot is £5,882 and the minimum is £3,808. Ysgol Gyfun Ystalyfera is in 11th position out of the 11 secondary schools in Neath Port Talbot in terms of the school budget per pupil.

Summary

The school's current performance	Good
The school's prospects for improvement	Good

Current performance

Ysgol Gyfun Gymraeg Ystalyfera is a good school because:

- performance in most key stage 4 indicators is consistently higher than in similar schools;
- most pupils make good progress in their skills and their subject knowledge in lessons;
- the quality of teaching is consistently good across all subjects; and
- the caring and supporting ethos which promotes equality for all pupils.

Prospects for improvement

Ysgol Gyfun Gymraeg Ystalyfera's prospects for improvement are good because:

- leaders on all levels have high expectations;
- there is a clear and consistent focus on improving standards;
- the proactive governing body challenges the school to improve and holds the school to account effectively;
- there are comprehensive and robust self-evaluation and improvement planning processes; and
- the school has a successful record of maintaining consistently high standards.

Recommendations

R1 Improve standards in Welsh in key stage 3 and key stage 4

R2 Improve the performance of boys

R3 Promote the use of Welsh in classroom discussions and socially

R4 Improve the consistency of teachers' marking and assessment to ensure that all teachers provide helpful advice

R5 Improve the quality and effect of co-ordination for developing skills across subjects

R6 Eliminate the financial deficit

What happens next?

The school will draw up an action plan which shows how it will address the recommendations.

Main findings

Key Question 1: How good are outcomes?

Good

Standards: Good

Over the last four years in key stage 4, performance in the indicators which include Welsh or English and mathematics has been consistently higher than that of similar schools and higher than the expectations. Performance in indicators which include a wide range of qualifications is also consistently higher than that of similar schools. Pupils make very good progress between key stage 2 and key stage 4 in all key indicators.

However, boys perform consistently below girls in each of these indicators. In 2012, pupils who received free school meals did not achieve as well as those in similar schools. In general, pupils with special educational needs make very good progress. In 2012, no pupils left the school without a qualification or without continuing in education.

In general, pupils in the sixth form perform well.

Performance in key stage 3 in the indicator which includes Welsh or English, mathematics and science, has been consistently higher than the average for similar schools. However, during the last three years, performance in Welsh and English, particularly at the higher levels, is not as strong as it is in schools which have a similar number of pupils who are entitled to free school meals. Since 2009, performance in mathematics and science is consistently higher than that of similar schools.

In lessons, almost all pupils are eager to learn and make good progress in their skills and knowledge. These pupils recall previous learning effectively and build successfully upon their subject knowledge. Most develop their analytical skills effectively and draw sensible conclusions and refine their opinions.

Almost all pupils work productively with one another in pairs or in small groups. They discuss a wide range of ideas thoughtfully, listen carefully to others' opinions and respond constructively to one another. Many pupils have a firm grasp of a wide range of subject terms in Welsh and English. Many pupils speak fluently and the most able pupils are able to express sophisticated ideas, using extensive vocabulary. However, a few pupils, particularly boys, do not have a firm enough grasp on how to express themselves clearly in Welsh. In some lessons, pupils do not have enough confidence to converse with one another through the medium of Welsh and turn to English too frequently.

Most pupils can read fluently in Welsh and English, and collect appropriate information from a range of texts successfully. However, a few pupils, particularly boys, are hesitant when they encounter unfamiliar words and they do not read with enough expression.

In most subjects, pupils write at length for a wide range of purposes and audiences. Many pupils have a firm grasp of grammatical rules, spelling and punctuation. These

pupils write fluently and clearly in both Welsh and English. However, a few pupils continue to make basic spelling and punctuation errors in Welsh and English, along with using incorrect mutations in Welsh. In addition, a few pupils use too many English words in their Welsh writing. Most books are well presented; however in a few cases, pupils' work is untidy and there are many gaps in their work.

Wellbeing: Good

Most pupils have good social skills and are developing the necessary skills for the workplace or the next step in their education effectively. They are polite and friendly with one another and are welcoming to visitors. Almost all pupils behave very well in lessons, in the corridors and on the school playground. Over the last four years, attendance rates have been consistently higher than those of schools that have a similar number of pupils who are entitled to free school meals. Most pupils arrive at their lessons punctually and almost all commit themselves conscientiously to their work. Most pupils feel safe at school and many agree that the school deals effectively with the rare cases of bullying.

