



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 Gynradd Merllyn
Foel Gron
Bagillt
Flintshire
CH6 6BB**

Date of inspection: April 2012

by

W Williams

for

**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 Merllyn is situated in Bagillt, midway between Holywell and Flint. Nearly all pupils who attend the school are from the village of Bagillt, which is an area of significant social and economic deprivation. Around 24% of pupils are entitled to free school meals, which is slightly above local authority and national averages.

Currently, the school has 189 pupils on roll aged between 3 and 11 years who are taught in eight single-age classes which includes a nursery for five mornings a week. Nearly all are of white British ethnic origin and use English as their first language. Five have English as an additional language; none uses Welsh at home. Currently, a very small number of pupils are 'looked after' by the local authority. There has been one exclusion during the past twelve months.

Baseline assessments show that pupils enter school with below average literacy and communication skills. The school identifies around 33% of its pupils as having additional learning needs, which is much higher than the national average. One pupil has a statement of special educational needs.

There have been no significant changes in the nature of the school since it was last inspected in June 2006. The present headteacher was appointed in September 2011. The individual school budget per pupil for Ysgol Merllyn in 2011-2012 means that the budget is £3111 per pupil. The maximum per pupil in the primary schools in Flintshire is £10075 and the minimum is £2616. Ysgol Merllyn is 49th out of the 76 primary schools in Flintshire in terms of its school budget per pupil.'

Summary

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

Current performance

The current performance of the school is good because:

- standards of literacy are good and most pupils make strong progress throughout the school;
- achievement and progress in learning are generally good;
- pupils enjoy coming to school and nearly all behave well;
- teaching is generally good; and
- the school provides good value for money.

Prospects for improvement

Prospects for improvement are good because:

- leaders have a clear vision for developing the school;
- effective self-evaluation processes and strategic planning are a regular feature of the life of the school;
- all members of staff collaborate closely as a team and are willing to try new initiatives; and
- the school has established a strong professional learning community which has brought about very positive outcomes.

Recommendations

In order to make further progress, the school needs to improve:

- R1 performance at the end of the Foundation Phase;
- R2 the outdoor facilities for older Foundation Phase pupils;
- R3 provision for sustainable development and global citizenship; and
- R4 the role of governors in school improvement.

What happens next?

The school will create an action plan which shows how it is going to address the recommendations.

Main findings

Key Question 1: How good are outcomes?

Good

Standards: Good

According to their age and stage of development, many pupils achieve good standards in literacy. In the Foundation Phase, nearly all make good progress in their ability to use their literacy and communication skills in different formal and informal contexts. They express their ideas clearly and, by the end of Year 2, read confidently and accurately and write to a good standard. In general, they spell common words correctly.

In key stage 2 most pupils discuss aspects of their work intelligently showing good ability to sustain and develop oral contributions. Many show a good understanding of different texts and apply a broad range of appropriate strategies for finding and retrieving information from books and websites. Nearly all express and organise their ideas in written forms confidently and coherently using different sentence structures, paragraphing and punctuation with increasing effectiveness.

Most pupils make good progress in learning Welsh and display an extremely positive and enthusiastic attitude towards the subject. During lessons, many ask and answer questions, follow instructions with increasing confidence and occasionally use Welsh around the school. They have a growing awareness of the culture and heritage of Wales. The percentage achieving the expected level in Welsh Second Language at the end of key stage 2 has risen during the last two years.

During the past five years, when compared with national benchmarks and with the relative performance of similar schools, the percentage of pupils who have reached level 2 in English, mathematics and science at the end of the Foundation Phase has, with very few exceptions, been in the lower 75%. However, the percentage of pupils at the end of key stage 2 achieving level 4 or above in all three subjects has been in the higher 50%.

The proportion of pupils who achieved level 2 or above at the end of the Foundation Phase in 2011 in English and mathematics was lower than the results of the schools in the same family. Science results were slightly above the family average. During the same period, the proportion of pupils who achieved level 4 or above at the end of key stage 2 in mathematics and science was similar to the family of school average. Results in English were lower.

In lessons and over time nearly all pupils make good progress in their learning. Most, including the more able and those with special educational needs or who speak English as an additional language, are working to their full potential. Girls and boys generally perform equally well.

