



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

A report on

**Ysgol Bryn Alyn
Church Street
Gwersyllt
Wrexham
LL11 4HD**

Date of inspection: December 2017

by

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

About Ysgol Bryn Alyn

Ysgol Bryn Alyn is an English-medium 11 to 16 mixed comprehensive school and is maintained by Wrexham local authority. There are currently 702 learners on roll, which is less than at the time of the last inspection.

The school serves several village communities in the north west of Wrexham and is situated in the village of Gwersyllt. Slightly less than 20% of pupils are eligible for free school meals, which is higher than the national average of 17.0%. About 25% of pupils live in the 20% most deprived areas of Wales.

Very few pupils receive support to learn English as an additional language and very few pupils come from a minority ethnic background. The school has resourced provision for pupils who have moderate learning difficulties. Currently the school has about 2% of pupils with statements of special educational needs, which is very close to the national average. Only about 1% of pupils speak Welsh fluently.

The acting headteacher took up her post in September 2017, but has worked at the school since 2016 as a deputy headteacher. The senior leadership team consists of the acting headteacher, an acting deputy headteacher, two assistant headteachers, two associate assistant headteachers and the business manager. An associate headteacher also works in the school part-time.

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 Bryn Alyn has a supportive and caring ethos. Most pupils feel safe at school and many understand how to live healthy lifestyles. The majority of pupils are polite and courteous. However, around half of pupils show little interest in lessons and the behaviour in lessons of a minority disrupts their learning and that of other pupils.

Many pupils enter the school with weak literacy and numeracy skills and a majority do not improve those skills well enough. Pupils' performance at the end of key stage 4 is poor and generally pupils make much less progress from previous key stages than expected.

Teaching is not effective and overall staff expectations of what pupils can do are too low. Furthermore, assessment does not improve pupils' learning sufficiently.

Since taking over her present role, the acting headteacher has developed a clear vision for the school. However, over a period of time senior and middle leadership have not been successful in improving the most important areas of the school's work, such as raising standards, pupils' behaviour and the quality of teaching.

| Inspection area | Judgement |
|--|--|
| Standards | Unsatisfactory and needs urgent improvement |
| Wellbeing and attitudes to learning | Unsatisfactory and needs urgent improvement |
| Teaching and learning experiences | Unsatisfactory and needs urgent improvement |
| Care, support and guidance | Unsatisfactory and needs urgent improvement |
| Leadership and management | Unsatisfactory and needs urgent improvement |

Recommendations

- R1 Improve standards at key stage 4 and the progress that pupils make including the development of their skills
- R2 Improve pupils' attendance and behaviour
- R3 Improve the quality of teaching and assessment so that pupils engage fully with their learning
- R4 Strengthen leadership at all levels including the rigour and accuracy of self-evaluation and the precision of improvement planning
- R5 Provide robust financial management to eliminate the deficit budget

What happens next

In accordance with the Education Act 2005, HMCI is of the opinion, that special measures are required in relation to this school. The school will draw up an action plan which shows how it is going to address the recommendations. Estyn will monitor the school's progress on a termly basis.

Main findings

Standards: Unsatisfactory and needs urgent improvement

Many pupils enter the school with weak literacy and numeracy skills. A majority do not improve those skills well enough and pupils' performance at the end of key stage 4 is poor. Generally, pupils make much less progress from previous key stages than expected.

During lessons, a majority of pupils recall suitably previous learning that is mostly factual, such as details of the Great Plague. However, only a minority make suitable progress in developing their knowledge and skills or in applying their recall well enough in different contexts such as when discussing people's religious beliefs. A very few more able pupils make stronger progress, for example in developing an empathy with and understanding of people's ability to forgive.

Many pupils have secure listening skills though a minority do not listen to the teacher or their peers with sufficient attention and respect. As a result, they miss relevant information such as the teacher's explanation of how to approach a particular examination paper or the views of their peers on work they are involved in. Many pupils are able to provide brief, appropriate verbal responses, for example when explaining hazards associated with burning substances or explaining the work done by a spring. A few pupils provide more developed responses and use subject specific vocabulary well, such as when identifying, naming and explaining the suitability of a range of hand tools used to cut and shape aluminium.

Many pupils skim and scan suitably to identify information in different texts. A few use this information well to support their understanding of issues, such as Germany's devastation at losing The Great War. Many read with a suitable level of understanding and are able to recall key points in a text, such as in the story of jazz. A few more able pupils synthesise well information from historical sources to deepen their understanding of key issues including the Treaty of Versailles, the political organisation of Weimar Germany and the circumstances surrounding the Night of the Long Knives. A similar proportion of pupils is able to recognise and discuss suitably the imagery in the work of contemporary poets such as Peter Finch and Paul Henry. Nevertheless, overall, around half of pupils do not use a sufficient range of reading strategies to support their learning.

