



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

**A report on**

**Ysgol Maesydderwen  
Tudor St  
Ystradgynlais  
SA9 1AP**

**Date of inspection: October 2017**

**by**

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

## About Ysgol Maesydderwen

Ysgol Maesydderwen is an 11-18 mixed comprehensive school maintained by Powys local authority. There are 503 pupils on roll compared with 540 at the time of the last inspection in November 2010. There are 81 students in the sixth form.

The school serves the small town of Ystradgynlais and the surrounding villages, which are former mining communities. Around 13% of pupils live in the 20% most deprived areas of Wales. Nearly 19% of the pupils are eligible for free school meals, which is above the Welsh average for secondary schools of 17.0%.

Most pupils come from English-speaking homes, with 9% stating that they speak Welsh at home, and around 8% of pupils being fluent in Welsh. Just over 2% of pupils receive support for English as an additional language.

The school has a specialist unit for pupils with Autism and learning difficulties. Currently, 22% of the pupils have additional learning needs with around 2% having statements of special educational needs. These figures are in line with national averages.

The senior leadership has remained stable since the last inspection. The headteacher has been in post since 2007 and the deputy headteacher since 2010.

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 Maesydderwen is a caring, community school. It promotes effectively its core values of respect and inclusivity, and supports all its pupils well. Pupils are proud and responsible members of the school community. In many lessons, pupils make suitable progress but, over the past few years, pupils have generally not made enough progress in key stage 4 in the indicators that include English and mathematics. Teaching has many strengths, though, in a majority of lessons, teachers' expectations are not always high enough. Leaders have been successful in securing improvements in many aspects of the school's work, such as attendance and the provision for pupils with additional learning needs, but have not had enough impact on improving standards and provision.

<b>Inspection area</b>	<b>Judgement</b>
<b>Standards</b>	<b>Adequate and needs improvement</b>
<b>Wellbeing and attitudes to learning</b>	<b>Good</b>
<b>Teaching and learning experiences</b>	<b>Adequate and needs improvement</b>
<b>Care, support and guidance</b>	<b>Good</b>
<b>Leadership and management</b>	<b>Adequate and needs improvement</b>

## **Recommendations**

- R1 Improve standards, particularly at key stage 4 and those of more able pupils, and improve pupils' independent learning skills
- R2 Improve the quality of teaching and assessment
- R3 Ensure that leaders at all levels evaluate accurately the effectiveness of their work and act swiftly to address aspects in need of improvement
- R4 Review examination entry policies in English, mathematics and Welsh so that all pupils have the opportunity to reach their full potential.
- R5 Work to reduce the deficit budget.

## **What happens next**

The school will draw up an action plan which shows how it is going to address the recommendations. Estyn will review the school's progress.

## Main findings

### **Standards: Adequate and needs improvement**

In many lessons, many pupils make suitable progress in their knowledge, understanding and skills. In a few particularly effective lessons and subjects, many pupils make strong progress. However, over the past four years, pupils have generally not made enough progress at key stage 4 in the indicators that include English and mathematics.

Most pupils display a positive attitude towards their learning and apply themselves well in lessons. Many recall prior learning suitably and apply new learning successfully, such as when describing work experience in Welsh lessons or when recalling and using French vocabulary.

Many pupils explain their viewpoints sensibly and clearly. A few pupils are particularly articulate and discuss their opinions on topics such as food poverty and migration issues maturely, supporting their points effectively. Despite their willingness to respond to questions, a minority of pupils do not extend their answers and give only short, underdeveloped responses. Most pupils listen attentively, and with respect, to their peers and teachers.

Many pupils have sound basic reading skills. They are able to locate and understand information competently, making good use of a variety of reading strategies to find out about topics such as the impact of volcanoes on different parts of the world or to consider the reliability of sources in history. A majority interpret texts suitably and a minority do so with sensitivity, for example when comparing and contrasting poems in English. However, a minority of pupils tend to interpret texts literally and do not analyse texts in enough depth and detail.

In general, many pupils make appropriate use of subject specific terminology and write suitably organised extended pieces in subjects across the curriculum. They have an appropriate understanding of audience and purpose and are able to write suitably in a variety of forms. For example, they compare methods of warfare during the Battle of Hastings and the Civil War in history or write about social and economic changes to the local area in geography. A few more able pupils have a sophisticated writing style and are able to vary sentence type and use vocabulary for effect skilfully. However, a minority of pupils, especially those of middle and lower ability, frequently misspell common words and fail to paragraph and punctuate their work appropriately.

