



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

A report on

**Ysgol Gyfun Y Strade
Sandy Road
Llanelli
Carmarthenshire
SA15 4DL**

Date of inspection: March 2019

by

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

About Ysgol Gyfun y Strade

Ysgol y Strade is a bilingual comprehensive school that provides education for pupils from 11-18 years old, in Carmarthenshire local authority. The school is situated near the coast, on the western side of Llanelli. There are 1,120 pupils on roll, which is slightly higher than at the time of the last inspection in October 2012. There are 192 pupils in the sixth form.

The school's catchment area extends along the south east coast of Carmarthenshire, from Fforest and Hendy in the east, to Kidwelly in the west. A majority of pupils come from Llanelli and the surrounding villages, and 17.3% of pupils live in the 20% most disadvantaged areas in Wales. Seven point eight per cent (7.8%) of pupils are eligible for free school meals, which is lower than the national average for secondary schools of 16.4%.

One point seven per cent (1.7%) of pupils have a statement of special educational needs, which is slightly lower than the national average. Eight point nine per cent (8.9%) of pupils are on the school's additional learning needs register, which is significantly lower than the national average of 22.9%.

Most pupils are from white ethnic backgrounds. Around 40% of pupils come from English-speaking homes, but all pupils are able to speak Welsh to first language standard.

Ysgol y Strade is a Professional Learning Pioneer school, and is working closely with other schools in order to realise the recommendations in Successful Futures to plan and implement a new curriculum for Wales.

The headteacher was appointed to the post in September 2017. The senior leadership team also includes the deputy headteacher and three assistant headteachers.

Further information is available from the Welsh Government My Local School website at the link below.
<http://mylocalschool.wales.gov.uk/Schools/SchoolSearch?lang=en>

Summary

Ysgol Gyfun y Strade is a close-knit and proud community. Close and productive relationships between staff and pupils make a valuable contribution towards creating a familial and supportive atmosphere. The respectful behaviour of nearly all pupils, and their polished social skills, are notable strengths. During their time at the school, many pupils make sound progress in terms of their knowledge, understanding and skills.

Providing care and support of the highest standard, in addition to a rich range of learning experiences, is at the heart of the school's work. As a result, pupils benefit from comprehensive support, effective teaching and a variety of rich experiences that broaden their horizons and make an important contribution to their Welsh identity.

Leaders work together effectively in order to support the wellbeing and progress of pupils and staff. Successful leadership has had a positive influence on important aspects of the school's work, including pupils' attendance and positive attitudes to learning.

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

Recommendations

- R1 Improve pupils' standards, particularly those who are more able
- R2 Ensure that pupils' views have more influence on the school's work
- R3 Improve the quality of teaching, including provision for numeracy and ICT and provision for challenging more able pupils
- R4 Improve self-evaluation processes, including the use of data and progress-tracking systems
- R5 Address the safeguarding and health and safety issues that were raised during the inspection

What happens next

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

Estyn will invite the school to prepare a case study on its work in relation to supporting pupils' mental health, to be disseminated on Estyn's website

Main findings

Standards: Good

During their time at the school, many pupils make sound progress in their lessons and external examinations. They recall previous knowledge efficiently and apply their skills skilfully, particularly their literacy skills. A few pupils, including those who are more able, do not make enough progress.

Most pupils listen attentively and respectfully to each other and their teachers. Many are willing to contribute to class discussions and a majority convey themselves clearly and support their views effectively. They communicate by using local dialect and use subject terminology confidently, for example when discussing musical elements when preparing an arrangement of a local folk song. A minority speak fluently and elegantly, and they have rich vocabulary. However, a minority provide limited oral responses, and a few are reticent and unwilling to contribute to discussions.

Pupils' reading skills are a strength. Many read confidently in order to find facts and gather information. They analyse literary and factual texts suitably, and explain the effect of writing techniques competently, such as persuasion techniques in holiday advertisements in their English lessons, or when interpreting sources about the Black Death in history. A majority interpret and analyse literary texts sensitively. They use appropriate technical vocabulary and include purposeful quotations. A minority do this skilfully, and show a mature and keen understanding of texts, such as when they compare love poems in their English lessons. A minority are too superficial when interpreting texts and the effect of writing techniques.