Many pupils produce appropriate, extended writing on topics including the success or otherwise of flood defences in Carlisle in 2015, diaries written during the plague in London and detailed briefs on project work such as the designing of a portable speaker. However, many pupils continue to make too many basic errors in their writing. The writing of a minority of pupils frequently lacks control due to their use of poor punctuation such as comma-splicing, and weak grammar, including the use of subordinate clauses rather than full sentences. A majority of pupils have poor presentational skills and take little care or pride in their work. They do not understand how to proof-read, edit or redraft their work suitably or take any responsibility for doing so before they hand it to the teacher.

Many pupils produce a variety of graphs on topics such as the frequency of landslides. A majority draw straight line graphs competently using correct scales and drawing lines of best fit, but a minority are very careless in their construction of these graphs. A few more able pupils analyse graphs well, calculating constants from gradients. Around half of pupils use their basic number skills competently in solving simple equations and many pupils use basic measuring skills when, for example marking and measuring the centre points for drilling holes. However, overall, most pupils do not use or develop their numeracy skills well enough in meaningful contexts outside of mathematics lessons.

Very few pupils use their information and communication technology (ICT) skills across the curriculum. Where this occurs it is mostly very basic word-processing to produce, for example, a web-page to sell a product, though this is often undermined by their very weak literacy skills.

A few pupils develop their creativity well. For example, a majority of pupils create interesting designs for their tea-light holders, while a few more able pupils create elaborate designs based on flowers, fish or geometric shapes. In addition, in textiles lessons, pupils design mobile phone cases successfully while other pupils work together well when devising a sequence of balances around large apparatus in physical education.

The majority of pupils make appropriate progress in developing their Welsh language skills. At the end of key stage 4, many pupils are entered for a Welsh language qualification. The performance of the few pupils that study the full course is broadly in line with that in similar schools. However, performance in the short course has been below the national average in each of the last three years.

In 2015 and 2016, there has been a declining trend in most performance indicators and provisional data for 2017 indicates that performance fell further in most of those indicators. Performance in both the level 2 threshold, including English and mathematics, and in the capped points score remains well below that in similar schools, as does the proportion of pupils gaining five GCSE or equivalent qualifications at A*-A. Boys, girls, and pupils eligible for free school meals all perform consistently below these groups of pupils in similar schools, in many indicators.

At the end of Year 11, most pupils remain in full-time education or training.

Wellbeing and attitudes to learning: Unsatisfactory and needs urgent improvement

The majority of pupils are polite and courteous. However, the behaviour in lessons of a minority of pupils is disruptive and has a negative impact on their learning and that of other pupils. In the last year, the number of recorded behaviour incidents has escalated and is high. The number of permanent exclusions is high as is the number of fixed-term exclusions. These increased significantly in the last year.

Around half of pupils show little interest in lessons. They lack ambition and enthusiasm for their learning and do not engage well in activities. These pupils are over-reliant on teachers, have very limited independent learning skills and lack resilience in their work.

Most pupils feel safe at school and many believe that the school deals effectively with any concerns they have. Many pupils have a clear understanding of how to keep healthy through diet and exercise. However, the number of pupils that participate regularly in extra-curricular physical activities is low.

The school council has a suitable impact on a few aspects of the school's work, for example in contributing to suggested changes to the school uniform. However, overall, pupils are not sufficiently involved in decision-making about their life in school, including aspects of teaching and learning.

Pupils' attendance has consistently been well below that expected for the last four years. The attendance of pupils eligible for free school meals is also much lower than that of the same group of pupils in similar schools.

Teaching and learning experiences: Unsatisfactory and needs urgent improvement

The quality of teaching is unsatisfactory and needs urgent improvement. Although many aspects of the curriculum are sound, assessment practice and the provision for skills are weak.

Many teachers have sound subject knowledge. A majority use this to plan a range of activities linked appropriately to suitable learning objectives. In a very few lessons, the purposeful atmosphere in class and enthusiastic delivery of the teacher ensure that many pupils make strong progress. Where present, most teaching assistants make a valuable contribution to supporting the progress of pupils with additional learning needs.

