



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

A report on

**Ysgol Plascrug
Plascrug Avenue
Aberystwyth
Ceredigion
SY23 1HL**

Date of inspection: February 2018

by

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

About Ysgol Plascrug

Ysgol Plascrug community school is situated in Aberystwyth, Ceredigion. It is an English medium school but places great value on Welsh, and a variety of other languages spoken by the pupils who attend the school. Around a quarter of the pupils come from a variety of different ethnic minority backgrounds.

There are currently 448 pupils aged from three to eleven on roll, including 58 part-time nursery pupils. Just under 9% of pupils are eligible for free school meals, which is significantly below the national average of 19%. Around 5% of the pupils speak Welsh at home. The school has identified that 34% of pupils have additional learning needs. This is above the national average of 21%. Very few of the pupils are cared for by the local authority.

The headteacher was appointed in September 2014 and the school was last inspected in June 2012.

The school is currently a pioneer school and is working with the Welsh Government and other schools to take forward developments relating to the curriculum.

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 Plascrug is a happy, caring, and diverse community where all pupils are valued equally and nearly all make excellent progress. Pupils show outstanding sensitivity and respect towards their peers and describe their school as an exciting and welcoming place that has a happy, family feeling. There is an extremely effective working relationship between staff and pupils, based on consistently high expectations, challenge and support. Through highly engaging and challenging activities, staff encourage pupils to become increasingly independent learners. As a result, they are highly motivated to learn. Pupils play an integral part in planning their own learning experiences and teachers monitor their progress carefully, to ensure they achieve their potential.

The headteacher and senior management team provide highly effective strategic leadership based on a strong and consistent focus on maintaining high standards of attainment and wellbeing. All staff share this clear vision for continuous improvement.

The school provides pupils with an exceptionally effective and natural Welsh ethos and uses the language regularly in all its activities. Pupils have enjoyed consistent success over many years in competitions at the Urdd National Eisteddfod, and take great pride in their achievements.

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

Recommendations

R1 Develop the strategic role of the governing body in the whole-school self-evaluation process

What happens next

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

Estyn will invite the school to prepare a case study for dissemination on its website based on its work in relation to developing independence amongst pupils of all ages and ability.

Main findings

Standards: Excellent

The majority of pupils enter the school with language, numeracy and social skills at an age appropriate level. Nearly all pupils, including those who have additional learning needs, those who receive English as an additional language and the very few cared for by the local authority make excellent progress. Nearly all pupils achieve very strong outcomes at the end of the foundation phase and key stage 2.

Nearly all pupils in the foundation phase listen attentively and talk confidently. They have a broad vocabulary in English and quickly develop a sound understanding of Welsh. Most use Welsh confidently when discussing everyday routines. In key stage 2, nearly all pupils have excellent English oracy skills. They speak very confidently in a wide range of situations, expressing opinions and feelings with maturity. Most pupils have an excellent understanding of Welsh and express themselves naturally, and with increasing confidence, asking questions and responding to instructions sensibly.

Nearly all foundation phase pupils make rapid progress with their reading. They make very strong progress in understanding the relationship between letters and sounds, and quickly learn to apply these skills when facing increasingly challenging texts. In key stage 2, nearly all pupils continue to make very good progress and enjoy referring to their preferred authors and styles.

Throughout the school, nearly all pupils demonstrate mature writing skills in English, and apply them confidently in a wide variety of genres across the curriculum. Younger foundation phase pupils make excellent progress from early mark making and emergent writing to producing highly engaging pieces of text, using effective punctuation and spelling. By the end of Year 2, nearly all pupils produce work of high quality, for example when writing a sensitive account of hedgehog's experience of a wet day. Nearly all key stage 2 pupils produce very interesting pieces of text in a variety of genres. For example, Year 4 pupils produce a very engaging character profile of Miss Poppy, demonstrating a sound understanding of characterisation. Pupils re-draft their work confidently following useful feedback, and explain the improvements they have made. Most develop into highly effective writers who use a variety of effects to enrich their work across the curriculum, for example when writing a particularly sensitive letter from a young First World War soldier to his parents in Wales. By the end of key stage 2, most make effective use of their broad literary experiences and develop into very accomplished independent writers across all aspects of the curriculum. Nearly all pupils have well-developed handwriting, which greatly enhances their presentation. Most pupils' reading and writing in Welsh at foundation phase and key stage 2 are very well developed.