The school council is an effective group which influences a range of issues, such as extending the choice of food in the canteen and toilet hygiene. They have had input on a range of policies and have contributed towards appointing teaching staff. All pupils receive regular opportunities to express their opinion about educational issues in their personal and social education lessons.

Many pupils feel that the school teaches them thoroughly about the positive effects of exercise and healthy eating. Many pupils participate in sports teams and a wide range of activities which promote fitness in the 5x60 club.

Pupils undertake additional responsibilities enthusiastically. For example, pupils in Year 10 and Year 12 support younger pupils very effectively through the peer mentoring scheme. Many pupils play a helpful and responsible role in the community and beyond, for example by contributing effectively to a range of charities.

Key Question 2: How good is provision?	Good
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Learning experiences: Good

The school provides a wide and balanced curriculum which responds to pupils' needs and statutory requirements in full. The school offers a rich provision of general and occupational courses in key stage 4 and the sixth form. The school ensures that most pupils follow courses of their choice. The school works closely with its partner primary schools in order to ensure that the key stage 3 curriculum builds effectively upon pupils' previous experiences.

The majority of subjects plan rigorously to ensure effective use of a wide range of useful strategies to promote literacy skills. However, provision for developing skills is not co-ordinated effectively enough to ensure consistent use of agreed strategies across all subjects. Pupils are given valuable opportunities to gain essential skills qualifications at level 2 and level 3 in all key stages. There is effective provision for improving the literacy and numeracy skills of pupils in Year 7 and Year 8 who receive additional support.

There is a range of suitable opportunities for pupils to extend their social use of Welsh, for example in the 5x60 activities. However, the school has not promoted the use of Welsh successfully enough among pupils. The Cwricwlwm Cymreig is given suitable attention in most departments' schemes of work.

Schemes of work in science, geography and personal and social education provide valuable opportunities to develop pupils' awareness of how to live sustainably. Significant emphasis is placed in assemblies and in the religious education department's schemes on developing awareness of how to be a global citizen. In addition, the humanitarian fund committee arranges a variety of valuable activities to raise money for charities.

Teaching: Good

There is a very beneficial working relationship between teachers and pupils. This contributes significantly towards pupils' progress in lessons across all subjects. In a very few lessons, teaching is excellent. In these lessons, there are very high expectations of what pupils can achieve. Teachers in these lessons are enthusiastic and inspire pupils through creative planning to promote exceptional progress.

Most lessons include a wide range of stimulating activities which engage pupils' interest and ensure that they make good progress. Most teachers plan rigorously to meet all pupils' needs. These teachers ensure that skills are developed effectively, along with subject knowledge. Most teachers have high expectations of what pupils can achieve and they use a range of questioning methods effectively to test and extend understanding. In a very few lessons, the pace is too slow.

Most teachers mark pupils' work consistently and give useful oral and written feedback. A majority of teachers set helpful targets and present pupils with specific and constructive comments on how to improve. However, in a minority of cases, teachers' comments are not helpful enough to help pupils improve their work. A majority of teachers present a helpful range of self-assessment and peer assessment strategies in order to develop pupils' understanding of how to improve. However, these helpful strategies are not applied consistently enough in a minority of cases.

Parents receive valuable information in parents' meetings and in interim and annual reports. Reports contain detailed and useful feedback for pupils and parents on progress and targets for improvement. Pupils and parents are given the opportunity to respond appropriately to these reports.

Care, support and guidance: Good

The school promotes pupils' spiritual, moral, cultural and social development effectively through religious education lessons and morning assemblies. The school provides a caring environment in which most people feel safe.

There is beneficial provision for promoting pupils' health and wellbeing through the curriculum, extra-curricular activities and the effective personal and social education programme. The personal and social education programme has been planned very carefully. It contains a good variety of interesting activities to develop pupils' understanding of a wide range of relevant topics.

The school receives useful support from a host of external agencies. Heads of year and personal tutors provide valuable support and guidance. The school's behaviour policy is comprehensive and is applied skilfully by most teachers. The school's effective attendance monitoring system, along with good communication with parents, has led to consistently high attendance levels.

Pupils with additional learning needs are given very good support. Specialist teachers and learning assistants ensure that these pupils' needs are met very effectively. Individual education plans are reviewed regularly and parents are involved fully. These include useful targets and strategies which are implemented effectively by most teachers. By working closely with specialist agencies, the school ensures that the needs of vulnerable pupils are met successfully.

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

Learning environment: Good

Ysgol Gyfun Ystalyfera is a homely, inclusive community. There is a caring and supportive ethos which promotes equality in all areas. This ethos supports individuals' rights at school, regardless of their background and ability. A strong feature of the school is its obvious concern for others and the desire to help everyone who is part of its community.