In most lessons, teachers do not have high enough expectations of what their pupils can do or challenge them well enough. Often, the teachers over direct learning and misjudge the pace of the lesson, which limits pupils' progress. At key stage 3, teachers often set low-level tasks that frequently repeat pupils' learning experiences from primary school or, similarly inappropriately, present GCSE work, which most pupils do not have the skills to complete. At key stage 4, too many lessons are formulaic and aimed at preparing pupils for a specific assessment rather than fostering deeper learning and understanding. Most teaching does not enthuse pupils or motivate them to try hard. This has a detrimental effect on the progress of all pupils, including the more able.

Questioning is a particularly weak aspect of teaching, with a lack of variety in the type and technique used by teachers. Too often, teachers' questioning determines only pupils' knowledge and recall rather than probing their understanding. This makes it very difficult for teachers to gauge sufficiently well the progress that pupils are making.

Most teachers provide pupils with sufficiently useful verbal feedback to guide their learning. However, the quality and value of written comments are too variable. Many teachers do not follow the school's marking policy and a minority of books contain little or no written feedback. Teachers' comments are frequently too general, effort related and overly generous in their praise of very modest work. Consequently, assessment does not improve pupils' learning sufficiently and teachers do not use it to inform their future planning well enough.

In many lessons, teachers do not use the school's behaviour management strategies consistently and allow poor behaviour to impede pupils' learning. As a result, teaching is not sufficiently effective because too many pupils are frequently disengaged or distracted, and do not allow others to focus well enough on their work.

Overall, the majority of teaching does not enable pupils to improve their knowledge or understanding sufficiently.

The school's planning for the progressive development of pupils' skills is particularly weak, and does not meet pupils' needs well enough. The school has taken suitable account of the national framework for literacy and numeracy and provided relevant training. Despite this, teachers have not built in worthwhile and progressive opportunities for pupils to develop their literacy, numeracy or ICT skills in meaningful contexts. The school identifies pupils with weak skills and has a suitable range of intervention strategies to support them. However, these interventions are not timely or effective enough. The co-ordination and quality assurance of provision for the development of pupils' skills in key stage 3 are underdeveloped.

The school has a suitable rationale for the curriculum it offers and the changes it has made over the last few years. Leaders have revised usefully the key stage 3 curriculum to support pupils' progression appropriately into key stage 4. The school provides a suitable range of subjects at key stage 4 that allows worthwhile opportunities for all pupils to progress to post 16 education and training.

In collaboration with a local further education college and special school, pupils with additional learning needs (ALN) are supported particularly well through key stage 4. They benefit from a wide range of useful opportunities to study for example, small animal care and construction, which meet their needs well. Provision in the wellbeing centre provides appropriate opportunities for most pupils at risk of disengagement to follow courses that meet their needs suitably.

The school provides opportunities for pupils to engage in suitable curriculum enhancement activities. These include, for example, visits to Auschwitz concentration camp and participation in science roadshows.

The school makes appropriate provision for the development of pupils' Welsh language skills. It ensures that many pupils pursue a level 2 course in Welsh. A minority of staff use Welsh in their daily dealings with pupils. Teachers ensure that the Welsh language and culture are given suitable prominence through extra-curricular activities such as the annual Eisteddfod and trips to Glan Llyn.

Care, support and guidance: Unsatisfactory and needs urgent improvement

The school has recently reviewed its behaviour management policy and is piloting a new approach in core subjects. However, neither this nor the previous policy, which still covers non-core subjects, is applied consistently by staff. As a result, in many lessons, poor, disruptive behaviour by a minority of pupils is not addressed.

The school has a supportive and caring ethos. Pupils are encouraged to make healthy eating choices and the curriculum helps to inform them, for example, about healthy lifestyles and the safe use of social media. School provides an appropriate range of opportunities for pupils to participate in extra-curricular activities, such as netball and football, although participation levels are low.

Pupils' spiritual and moral development is addressed through appropriate assemblies and tutor time on topics such as the Olympic spirit. Their social development is supported suitably through a range of worthwhile interventions and activities such as talks from the emergency services and theatrical performances.

The school works effectively with an appropriate range of external agencies to support pupils' personal development. Positive attitudes towards diversity and equality are supported suitably by the school's wellbeing programme, which includes worthwhile events such as Emotional Health Week and a multi-cultural food project in Year 9.

Those pupils most at risk of not remaining in school are supported appropriately through a range of programmes, including college and army courses. However, many of these pupils do not make the progress expected in their learning overall.

The school's systems to monitor and improve pupils' attendance are not sufficiently effective. As a result, attendance remains well below that expected.