Wellbeing: Good

Nearly all pupils say they enjoy school and have formed close relationships with staff. Most face new experiences and challenges confidently and are keen to inquire and ask questions.

Attitudes to learning are very positive with nearly all pupils well motivated and fully engaged in their tasks. In the Foundation Phase nearly all become confident learners who have developed positive learning habits and are able to make choices about their own learning. By key stage 2 most have the skills to improve their own learning, work with others and solve problems; nearly all evaluate their own work thoughtfully and set themselves personal targets for improvement.

Pupils of all ages have acquired a secure understanding of how they can become healthy, both through what they eat and the physical activity they undertake.

Pupils of all ages generally behave well and show courtesy and concern for others. With very few exceptions, they say they feel safe in school and know who to approach if they are worried.

The average attendance for the school during three of the last five years has been in the upper 50% of similar schools. At 94% over the three terms prior to the inspection it was better than the average nationally and for similar schools.

Foundation Phase pupils willingly undertake routine responsibilities such as 'Helpwr Heddiw' and are beginning to take responsibility for their own actions. Through the school council, the eco-committee and other activities, key stage 2 pupils play an active part in the school and the community and are confident that their voice is heard.

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

Learning experiences successfully meet the needs of the full ability range including those pupils for whom English is an additional language.

All staff collaborate very effectively to plan flexible and imaginative activities, which succeed in engaging the interests of the all pupils. Stimulating learning experiences, both inside and outdoors, ensure that pupils are challenged by relevant tasks that provide continuity and progression in their learning.

Very effective learning support programmes enable all pupils to participate fully in every activity. Suitably challenging work is also provided for more able and talented pupils.

There is good planning for the development of all key learning skills, including thinking and problem-solving skills, across all curriculum areas. Planning and provision for Welsh language development is thorough and well-suited to pupils' ages and abilities. There is good provision for developing their knowledge and understanding of the history and culture of Wales.

Pupils benefit from a range of visits and extra-curricular activities which further enhance their learning experiences. Provision to enable them to increase their knowledge about sustainability and to improve their understanding of the wider world, however, is underdeveloped.

Teaching: Good

Teachers have up-to-date subject knowledge and plan lessons effectively to ensure that all pupils are challenged by stimulating learning experiences that are well matched to their age and ability. In a few lessons, however, tasks do not successfully engage the interest of all pupils.

Teachers successfully employ a wide range of approaches and strategies and provide good opportunities for skill development. They identify clear learning objectives and success criteria that are shared with pupils. Together with support staff, they use questioning skilfully to promote thinking skills. Incidental Welsh is used very effectively in nearly all classes.

Working relationships between pupils and staff are extremely positive; behaviour is generally well managed and there is a productive working atmosphere in all lessons.

Support staff provide pupils with well-focused assistance and feedback, which enhances their learning. They intervene very effectively to provide support for specific groups.

There are well-established and very clear systems for tracking and recording pupils' progress. These systems enable staff to identify any instances of low performance and to take remedial action when necessary. Assessment information is used purposefully in all classes to plan the next steps in learning.

Assessment for learning strategies are firmly embedded in the school's teaching and assessment methods. Teachers consistently encourage pupils to evaluate their own work, set their own targets and take part in self and peer assessment.

Parents are well informed about their children's achievements and targets through comprehensive annual reports and regular meetings with staff.

Care, support and guidance: Good

The positive and welcoming environment provided for pupils and members of staff ensures that the needs of all individuals are met. There are policies and procedures to guarantee that pupils are safe and that they successfully develop emotional and physical wellbeing. They are encouraged to eat healthily and they receive a wide variety of opportunities to improve their fitness and health.

A well balanced programme of personal and social education promotes pupils' social, moral and cultural development very effectively. Provision for spiritual development is less well developed. All pupils clearly understand the expected standard of behaviour and know the consequences should they not meet these expectations.

The school has procedures and an appropriate policy for safeguarding.

Provision and support for pupils with additional learning needs is good allowing all individuals to access fully all areas of the curriculum. Vulnerable pupils and those in need of support are clearly targeted and tracked with the result that they make good progress.