In the foundation phase, nearly all pupils make strong progress in their mathematical development. They have excellent number skills, and a sound grasp of shape and data. Nearly all have a very good understanding of time and money, and apply these skills confidently in a variety of contexts across the curriculum. For example, they use data about pupils' pets to create a bar graph and measure the length of worms correctly in centimetres. By the end of key stage 2, nearly all pupils have very well

developed mathematical skills and apply these confidently in other contexts. For example, Year 6 pupils produce highly detailed line graphs to demonstrate the thermal insulating quality of coffee cups of different materials. Across the school, nearly all pupils, whatever their ability, respond positively to challenging and engaging activities that encourage them to develop their problem solving skills in real life contexts.

Nearly all pupils have good information and communication technology (ICT) skills and apply them very effectively in other situations from an early age. For example, nearly all nursery pupils control the motion of a wheeled electronic robot confidently and use a variety of software to develop their letter formation. In key stage 2, nearly all pupils select equipment and software confidently to support their learning. For example, they create a highly effective vlog about their imminent visit to the Arctic Circle to develop their oracy, and use an electronic recording system when assessing their own work and providing feedback for their peers.

Wellbeing and attitudes to learning: Excellent

Nearly all pupils have exceptional attitudes to learning and very high levels of wellbeing. Nearly all pupils feel safe, cared for and nurtured due to the very strong family ethos that exists within the school. They have a mature understanding of how to keep themselves healthy through diet and exercise. Most pupils make healthy food choices and many take part in the wide range of sporting activities that form part of the school's provision, such as the 'fit in five' fitness initiative that they undertake daily. This contributes very positively to the development of their fitness, confidence, self-esteem and social skills.

Nearly all pupils demonstrate a very caring attitude towards each other. They share a determination that all pupils should be included in all activities within and beyond the classroom. Nearly all are protective of and concerned for each other.

Nearly all pupils enjoy the many and varied opportunities to undertake leadership roles, such as the 'Criw Cymraeg', the bronze sporting ambassadors and the eco committee. The school council is an effective body that recognises that the staff are supportive of them and listen to their ideas. The school has implemented the council's suggestion to arrange a harvest festival and collect items for a local food bank. They have also introduced a reading club, which has been popular with pupils and has impacted well on their standards and interest in reading.

Nearly all pupils enjoy coming to school and are confident in the school setting. The behaviour of nearly all pupils in class and around the school is exemplary. There is a strong and supportive working relationship between pupils and staff, based on mutual respect. Nearly all pupils know what to do if they are worried or anxious. Pupils are encouraged to develop and celebrate their experiences as independent learners within an ethos of challenge and high expectation. Almost all pupils are confident in their manner and at ease in unfamiliar situations and with visitors to the school.

Nearly all pupils have a very strong understanding of the importance of rights and values as demonstrated by their knowledge of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. For example, they explain in detail to visitors the impact that World War 2 had on the rights of children, who had been denied freedom during the conflict.

An outstanding feature of the school is the mature and effective thinking skills that pupils develop as they progress through the school. For example, in Year 5, pupils take responsibility for their own learning by deciding on relevant activities and whom to invite to work with them on topics such as 'On Safari' as part of the school's pioneering work on the creative arts. This has impacted positively on standards of literacy and numeracy across the curriculum.

Teaching and learning experiences: Excellent

As a curriculum pioneer and lead creative school, there is a vigorous thematic approach to curriculum planning. The quality of planning is outstanding and has the flexibility to work with the pupils' interests and needs. Teachers use pupils' ideas creatively to develop rich learning experiences that motivate and engage nearly all of them as they develop their skills.

Most teachers provide pupils with innovative tasks of a very high quality, which fully engage nearly all of them and successfully develop their skills, knowledge and understanding to a high level. Within lessons, staff give pupils rich opportunities to become active independent learners, and to respond positively to suitable challenges.

Nearly all members of staff have high expectations and, as a result, nearly all pupils have a very positive attitude towards learning. Teachers and support staff work together particularly successfully to create an environment in which nearly all pupils are keen to give of their best.

Team teaching is highly effective throughout the school and teachers share expertise successfully. The collaborative teacher peer observations, where three colleagues observe another, have proven very beneficial in sharing good practice across the school. As a result, most teachers use a range of highly creative approaches and resources to engage the interest of pupils and to meet the needs of all groups of learners. Nearly all teachers differentiate work sensitively and effectively and challenge pupils that are more able successfully.

Nearly all teachers ensure that their lessons have a good pace, which leads to very high levels of engagement among pupils. Nearly all members of staff are excellent language models in English and Welsh and display an extensive use of bilingual skills when communicating in lessons.