Many pupils have an appropriate grasp of the main number skills but a minority have gaps in their understanding of other mathematical skills such as working with probability and shapes. Many pupils have a sound understanding of the main features of a graph and why different types of graphs are used. A majority are able to analyse data from various sources appropriately and come to sensible conclusions. However, in a minority of cases pupils draw graphs and diagrams inaccurately.

Most pupils develop their information and communication technology (ICT) skills appropriately across the curriculum. They are competent in their use of the internet

for research purposes and have a sound understanding of bias and reliability through their use of research logs. They also make effective use of ICT skills to complete homework and to support each other with their work through online class forums.

Many pupils engage enthusiastically in activities which develop their creative skills.

For example, they design, describe and create prototypes of confectionery whilst studying Roald Dahl's *Boy* in 'camau dysgu' lessons and design their own mathematics games in ICT. Pupils have also created their own films and completed a financial literacy project which involved a visit to the Royal Mint as part of a creativity project.

Many pupils display competent physical skills. For example, they display a secure understanding of how to maintain basic fitness in physical education lessons and develop their coordination skills well in their keyboard work in music.

While pupils are generally eager to do well in their studies, a majority have underdeveloped independent learning skills. For example, when writing, a minority of pupils are over-dependent on support from writing scaffolds and therefore do not develop their independent writing skills well enough. Similarly, these pupils depend too much on the teacher to provide strategies to solve numerical problems.

Performance in the level 2 indicator including English and mathematics has been variable over the past four years and dipped significantly in 2016. Performance in this indicator has been lower than that in similar schools for three of the past four years. Performance in the capped points score has been strong over the past three years and compares well with that in similar schools.

Over the past four years, the performance of both boys and girls in the indicators that include five grades A\*-C and 5 grades A\*-G has been strong and above that of boys and girls in similar schools. However, the performance of boys has generally been below that of boys in similar schools in the indicators that include English and mathematics. The performance of girls has generally been in line with that of girls in similar schools, apart from in mathematics and the level 2 indicator including English and mathematics.

The proportion of pupils gaining five or more GCSEs or equivalent at grades A\*-A has varied over the past four years but has generally been below that in similar schools. The proportion of girls gaining this indicator has been particularly weak in the last two years, and substantially lower than the performance of girls in similar schools.

The performance of pupils who are eligible for free school meals has been above the average for the same group of pupils in similar schools in many indicators in recent years. They have performed particularly strongly in the indicator that includes five GCSE grades or equivalent at A\*-A. However, over the past two years, their performance in mathematics has not compared well with that in similar schools.

Performance in the sixth form has declined over the past two years but has remained above the average in similar schools in terms of the average points score and the number of pupils gaining two or more A level grades at A\*-E. However, many pupils

do not make enough progress in many of the subjects offered in the sixth form. Performance in the indicator that includes 3 A level grades at A\*-C has been variable, but improved in 2017.

At the end of Year 11, nearly all pupils remain in education, employment or training.

At key stage 4, a majority of pupils achieve a level 2 GCSE qualification in Welsh as a second language and the small group of pupils who speak Welsh fluently are developing their Welsh language skills well. Many pupils display positive attitudes towards the language but lack confidence when speaking Welsh.

### **Wellbeing and attitudes to learning: Good**

Pupils are proud of attending Ysgol Maesydderwen and most contribute positively to the caring, community-based ethos that exists in the school. Most show high levels of respect towards other pupils, staff and visitors, and sixth form pupils provide particularly positive role models for younger pupils.

Many pupils develop well as ethical and informed citizens and have a strong awareness of fairness, equality and tolerance. For example, they have obtained status as a 'School of Sanctuary' for their work with Oxfam and Syrian refugees and as a 'Rights Respecting School' in a UNICEF programme to promote children's rights. Pupils also raise substantial amounts of money for local and national charities such as 'Macmillan' and 'Race for Life'. As a result, the pupils contribute valuably to the local and wider community.

Most pupils enjoy coming to school and appreciate the support and opportunities given to them.

Most pupils feel safe in school. They know to whom they can turn if they require help and feel that the school deals well with the very few instances of bullying.

Most pupils have positive attitudes to learning. In a few lessons, such as those when they improve their singing skills, pupils are particularly enthusiastic and eager learners. Most arrive promptly to lessons and maintain their concentration well. Many work effectively in groups and pairs, such as when designing and evaluating their own lineouts in physical education lessons.

Most pupils behave very well during lessons and around the school. However, in a few lessons a few pupils do not sustain their concentration well enough and are too easily distracted. In the past three years a very few pupils have not engaged positively with the school's ethos and expectations, and consequently the number of fixed term exclusions has increased.