Despite the poor condition of the external parts of the building, the school has worked hard to ensure a fun and stimulating environment in most classrooms. There is a wide range of good quality teaching resources, including up-to-date computer equipment. Attractive displays of pupils' work and successes can be seen in classrooms and in the corridors. There is an appropriate range of physical activity resources, and sports fields and changing rooms are well maintained. However, the poor condition of the all-weather pitch means that it is not fit for purpose. The condition of the toilets varies, but most are fit for purpose. On the whole, the building and grounds are well-kept.

Key Question 3: How good are leadership and management?	Good
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Leadership: Good

The headteacher has a clear strategic vision for developing the school. His strong leadership focuses on raising standards and developing the school further as a close-knit community. Since his appointment in 2011, he has succeeded in promoting a culture of high expectations. He conveys clear strategic objectives and these are well-understood and supported consistently by staff and pupils. With the support of the governors, the school has addressed the very few cases of underperformance by staff members effectively. The result of this work is that the school has maintained consistently high standards in key stage 4 and the sixth form over the last three years.

The headteacher is supported effectively by his leadership team. By working closely with each other, they give clear direction to the school's work. These leaders give middle leaders appropriate challenge and helpful support. Line managers'

responsibilities are clear, with effective links between the leadership team and their departments.

Regular meetings are held and they have a clear focus on improving standards. In many cases, the subsequent actions from meetings are incisive and ensure accountability. However, in a few cases, the senior leadership team does not challenge middle leaders robustly enough. Many middle leaders use data confidently to analyse performance and lead their departments effectively.

The performance management process sets clear targets which link well with the school's priorities, in addition to identifying staff development needs well. However, in a few cases, targets are not challenging enough. Most staff have clearly-defined roles and responsibilities. Staff understand their roles well and work together productively.

The school has an experienced governing body which has an appropriate number of committees to consider aspects of school life. The governing body's knowledge and understanding of the school's performance is developing well. They work closely with the leadership team to set the school's strategic direction. The governors have challenged underperformance robustly and they hold the school to account. Governors have useful links with specific departments and give them helpful support.

The school responds effectively to local and national priorities. It has developed and extended the 14-19 provision, and achieved positive outcomes for many students. The school is planning appropriately to improve pupils' literacy and numeracy further.

Improving quality: Good

The self-evaluation process and the planning for school improvement process have succeeded in ensuring that teaching is of a consistently high standard. This has contributed towards maintaining high standards, for example in the level 2 threshold including Welsh or English and mathematics.

The senior leadership team has a good awareness of the school's performance and the quality of its work. The school collects a wide range of direct evidence through lesson observations, scrutinising pupils' work and seeking pupils' opinions. The whole-school self-evaluation report is a useful document. It gives a detailed analysis of performance data, along with recognition of successes and areas for improvement.

Over the last year, the school has taken very effective steps to seek pupils' opinions about the school's work. A good example of this is the way in which pupils evaluate lessons regularly in personal and social education lessons. As a result of this consultation, the content of the personal and social education programme was adapted effectively, along with some teaching styles, in order to respond to pupils' requirements.

The school development plan focuses appropriately on improving standards of attainment, teaching and assessment and effective transition from primary schools. There is a clear link between the self-evaluation report and targets for improvement, in most cases.

Departmental self-evaluation is developing well with strengths and areas for improvement in almost every report. Most departments canvass pupils' opinions purposefully in order to refine their teaching and schemes of work. Most departments analyse performance data accurately and refer appropriately to direct evidence. There are clear links between the outcomes of the self-evaluation report and departmental and whole-school improvement plans. However, some are not self-critical enough.

A minority of teachers are keen members of working groups that research educational aspects and promote good teaching practice. The work of some working groups, for example those relating to drama and physical education, have succeeded in improving pupils' achievement. The school has a comprehensive programme of activities to ensure that teaching staff develop their skills continuously.

Partnership working: Good

The school has close links with its partner primary schools which ensures that pupils settle quickly in their new environment. There is a monthly programme of valuable opportunities for key stage 2 pupils to visit the school to take part in a variety of beneficial extra-curricular activities. This has contributed significantly towards increasing the numbers that transfer from the primary sector and ensures effective language progression.

The school has established valuable strategic partnerships with nearby schools and the local college. They plan well jointly to expand the courses on offer in key stage 4 and post-16. There are rigorous procedures to ensure the quality of the 14-19 partnership.