Individual education plans are purposeful and evaluated regularly. Parents are kept well informed and fully involved in the process.

Productive links with a wide range of support services ensure that specific expertise and advice are readily available to staff.

Learning environment: Good

The school is an inclusive community that provides equal access to the curriculum and extra-curricular activities. Positive attitudes to equality and diversity are successfully promoted through classroom practice, curricular themes, international aspects and collecting on behalf of a range of charities.

There is a good supply of relevant resources which are of good quality and appropriately matched to pupils' ages and abilities.

The building is of good quality and the school utilises all available space purposefully and for the benefit of pupils. The all-weather pitch, which allows safe outdoor play all year round, is very well used.

The recently developed outside area for nursery and reception pupils is a valuable resource which provides a variety of stimulating learning experiences. However, facilities for outdoor learning for older Foundation Phase pupils are not fit for purpose.

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

The leadership skills and vision of the headteacher have been key factors in bringing about substantial improvements in standards and provision in a very short time. Expectations are high and there is a shared commitment towards improving standards. Common values about learning, behaviour and relationships are shared by all teaching and support staff.

The senior leadership and management team have an active monitoring role in all aspects of school life, which bears directly on improving the quality of provision and the standards pupils achieve. Staff are fully involved in the formulation of aims and policies and their views are valued. This contributes substantially towards strategic management and the establishment of common practices across all classes.

Through their recent involvement in the school development plan and class visits, governors have become more aware of the priorities for school improvement. Data on pupils' attainment is scrutinised and trends in performance identified. However, these initiatives are in their early stages of development.

Local and national priorities are successfully incorporated into the school's programmes of work. Initiatives, such as assessment for learning, have contributed significantly to pupils' standards and progress.

Improving quality: Good

The headteacher has established a rigorous approach to self-evaluation and has overseen the establishment of a culture of robust and honest review to which all members of staff contribute.

Sources of evidence, which include assessment data, lesson observations and detailed analysis of pupils' work, are used effectively to monitor progress and to plan for improvement. The views of pupils, parents and the local authority are sought regularly and any suggestions made are given serious consideration. This process ensures increased improvement.

The school development plan is a collaborative effort involving all teaching staff. It is based on objective evidence and is closely linked with self-evaluation outcomes. The plan provides a clear strategic direction for the work of the school.

Members of the senior management team have played a leading role in establishing a strong and ambitious professional learning community within the local authority. Outcomes have been extremely positive and have led to significant improvements in assessment for learning strategies and in standards of speaking and listening. This is excellent practice.

Partnership working: Good

The school has a range of partnerships, which make a good contribution to pupils' learning experiences and wellbeing. Good links have been established with parents, individuals and organisations in the local community. There are good partnerships within the local family of schools and the nearby high school.

The close links with the local playgroup ensure that the transfer to the nursery class is effective. Well-planned transition arrangements with the local high school ensure there is appropriate progression and continuity in pupils' education as they move up from the primary school.

The moderation of pupils' work in English, mathematics and Welsh provides a better understanding amongst teachers of assessment methods and standards of achievement.

Resource management: Good

Staff and financial resources are managed and deployed effectively to support improvement.

The school is appropriately staffed to teach the curriculum effectively. Teaching and support staff are deployed well to make the best use of their time, expertise and experience.

Teachers make effective use of their planning, preparation and assessment time and arrangements for this are managed well.

Staff are very well supported by a comprehensive programme of continuous professional development, both in the school and off-site, linked to school priorities. Teachers share good practice and are willing to try out new ideas and different ways of working.

Effective and efficient use is made of all available resources. The financial implications of all priorities in the school development plan are regularly monitored. This ensures that all monies are spent wisely and in accordance with the school's targets.

Overall, outcomes for pupils are good and there is a trend of improvement. The school, therefore, provides good value for money.

Appendix 1

Commentary on performance data

At the end of Foundation Phase, during the past five years, the percentage of pupils who have reached the expected level 2 in the core subjects has, with very few exceptions, been in the lower 75% when compared with national benchmarks and with the relative performance of similar schools. Results in science were in the higher 50% of similar schools during the last academic year.