The school has embedded the principles of the foundation phase successfully. There is a very good mix of adult-led and independent activities. As a result, provision in the outdoor and indoor areas is of a high quality and enriches the curriculum effectively.

Assessment for learning is a strength across the school. Staff use effective questioning consistently to challenge and spark discussion, and check that pupils understand their work. Teachers provide pupils with highly effective oral and written feedback. Teachers give foundation phase pupils opportunities to evaluate their work confidently by using a traffic light system and reflect on their targets. For example, younger pupils evaluate their pieces of persuasive writing about a painting by A K Skipsey sensibly. Nearly all teachers make very effective use of success

criteria to encourage pupils to evaluate their own progress successfully. In Years 5 and 6 especially, pupils set their own objectives and success criteria during lessons. For example, pupils in Year 5 set challenging objectives to plan suitable and safe transfer of animals from Kenya to the West Midlands Safari Park.

The successful way that the school uses the literacy and numeracy framework in its plans is a particular strength across the school. As a result, pupils develop their literacy, numeracy and ICT skills effectively in all classes and use them effectively in rich and purposeful contexts across the curriculum. For example, in Year 4, pupils' oracy and reading skills are inspirationally challenged as they express their feelings when composing a piece of music based on the early Welsh settlers' journey to Patagonia.

The school plans effectively to develop pupils' ICT skills. Staff ensure that there are regular opportunities for them to use a wide range of skills consistently across the curriculum. The 'Digital Wizards' are successful in teaching and supporting other pupils and staff across the school. For example, they prepare an inspirational 'Vlog' to inform pupils in Years 3 and 4 on how to use QR codes effectively to enhance their own learning.

The school consistently provides pupils with learning activities that reflect and celebrate their diverse cultural, linguistic and ethnic origin. A strong and thoroughly embedded Welsh ethos exists across the school. Stimulating displays celebrate the pupils' numerous Welsh achievements such as their sustained successes at the Urdd National Eisteddfod. The school enhances its Welsh language provision successfully through a variety of strategies such as the 'Cymraeg Cwl' scheme. This is an integral and highly effective part of every activity throughout the school.

Care, support and guidance: Excellent

The school's care, support and guidance for pupils promote their wellbeing exceptionally well, and ensure that they have excellent opportunities to thrive in their academic, social, moral and emotional development. Staff know pupils extremely well and provide them with a nurturing environment that develops their confidence, self-esteem and positive, mature attitudes to learning. There is a consistent emphasis on developing pupils' understanding of their human rights, which has a positive effect on their exemplary attitudes and behaviour.

The school has comprehensive and robust systems to track and monitor pupils' achievements, progress, behaviour and attendance. Leaders and staff use these effectively to identify the specific needs of pupils of all abilities and language backgrounds. The school then provides pupils a wide range of programmes that meet their needs successfully.

The highly efficient additional learning needs co-ordinator provides outstanding support for staff in developing high quality, individualised provision for specific pupils. Well-trained staff deliver a range of intervention programmes to improve pupils' literacy and numeracy skills. There are extremely beneficial programmes to support vulnerable pupils, including those with additional emotional needs. For example, the use of specific language programmes and the effective use of the sensory room have a very positive affect on raising pupils' self-esteem. As a result, many pupils

demonstrate improved levels of confidence and engagement in school life. Pupils with additional learning needs have detailed individual education plans that include measurable, challenging and achievable targets with a very high degree of pupil and parental input.

The school has strong relationships with parents, and informs them well about their child's progress. Arrangements include detailed progress reports and regular parents' evenings such as the 'meet the teacher evenings' held in September to inform parents of classroom procedures and routines, and which provide an overview of the learning activities for the year. This helps parents to support their child's learning. Informative and individualised annual reports give parents an accurate picture of their child's progress and include specific targets for improvement. The school's website and other social media platforms provide parents with current and detailed information of the school's activities.

Staff provide pupils with many opportunities to take an active part in decision-making and leadership. This is a particular strength of the school. For example, there is a very active school council, eco council, 'Criw Cymraeg' and digital wizard group. The school council focuses effectively on health matters such as the need for pupils to drink enough water to hydrate themselves sufficiently following very interesting work undertaken on The Wee Challenge. Pupils discuss the conclusions very maturely without a hint of embarrassment, resulting in them drinking water at regular intervals during the school day. The school has highly effective arrangements to promote healthy eating and drinking and physical activity. The Bronze Ambassadors lead activity sessions successfully to develop pupils' physical skills and increase participation levels during the school day, for example by leading the 'hip hop' dance activity for foundation phase pupils.