The school has valuable links with a wide range of external specialist agencies. These have a beneficial influence on the standard of pupils' wellbeing.

The school works well with careers services and local employers to ensure valuable opportunities for post-16 pupils, for example by giving mock interviews to develop their interview skills and gain confidence. The school contacts parents regularly to share information about the school's work, for example through the user-friendly and helpful website.

Resource management: Good

The school has suitably qualified staff to meet curriculum requirements. The school makes effective use of teachers' specific skills. The very few members of staff who teach subjects in which they do not specialise receive helpful support and training.

The headteacher, bursar and governors work together effectively to restructure staffing and ensure a sustainable financial position. Recent arrangements to reduce the number of days lost by teachers has led to a significant reduction in these figures. Although there is an overspend of £69,000 in the budget, the school has agreed realistic plans with the local authority to eliminate the deficit by 2014.

There are appropriate arrangements in place for the professional development of all members of staff and for the induction of newly-qualified teachers.

In light of the consistently high standards, the school provides good value for money.

Appendix 1

Commentary on performance data

In key stage 4, since 2009, the level 2 threshold results which include Welsh or English and mathematics, along with the core subject indicator, are consistently higher than the average figures for Wales and the family average. The school's performance in the level 2 threshold, which includes Welsh or English, is among the top 25% in terms of the free school meals benchmarks in 2011 and 2012.

Performance in this indicator is consistently higher than modelled expectations.

Over the last four years, performance in the level 2 threshold has been consistently higher than the family of schools and places the school in the top half or quarter in comparison with similar schools during the last two years. Over the last three years, performance in the level 1 threshold has improved and, in 2012, it was higher than the family average and placed the school among the highest benchmark quarter in comparison with schools which have a similar level of entitlement to free school meals. Since 2010, performance in the capped average wider points score has been consistently higher than the family average and, in 2011 and 2012, was among the top 25% in comparison with schools with a similar level of entitlement to free school meals.

During the last three years, there has been a decline in performance in Welsh at level 2. In 2012, performance in this indicator was lower than the family average and the all-Wales average, and placed the school among the lowest 50% in comparison with similar schools.

Over the last three years, performance in level 2 English has improved and, in 2012, placed the school above the family average and in the top half compared to schools with a similar level of entitlement to free school meals. Performance in mathematics at level 2 is consistently higher than that of the family and, in 2011 and 2012, placed the school in the top half compared to schools with a similar level of entitlement to free school meals. Science at level 2 was consistently higher than the family average until a significant fall in 2012. This performance placed the school below the family and among the lowest 50% of schools with a similar level of entitlement to free school meals.

Compared to their performance in previous key stages, pupils in key stage 4 make good progress in all indicators. In 2012, no pupils left school without a qualification.

In key stage 3, the core subject indicator has varied over the last three years and places the school in the top half of similar schools in terms of entitlement to free school meals. Since 2009, performance in Welsh in key stage 3 has varied and, in 2012, placed the school below the family average and in the lowest benchmark quarter in comparison with similar schools in terms of entitlement to free school meals. Performance in English has varied since 2009 and, in 2012, placed the school below the family average and in the lowest benchmark quarter in comparison with similar schools in terms of level of entitlement to free school meals.

Performance in mathematics has improved since 2009 and consistently places the school above the family average and in the highest benchmark quarter in comparison

with similar schools. In 2011 and 2012, performance in science was higher than the family average and among the top 50% in comparison with similar schools in terms of level of entitlement to free school meals. Performance at level 6 or above in Welsh and English is consistently lower than the family average. In 2012, performance at level 6 or above in mathematics or science was similar to the family average.

In the sixth form, pupils' performance is good. In 2012, a very high percentage of sixth form students succeeded in achieving the level 3 threshold. This year, 51 pupils gained the Welsh Baccalaureate Qualification. Pupils' attainment in the wider points score is significantly higher than the local and national averages.

In key stage 4, boys perform below girls in all key indicators. In 2012, these differences were wider than the family and Wales averages. In key stage 3, girls achieve better than boys in all key indicators and these differences are wider than the family and Wales averages.

In 2012, in key stage 4, pupils who received free school meals performed lower than the family of schools in the level 2 threshold and the level 2 threshold including English or Welsh first language and mathematics. These differences were wider than the family and Wales averages.

In general, pupils with special educational needs make good progress.

Appendix 2

Stakeholder satisfaction report

Responses to learner questionnaires

Responses to the questionnaire were received from 577 pupils, chosen at random across the school. This sample represents just over half of all pupils at the school. All of these responses are less favourable than those in other secondary schools in Wales.