When writing, many pupils organise their work sensibly by using paragraphs, and they write extended pieces across a range of subjects. A majority have suitable vocabulary, and a minority of pupils' vocabulary is broad and refined. However, a few pupils' vocabulary is limited. A majority apply writing techniques and genres appropriately, and write in a suitable register. A minority use language and style skilfully, for example when writing a monologue by the character Eli Brown. A minority of pupils make numerous careless mistakes in terms of their grammar and spelling. These pupils do not take enough responsibility for correcting their work before the teacher looks at it.

Many pupils have appropriate number skills and use subject terminology suitably. They use units and produce and interpret graphs correctly, for example when interpreting distance-time graphs in mathematics. However, a majority do not apply their number skills in order to solve multi-step mathematical problems often enough.

Many pupils use information and communication technology (ICT) programs confidently in order to share information and work together on projects. They use word processing programs, create presentations and basic spreadsheets competently. However, their progress in developing their advanced ICT skills across the subjects is limited.

Pupils' creative skills are a notable feature. They display their creativity across a wide range of activities within their lessons and through rich extra-curricular experiences. In drama lessons, they write and perform their own original scripts by drawing on their experiences of taking part in numerous musicals. In their art lessons, they create pottery in the style of a world-famous potter by including various textures. Many pupils develop their physical skills effectively during physical education lessons and in popular sports clubs, for example by practising sprinting in order to reach their maximum speed.

A majority of pupils are able to reason sensibly when presenting their views and evaluate suitably, for example when evaluating pupils' performance in group discussions in their Welsh lessons. However, a few pupils are too dependent on support from teachers, and a majority do not develop their thinking skills sufficiently.

Over the last four years, the school's performance has been better than, or similar to, the performance of similar schools in a majority of indicators in key stage 4. The capped points score has been similar to, or better than, that of similar schools for the last four years. In the level 2 indicator that includes Welsh or English and mathematics, the school's performance has been similar to, or better than, that of similar schools in three of the last four years. The school's performance in the level 1 and 2 indicators has compared favourably with that of similar schools over the same period. The proportion of pupils who gain 5 grade A*-A GCSEs or equivalent has fluctuated over time, and is slightly lower than in similar schools in 2018.

Over the last four years, boys' performance in most indicators in key stage 4 has compared favourably with the performance of boys in similar schools. Girls' performance has been more inconsistent over time. In 2018, their performance is similar to that of girls in similar schools, overall, except in Welsh, where it is weaker. In the previous two years, their performance was lower than that of girls in similar schools in around half of the indicators in key stage 4. The performance of the small number of pupils who are eligible for free school meals has fluctuated over time. In 2018, their performance was better than, or similar to, that of their peers in similar schools in a majority of the performance indicators in key stage 4. No pupils have left the school without a qualification since 2016.

In the sixth form, the school's performance in the level 3 threshold is consistently higher than in similar schools. Performance in the wider points score has been lower than in similar schools in three of the last four years. The proportion of pupils who have gained 3 A*-A grades or equivalent has varied over time, but declined in 2018.

Wellbeing and attitudes to learning: Good

Pupils' wellbeing is a strong aspect of life at Ysgol y Strade. Pupils value the school's familial atmosphere and the support that is given by staff. Most pupils feel safe at school and are confident that the school will support them if they need assistance. They are aware of the importance of mental health and physical wellbeing, and participate enthusiastically in mindfulness sessions. Pupils develop their awareness of how to keep themselves safe online well, and the work of the digital leaders makes a valuable contribution to this.

Nearly all pupils extend a warm welcome to visitors, interact with each other in a friendly manner and treat staff with obvious respect. Nearly all pupils behave well in lessons and settle to work quickly. Many pupils show positive attitudes to learning and convey an obvious desire to succeed, and their attendance is consistently good. Many work in pairs and groups in an effective and disciplined manner, and respond constructively to each other's contributions. Many show resilience when working independently, and are able to concentrate and persevere successfully. A minority show obvious curiosity and ask questions frequently, for example questions about crime and punishment in history. However, a few pupils are too dependent on their teachers and do not apply their skills effectively enough.

Most pupils respond positively to various opportunities to take part in activities. Many benefit from attending various clubs and take part in musical activities, choir trips, local and national eisteddfodau, and musicals. They also contribute enthusiastically towards charitable activities, such as a Christmas jumper competitions and Children in Need. They have recently been collecting money for a charity to support people with Parkinson's disease.

Most pupils understand the importance of healthy eating and physical exercise. Many benefit from taking part in a wide variety of physical activities, which include team sports, yoga and fitness sessions.