The school succeeds well in providing a broad, balanced and differentiated curriculum whilst, at the same time, being sensitive to the culture, traditions and beliefs of all pupils. The school is a cosmopolitan community where nearly all pupils have an excellent understanding of issues relating to equality and diversity, whilst developing the values of tolerance and respect. For example, the ground breaking intergenerational project 'Clwb Ni', where school pupils visit local sheltered accommodation to take part in activities with the older generation, strengthens the school's links with the community and improves pupils' social and emotional skills.

Developing pupils' artistic, creative and sporting abilities is a strength of the school. Leaders and teachers provide excellent opportunities for pupils to engage in trips and visits, such as the National Library of Wales. It has also had sustained success at a national level in the Urdd eisteddfod providing many opportunities for pupils to take part in musical, recitation and dance competitions. The school's gymnastic team also competes successfully at national level. Such activities develop pupils' performing, artistic and sporting abilities exceptionally well. Collective worship promotes pupils' spiritual reflection successfully.

The school's arrangements for safeguarding pupils meet requirements and give no cause for concern.

Leadership and management: Excellent

The experienced headteacher provides strong, effective and purposeful leadership. She has very high expectations and a resolute vision for the development of the

school, which she shares energetically with all staff and governors. These derive from clear educational values and ambitious objectives for all pupils. The headteacher distributes responsibilities very effectively and promotes the professional development of staff as leaders within school and beyond very successfully. Members of staff lead on specific areas of good practice throughout the local authority, such as promoting the development of physical literacy in partnership with a higher education establishment and local schools. This provides opportunities to share and develop professional learning practices, which have a very positive effect on pupils' attitude to learning and wellbeing.

An exceptionally strong senior management team is very enthusiastic and committed to promoting quality teaching and stimulating learning experiences. They encourage and promote a positive, caring ethos of collaboration based on pastoral support and guidance for all members of staff as well as pupils. This is a particular strength in the school. During recent years, senior leaders have worked very successfully with teachers to improve all aspects of the school's work, particularly in developing the curriculum as a pioneer school, and ensuring the continuity of skills through highly effective teamwork. Support staff are an integral part of the team and contribute successfully to improving pupils' standards, wellbeing and social skills.

The school has robust performance management arrangements, and successful training opportunities support them thoroughly. Nearly all members of staff benefit from taking part in a broad range of professional learning activities that meet school priorities and personal aspirations effectively. The strong focus on professional learning reflects the high priority that leaders place on developing the skills of all staff. Leaders are especially effective in identifying individual teachers' expertise, strengths and interests and, as a result, allocate responsibilities to them very effectively. An especially strong feature is the way in which staff have the confidence to observe each other teach through peer observation arrangements.

The governing body has a secure understanding of the school's performance and areas to be developed. Governors contribute well to help determine the school's priorities for improvement. They offer constructive support to the leadership team in meetings and provide valuable professional expertise in specific areas of the school's work. However, their strategic role in the whole-school self-evaluation processes is less developed.

The school has a strong culture of continuous self-evaluation, which focuses clearly on pupils' outcomes. The process is robust and very successful in enabling leaders to identify, monitor and evaluate the school's performance very effectively. This ensures that there is a constant climate of targeting and challenging pupils to reach their full potential and make achievable improvements. Senior and middle leaders use an extensive range of data effectively to evaluate pupils' achievements and progress. They constantly encourage the views and opinions of pupils, for example in choosing and planning topics. This has a very positive effect on pupils, who appreciate that staff value and consider their input.

The school's comprehensive development plan focuses directly on the outcomes of the self-evaluation process, and details the main priorities clearly. The document is concise and contains plans and actions that allocate responsibilities to evaluate the effectiveness of the school's provision and standards. Through a structured

programme of monitoring activities, reviews and meetings, leaders continually identify the principal strengths and areas for improvement in the school's work that help inform development planning.

The school is well resourced and leaders ensure purposeful use of the school's budget to improve provision and standards. Expenditure is managed and monitored prudently and links carefully to the priorities in the school development plan. Senior leaders are extremely successful in ensuring substantial extra funding through a variety of projects and grants, which impact strongly on pupils' standards and creative development. The school makes effective use of the pupil development grant to improve standards of literacy and numeracy as well as providing essential support for the emotional wellbeing of vulnerable pupils. Nearly all targeted pupils make excellent progress.

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:

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