Many pupils feel safe at school and a majority feel that the school deals well with any bullying. Many say that they have someone to talk to if they are worried. Just under half of all pupils feel that the school teaches them how to keep healthy, but the majority of pupils say that there are enough opportunities at school to undertake regular physical exercise. Many pupils feel that the school has enough equipment.

Many pupils feel that they are doing well and that teachers help them to learn and make progress. The majority of pupils feel that homework that is set builds well on what they learn at school. Just under half of all pupils feel that others behave well. The majority believe that staff treat all pupils fairly and show respect towards them. Approximately half of all pupils feel that the school listens to their views and many note that the school helps them to prepare for their next school, college or the world or work. The majority of pupils in key stage 4 and in the sixth form feel that they were given good advice when they were choosing courses.

Responses to parent questionnaires

Estyn received 89 questionnaires from parents and most are either satisfied or very satisfied with the school.

Most parents say that their children like the school and feel safe there. Many believe that pupils behave well, that pupils are treated fairly and with respect, and develop to become more mature and to shoulder responsibilities. Most feel that teaching is good and that their children make good progress at school. Many parents feel that they receive good information about their child's progress and that the school prepares their child well for moving on to the next school or college or work. Many parents feel that the homework that is given builds well on what pupils learn at school. Many parents state that there is a good range of activities, including trips or visits. Most parents are of the opinion that the school is well run.

In general, the responses are similar to the responses of parents in other secondary schools in Wales.

Appendix 3

The inspection team

Ceri Jones	Reporting Inspector
Ray Owen	Team Inspector
Gwyn Thomas	Team Inspector
Dylan Gwyer-Roberts	Team Inspector
Glenda Jones	Lay Inspector
Aaron Bayley	Peer Inspector
Anita Rees	School Nominee

Copies of the report

Copies of this report are available from the school and from the Estyn website (www.estyn.gov.uk)

Year groups, the Foundation Phase and key stages

Schools use a common system of numbering year groups from the start of compulsory schooling to 18 years of age. This system emphasises the importance of continuity and eases communication among schools, governing bodies, parents and local authorities.

The following table sets out the age ranges relevant to each year group. For example, Year 1 refers to the group of pupils who reach the age of six and Year 13 is the year group who reach the age of 18 during the academic year.

Primary phase:

Year	N	R	Y1	Y2	Y3	Y4	Y5	Y6
Ages	3-4	4-5	5-6	6-7	7-8	8-9	9-10	10-11

Secondary phase:

Year	Y7	Y8	Y9	Y10	Y11	Y12	Y13
Ages	11-12	12-13	13-14	14-15	15-16	16-17	17-18

The Foundation Phase and key stages cover the following year groups:

Foundation Phase	Nursery, Reception, Year 1 and Year 2
Key stage 2	Year 3 to Year 6
Key stage 3	Year 7 to Year 9
Key stage 4	Year 10 and Year 11

Glossary of terms

Core subject indicator (CSI)	This relates to the expected performance in English or Welsh, mathematics and science, the core subjects of the National Curriculum.
Families of schools	These have been created to enable schools to compare their performance to that of similar schools across Wales. Families include schools with similar proportions of pupils entitled to free school meals, living in 20% most deprived areas of Wales, having special education needs at school action plus or statemented and with English as an additional language acquisition less than competent.
Level 1	This represents the equivalent of a GCSE at grade D to G.
Level 1 threshold	This represents a volume of learning equivalent to five GCSEs at grade D to G.
Level 2	This represents the equivalent of a GCSE at grade A* to C.
Level 2 threshold including English or Welsh first language and mathematics	This represents a volume of learning equivalent to five GCSEs at grade A* to C including English or Welsh first language and mathematics.
Level 2 threshold	This represents a volume of learning equivalent to five GCSEs at grade A* to C.
Level 3	This represents the equivalent of an A level at grade A*-E.
Level 3 threshold	This represents a volume of learning equivalent to two A levels at grade A* to E.
Average wider points score	This includes all qualifications approved for use in Wales at the relevant age, for example at the age of 16 or at the age of 18.
Capped wider points score	This includes the best eight results from all qualifications approved for use in Wales at the age of 16.
All-Wales Core Data sets	Schools and local authorities may refer to performance relative to their family of schools. These families of schools have been created to enable schools to compare their performance to that of similar schools across Wales. Families include schools with similar proportions of pupils entitled to free school meals, living in 20% most deprived areas of Wales, having special education needs at school action plus or statemented and with English as an additional language acquisition less than competent.