Specific pupils undertake leadership roles and responsibilities enthusiastically. Nearly all pupils in the sixth form are involved in the work of the committees, for example the eco committee and the Welsh language committee. 'Digital leaders' work enthusiastically to train and upskill pupils and staff. The school council has an appropriate effect on a few aspects of the school's work, for example by changing a learning programme and the physical education uniform. However, overall, pupils' views do not have a strong enough influence on the school's work, including aspects of teaching and learning. Pupils are not always aware of the effect of their views on the school's activity, or of the work of the school council.

Teaching and learning experiences: Good

Warm and positive working relationships between teachers and pupils are a feature of most lessons. Most teachers are very supportive of pupils and have high expectations of them in terms of behaviour, motivation and the presentation of their work. They have sound subject knowledge and are good language models. Many teachers create a welcoming environment in their classrooms and provide attractive displays, which engage pupils' interest.

Many teachers plan lessons purposefully, and provide a range of useful activities and varied and attractive resources. They plan tasks that build on each other beneficially and lead to sound progress. A minority of teachers plan carefully, based on detailed information about individual pupils' needs and their subject requirements. In these teachers' lessons, pupils are stretched and challenged, and make strong progress whatever their ability. However, a majority do not plan in enough detail to provide suitable challenge for pupils across the range of ability, particularly those who are more able. A very few teachers do not plan activities that build suitably on each other or deepen understanding. In these lessons, pupils do not make enough progress.

Many teachers provide clear instructions, and a majority explain new concepts in an accessible way. A minority of teachers model and illustrate valuably, and provide a pattern of good practice for pupils in doing so.

Many teachers provide beneficial opportunities for pupils to work independently and in groups. However, a minority of teachers do not prepare pupils adequately to be able to work successfully independently. They provide pupils with too much support or their presentations are too lengthy.

In the few cases in which teaching is at its best, teachers convey infectious enthusiasm towards their subject and show genuine enjoyment when teaching. They have comprehensive knowledge of all pupils and monitor their progress keenly. This motivates pupils successfully and maintains their interest. In these cases, there is a suitable balance of input from the teacher and activities for pupils.

Many teachers question pupils appropriately in order to confirm basic understanding. A few ask deep and incisive questions, and challenge pupils to extend their responses and develop their thinking skills. However, overall, teachers' questions are not probing enough. Overall, when questioning and walking around the classroom, teachers do not focus adequately on deepening pupils' understanding and checking their progress thoroughly.

Many teachers provide pupils with useful feedback on the quality of their work and useful follow-up tasks, which help pupils to move forward. A minority make effective use of success criteria and annotate work with specific, valuable comments. A majority of teachers ensure that pupils respond purposefully to their feedback. However, the quality of assessment is too varied. In a few cases, teachers provide comments that are too complimentary, or there is a lack of useful feedback. In a minority of cases, teachers do not check the quality of pupils' responses to their feedback.

The school provides a broad and balanced curriculum that builds appropriately on previous learning. The comprehensive variety of general and vocational courses meets pupils' interests and needs successfully. The school works valuably with local schools and a local college to expand pupils' options in the sixth form.

One of the school's strengths is the comprehensive programme of experiences that enrich the curriculum. This includes the popular cooking club, the chemistry olympiad, 'curriculum enrichment week' and educational opportunities that derive from the partnership with a national building society that has local contacts. This has a positive effect on pupils' motivation to succeed and their engagement in school life.

The school is a 'professional learning pioneer school' and is planning for the Curriculum for Wales. For example, there is close co-operation between the humanities departments, and a professional inquiry on the four purposes of the new curriculum with partner primary schools.

The school works closely with its partner primary schools to ensure that the curriculum builds appropriately on the experiences of pupils from key stage 2.

There are suitable extra-curricular opportunities to challenge the most able pupils, such as engineering and mathematics challenges.

There is a purposeful range of opportunities for pupils to apply their literacy skills across the curriculum. In relevant subjects, the school provides valuable opportunities for pupils to develop their numeracy skills across the curriculum. However, the school does not provide enough opportunities, in mathematics or across the curriculum, for pupils to develop their ability to reason and solve multi-step problems.

The school has mapped opportunities to apply the Digital Competence Framework thoroughly, and many departments have purposeful plans. Overall, there are appropriate opportunities for pupils to develop their ICT skills across the curriculum, but there is a lack of opportunities to develop advanced ICT skills in key stage 3. The school uses national test data purposefully to organise intervention for pupils whose skills are weak.