The results of key stage 2 pupils in three of the past five years have been mainly positive, with the percentage of pupils achieving the expected level 4 or above in the core subjects being in the higher 50% when compared with national benchmarks and with the relative performance of similar schools. Science, on two occasions, has been in the highest 25% of those for schools that are in the same family.

The proportion of pupils who achieved level 2 or above at the end of Foundation Phase in 2011 in English and mathematics was lower than the national benchmarks and the results of most of the schools in the same family. Science results were marginally above national benchmarks. The proportion of more able pupils who reached level 3 in English, mathematics and science was generally similar to the national benchmarks and the family of schools average.

In 2011 the proportion of pupils who achieved level 4 or above at the end of key stage 2 in mathematics and science was very similar to the national benchmarks and the family of schools' average. Results in English were lower. The proportion of more able pupils who reached level 5 in mathematics and science were above national benchmarks and the averages for the family of schools, but were lower in English.

Nearly all pupils, whatever their ability or background, make good progress through the school. Significant progress is made by the small group of pupils who learn English as an additional language. Girls and boys generally perform equally well.

Appendix 2

Stakeholder satisfaction report

Responses to parent questionnaires

Responses to parents' questionnaires:

Thirty-eight parents completed the questionnaire; nearly all responses were positive and supportive of the school. Without exception, all parents say that:

- overall they are satisfied with the school, that their child likes school and is expected to work hard and do his best;
- their child is helped to become more mature and take on responsibility and is well prepared for moving on to secondary education;
- they are kept well informed about their child's progress and are comfortable about approaching the school with questions, suggestions or complaints; and
- their child is encouraged to be healthy and to take regular exercise.

Nearly all say that:

- their child has settled down well, is making good progress and treated fairly and with respect;
- the school is well run and teaching is good;
- their child is safe at school, children behave well and are expected to do their best and to work hard; and
- homework builds well on what their child learns at school and there is a good range of activities including trips or visits.

These responses compare very favourably with the national benchmarks.

Responses to pupil questionnaires

Ninety-three key stage 2 pupils completed the questionnaires; most responses were positive. Most pupils say that:

- they are doing well at school, teachers and other adults help them to learn and make progress and that they know who to talk to if they are worried or upset; and
- the school teaches them how to be healthy and that there are numerous opportunities for them to keep healthy through regular exercise.

Many pupils say;

- they feel safe in school, that staff deal well with any bullying; and
- homework helps them to understand and improve their work and that there are enough books, equipment and computers for them to do their work.

A minority of pupils do not feel that other children behave well in class and during playtime and lunch.

The majority of pupil responses are similar to national benchmarks with the exception of those relating to pupils' views on homework, the supply of books and materials, the way the school deals with bullying and the behaviour of other children. In these aspects, the percentage of disagreement by pupils is at least 10% greater than national averages.

Appendix 3

The inspection team

Wil Williams	Reporting Inspector
Hazel Hughes	Team Inspector
Kerry Jones	Lay Inspector
Tim Redgrave	Peer Inspector
Tracey Howarth	School Nominee

Copies of the report

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

Under the Independent School Standards (Wales) Regulations 2003, the school must provide copies of the report to all parents of the school. Where a pupil is subject to placement by a local authority, a copy of the report should be sent by the school to each relevant authority.

Year groups 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 LEAs.

The term 'Reception' (FPR) refers to the year group of pupils in a primary school who reach the age of five during the academic year. FYear 1 refers to the year group of pupils who reach the age of six during the academic year and so on. Year 13 is the year group of students who reach the age of 18 during the academic year.

Primary phase:

Year	FPR	FPY1	FPY2	Y3	Y4	Y5	Y6
Ages	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 four key stages cover the following year groups:

Foundation Phase	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 – Primary

National Curriculum

Expected National Curriculum levels

- By the end of the key stage 1, at the age of seven, learners are expected to reach level 2 and the more able to reach level 3.
- By the end of the key stage 2, at the age of eleven, learners are expected to reach level 4 and the more able to reach level 5.

Core subject indicator in all key stages

The core subject indicator relates to the expected performance in English or Welsh first language, mathematics and science, the core subjects of the National Curriculum. Learners must gain at least the expected level in either English or Welsh first language together with mathematics and science to gain the core subject indicator.

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.