Pupils with additional learning needs are identified and tracked well with detailed pupil profiles providing valuable information. However, teachers do not use this information well enough, nor does the school evaluate the quality of provision for these pupils robustly enough. As a result, they do not make enough progress. In addition, the school's identification and tracking of more able pupils is inconsistent and provision to enrich and extend their learning experiences is underdeveloped. As a result they too do not make the progress expected.

Pastoral arrangements with feeder primaries are appropriate and provide beneficial support for the most vulnerable pupils. Pupils are supported well in making their options choices.

Safeguarding procedures meet requirements and there are no significant areas for concern.

Leadership and management: Unsatisfactory and needs urgent improvement

Since taking over her present role in September 2017, the acting headteacher has developed a clear vision for the school based upon improved teaching and stronger pupil outcomes. With support from the senior leadership team, she has established more effective communication between the senior leadership team and the staff, and improved staff morale.

The acting headteacher and senior leadership team have identified their key priorities for action and have reviewed and updated key policies and procedures. This includes improving and strengthening the school's behaviour policy. However, senior and middle leaders have not been successful in improving key areas of the school's work, including raising standards, improving pupils' behaviour and attendance, and improving the quality of teaching.

The responsibilities of the senior leadership team have been revised recently, but are not distributed effectively. The acting headteacher has too many diverse responsibilities including line managing too many subject areas. This leaves too little time to concentrate on strategic issues. It is not clear within the leadership structure, who is responsible for ensuring the consistent application of policies. This has contributed to underperforming staff not being dealt with effectively.

The senior leadership team has revised the line management structure and now have regular link meetings that focus suitably upon standards. These changes are beginning to increase the accountability of middle leaders. However, lines of accountability for key areas of the school's performance are not clear enough.

There is too much variability in the quality and effectiveness of pastoral and subject leaders. Many do not understand fully their role and only a few have been effective in raising standards in their areas of responsibility. Many subject leaders do not have a firm grasp on the strengths and weaknesses of teaching in the areas that they lead.

The governors are supportive of the school and have a reasonable understanding of its strengths and weaknesses. They are developing a better understanding of the core data sets and are beginning to use this understanding to challenge the school on its performance in key areas. However, they have not challenged the school well enough on key areas of underperformance, including pupil standards, attendance, behaviour and the quality of teaching.

The school has a useful calendar of self-evaluation and improvement planning activities and has recently revised many of the procedures for gathering evidence about the school's work. However, this has not led to the improvements needed in important areas of the school's work.

Most leaders use data appropriately to analyse and compare performance against that of similar schools. They collect suitable evidence from lesson observations and the scrutiny of pupils' work. However, the evaluation of performance data and of information gathered from quality assurance processes is inconsistent. As a result, leaders do not identify accurately enough the areas for improvement in teaching and learning. The school does not canvass the views of pupils or parents systematically enough and is unable to prioritise aspects that cause them concern.

The school's self-evaluation report, while being succinct and specific in parts, is selective, contradictory and overly positive, particularly in key areas such as leadership, pupil behaviour and the quality of teaching. Departmental evaluations follow the same format but are inconsistent in quality and content. A few departments do not make use of all the evidence available and are too generous in their evaluation of teaching as they do not consider the impact it has on pupil outcomes.

The school improvement plan includes five suitable priorities. Departmental improvement plans focus appropriately on raising standards. Many plans do not include success criteria based on secure targets or include enough actions that are precise or robust enough to bring about the improvements needed. Monitoring responsibilities are not specific enough and plans are not costed sufficiently.

The school has not made sufficient or sustained improvements against the recommendations of the inspection in May 2012, particularly standards at key stage 4, the development of pupils' literacy skills and the quality and consistency of departmental self-evaluation.

The school provides useful professional development opportunities such as external training for middle leaders. The school is beginning to share effective practice and

has established school improvement groups to address aspects of teaching and learning. However, they have not had enough impact on the quality of teaching or pupils' progress. The school has recently refined its arrangements for managing the performance of staff and objectives now link suitably to the school's priorities.

There are appropriate numbers of teaching and support staff and most teach within their main subject specialisms. However, high levels of staff absence and the use of supply cover has a negative impact on the quality of teaching. Leaders and managers are beginning to consider closely the costs of the existing curriculum and the need to prioritise spending to support the school's strategic priorities. However, staffing and supply cover costs are high and the school has a significant budget deficit. The school has agreed suitable plans with the local authority to reduce the deficit over the next three years.

The school has used the pupil development grant appropriately to provide additional support for pupils. The majority of the funding has been used suitably to employ support assistants. However, this has not resulted in significant improvements in the standards and attendance of pupils 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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