The school's arrangements for promoting Welshness and nurturing pupils' Welsh language skills are valuable. For example, original musicals are produced, which teach pupils about local and national history and characters, such as the show 'Grav' about Ray Gravell, and 'Y Map' about Welsh history and culture. The 'eisteddfod ddwl' and trips to places of historical interest, such as Tryweryn and Aberfan, enrich pupils' understanding of their history and culture. However, there are no opportunities for pupils to study a few subjects through the medium of Welsh in the sixth form.

Care, support and guidance: Good

Ysgol Gyfun y Strade is an inclusive, caring and close-knit community. At the heart of its work is its provision for care, support and guidance, and the ethos that every pupils counts. As a result, nearly all pupils behave exceptionally well, and treat their peers and others with respect and care.

An obvious strength is the way in which the school enables pupils to develop as responsible and principled citizens, who understand their roles within the local and national community. There are opportunities for pupils to take responsibility and contribute to society through various charitable committees, working groups such as the eco and Welshness working groups, and activities which include cleaning Pembrey beach and taking part in local and national eisteddfodau.

There is successful provision to promote pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. This is done through school assemblies, guest speakers and a comprehensive personal and social education programme. Pupils are given purposeful opportunities to develop their understanding of equality and diversity, for example by writing a letter about being a Muslim footballer in religious education. The school has useful links with individuals and external agencies who make a beneficial contribution to the personal and social education programme. A police liaison officer provides valuable sessions regularly in order to raise pupils' awareness of issues, such as the dangers of substance abuse and inappropriate use of social networks.

Rich and innovative provision to promote pupils' mental health is an excellent feature. It includes 'mindfulness' sessions and the 'Saib a Symud' project, which helps Year 7 pupils to prepare mentally for the challenges of secondary school. Pupils play a key part in developing and providing this valuable provision. For example, Year 12 students who have trained as 'emotion mentors' provide support for younger students and, as part of a creative project, Year 9 pupils have created a series of stimulating prompts in order to support mindfulness sessions.

The wealth of valuable extra-curricular opportunities is a notable strength. These include various sports clubs, an opportunity to take part in the Duke of Edinburgh Bronze Award, coding clubs, drama, art, choirs and musicals. There are a number of school trips, including trips to Paris, Iceland, the United States and the annual skiing trip. The school's arrangements for promoting eating and drinking healthily are suitable, and the school canteen provides appropriate choices.

The school has thorough and consistent systems to track pupils' attendance. Through successful co-operation with parents, the attendance officer and the welfare officer, attendance rates are consistently high. There is a comprehensive programme of effective interventions to support pupils with poor basic skills or emotional, behavioural or social needs. Through support from various external agencies, such as the school nurse, the youth officer and a counselling service, the school provides highly successful help and support for the most vulnerable pupils. Effective use is made of the 'Hafan' support hub to develop the life skills and self-confidence of pupils who need further support. This provision ensures that these pupils have full access to the curriculum and gain qualifications.

Very recently, the school has strengthened whole-school and departmental progress-tracking systems. However, over time, the academic progress-tracking system has not been rigorous or incisive enough to ensure correct identification of the performance of groups of pupils, or to identify pupils who are at risk of underachieving, at an early enough stage.

There is valuable provision for pupils with additional learning needs. The school has effective procedures to identify pupils' needs at an early stage and provide high quality interventions across the school. The school works closely with various external agencies to provide high quality support for these pupils. The school responds positively to the requirements of different cohorts of pupils, and tailors its provision purposefully to meet their needs. This ensures that pupils with additional learning needs make sound progress.

The school has a close and productive relationship with parents. Valuable events are organised to facilitate pupils' transition to secondary school, such as the 'Setlo Saith' parents' evening. Parents receive detailed and personal reports, which provide a clear picture of pupils' commitment and identify their strengths and weaknesses successfully.

The school provides appropriate advice and support in order for pupils to make suitable choices at the end of every key stage. This includes effective subject option evenings and comprehensive information booklets for pupils who are moving from one key stage to another. The school works effectively with agencies, further

education colleges and local businesses in order to provide taster opportunities and suitable information about courses and apprenticeships.

Overall, the school has appropriate safeguarding policies and procedures, although the team did draw the school's attention to some safeguarding and health and safety issues during the week of the inspection.

Leadership and management: Good

The headteacher has a clear vision that is based on 'aiming for excellence', by providing rich experiences in a Welsh, and Welsh language, environment. The senior leadership team and middle managers share this vision fully, and it is conveyed effectively and regularly across the school. There is a strong sense of close co-operation between staff and obvious pride in being part of the school community.

Effective leadership has ensured that pupils have very positive attitudes to learning. Attendance and behaviour within this caring school are also very good. There are a few important aspects of the school's work in which leadership has not led to consistent improvements, for example outcomes in the core subjects in key stage 4, and the performance of more able pupils.

The headteacher is supported strongly by his senior leadership team, who work closely together. Similarly, there is a team of middle managers who work well together. Many set high expectations and a clear strategic direction for the work of members of their departments.

The senior leadership team's roles and responsibilities are balanced and clear to all. There is a comprehensive line manager system, with unambiguous lines of accountability. A series of formal meetings are held throughout the year, which lead to useful action points and suitable follow-up.

Many middle managers understand their roles and responsibilities in full and are aware of what they need to do to improve the quality of their departments' work. They use performance data suitably to identify reasons for underachievement and to set improvement targets for individuals and departments. However, leaders at all levels do not compare the school's performance rigorously with that of other similar schools.

Performance management arrangements are suitable. Staff have objectives that link directly to the school's priorities for improvement, and there are arrangements to support their professional development appropriately. Leaders challenge any cases of underperformance appropriately.

Governors support the school enthusiastically and contribute appropriately towards setting a clear direction for the school's work. On the whole, they identify strengths and areas for improvement well. However, governors do not compare the school's performance with that of other similar schools rigorously enough. Through the governors' strategic group, all members of the senior leadership team are held to account purposefully, but this structure has not been extended to include middle leaders.

The school has developed a programme of useful procedures, which provides a sound basis for its self-evaluation and planning for improvement processes. This programme is implemented consistently across the school and includes beneficial activities, such as data analysis, lesson observations and scrutiny of pupils' work. Many leaders contribute to these processes and, on the whole, they make effective use of a wide range of first-hand evidence to identify positive aspects of the school's work and what needs to be improved. Through valuable communication channels, such as the staff forum, staff are given an opportunity to contribute to the school's strategic direction and influence it suitably. However, heads of standards, who are the school's pastoral leaders, do not contribute sufficiently to the self-evaluation and planning for improvement processes.

The school ensures that there is a purposeful link between the findings of its self-evaluation processes and the main priorities to ensure improvement. These priorities are suitable and, on the whole, departmental improvement plans reflect both whole-school and departmental areas for improvement. They focus suitably on raising pupils' standards of attainment and improving the quality of teaching.

Self-evaluation and planning for improvement activity has had a positive effect on important aspects of the school's work over recent times. This includes performance in a majority of performance indicators in key stage 4 and the sixth form, and boys' performance. However, at times, information that feeds into self-evaluation processes, including interpretations of data and findings from lesson observations and scrutiny of pupils' books, is not reliable enough. As a result, planning for improvement is not always specific or effective enough. For example, lesson observations and scrutiny of books focus too much on provision and teaching, without considering the progress made by pupils. As a result, leaders do not always have precise enough information to evaluate the effect of teaching on the standards that are achieved by pupils.

A healthy culture of joint professional learning is developing in the school. Teachers benefit from a range of valuable activities, such as participating in sessions to share good practice. A wide range of internal training courses is provided, which responds meaningfully to school and departmental priorities for improvement. For example, specific attention that is given to staff training on aspects of mental health has a positive effect on pupils' wellbeing. Being a pioneer school has provided beneficial opportunities for a few departments to work productively with primary schools in the cluster, in order to begin to develop a better joint understanding of the expectations of the new curriculum.

The school is staffed appropriately and nearly all teachers teach within their specialism. The school uses administrative and support staff effectively to support teachers and pupils. The headteacher, business manager and governors manage funding and resources carefully. They take robust action to ensure that the school has enough learning resources and purposeful accommodation. Grants are used appropriately to support the most vulnerable pupils. During the last year, the Pupil Development Grant has had a positive effect on the attendance and results of pupils who are eligible for free school meals.

Copies of the report

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

Estyn evaluates a provider's effectiveness using a four-point judgement scale:

Excellent	Very strong, sustained performance and practice
Good	Strong features, although minor aspects may require improvement
Adequate and needs improvement	Strengths outweigh weaknesses, but important aspects require improvement
Unsatisfactory and needs urgent improvement	Important weaknesses outweigh strengths

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

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

Publication Section
Estyn
Anchor Court, Keen Road
Cardiff
CF24 5JW or by email to publications@estyn.gov.wales

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