Where opportunities arise, pupils take on leadership roles and responsibilities enthusiastically. These pupils play a full part in the life and work of the school, for example as members of the school council, digital leaders and sports ambassadors. In addition, sixth form pupils run numerous clubs for younger pupils. The school council makes a positive contribution to the life of the school, for example by influencing policies regarding behaviour and substance misuse and re-designing the school planners.

Most pupils have a sound understanding of how to keep healthy by eating a nutritious diet and undertaking physical exercise. A high proportion of pupils take an active part in the wide range of extra-curricular activities available in school, including dodgeball, gymnastics, rugby for boys and girls and mixed football.

### **Teaching and learning experiences: Adequate and needs improvement**

Although teaching has many strengths, overall, the quality of teaching is adequate and needs improvement.

Most teachers have positive and respectful working relationships with pupils and many have sound subject knowledge. In a few very effective lessons there is a particularly purposeful and constructive atmosphere. In these lessons, teachers have a comprehensive knowledge of the learning needs of individual pupils and provide tasks that challenge pupils of all abilities.

In many lessons, learning objectives are useful and teachers plan appropriately. Many provide helpful resources, a minority of which are of very high quality. A few make particularly effective use of digital resources, for example when modelling how to answer examination questions.

In a minority of lessons, teachers plan skilfully and provide a sequence of activities which build successfully on each other. In these lessons teachers have suitably high expectations and provide challenging activities which enable pupils of all abilities to make strong progress. In a very few lessons teachers provide valuable opportunities for pupils to work independently and learn for themselves. For example, when pupils develop a range of strategies for estimating the numbers in a crowd. However, in a majority of lessons, despite providing helpful activities, teachers' expectations of what pupils can achieve on their own are not high enough. In these lessons activities do not challenge pupils to think for themselves and teachers give pupils too much guidance. As a result, a minority of pupils have become over-dependent on this support.

Many teachers ask useful questions to check pupils' understanding and recall. A very few ask probing questions which encourage pupils to extend their answers, for example, when they ask pupils to predict the outcomes of chemical reactions and provide detailed reasons to support these.

In the majority of cases, teachers provide helpful feedback to pupils on their work. In a very few lessons teachers provide particularly constructive and valuable verbal feedback which enables pupils to make strong progress. However, the quality and usefulness of feedback varies too much, both within and across departments. In a minority of cases, advice for improvement is too general and does not concentrate sufficiently on subject-specific skills and knowledge.

In a minority of subjects pupils respond meaningfully to teachers' feedback and improve their work as a result. For example, they re-draft specific sections of work in history and English. However, teachers do not ensure that pupils respond consistently well across all subjects. In some cases pupils' responses are very superficial and in others they do not respond at all.

The curriculum at key stage 3 is broad and balanced and effective co-ordination with local primary schools ensures that it builds well on prior learning. The 'camau dysgu' integrated curriculum programme in Year 7 provides an appropriate foundation in a range of subjects, while ensuring a strong focus on literacy skills.

The key stage 4 and post-16 curriculum provides a balanced range of courses, and leaders use the findings from pupil surveys well to respond effectively to the needs of each cohort. Almost all students are entered for English, mathematics and Welsh GCSEs early. However a minority of pupils do not continue to study these subjects throughout Year 11. This limits their opportunities to reach their full potential and constricts the breadth of their experiences.

The school has recently expanded the vocational provision in the sixth form in order to provide relevant learning experiences for all sixth form pupils. These additional courses are a positive response to the needs of pupils, the local community and employers. The school now offers a broad range of suitable academic and vocational courses in the sixth form.

Many subject areas provide appropriate opportunities for pupils to develop their literacy skills across the curriculum. Many teachers develop pupils' literacy skills effectively although a few are not always accurate in their own use of language. Provision to develop pupils' numeracy skills is appropriate in about half the subjects which have been allocated to develop these skills. However, the level of challenge offered in numeracy tasks is inconsistent across these subjects. Teachers' approaches to teaching key concepts, such as graphs, are not consistent across all subject areas. This makes it confusing for pupils when they attempt to transfer their numeracy skills across the curriculum.

The school works well with local primary schools to co-ordinate planning for progression in pupils' ICT skills from key stage 2 into key stage 3 and pupils have worthwhile learning experiences in the majority of subjects.

Provision for Welsh enables pupils to make sound progress. The introduction of Welsh first language in Year 7 ensures appropriate progression opportunities for pupils transferring from a Welsh medium primary school. Welsh language and culture are given suitable prominence across the school through activities such as Shwmae/S'umai day.

### **Care, support and guidance: Good**

The school is an inclusive community at the heart of the locality it serves. Respect for each other and one's self are core values of the school. The school shows care and concern for all pupils and supports them well.

The school has successful strategies for securing, encouraging and sustaining high levels of pupil attendance. In addition, it deals effectively with the very few instances of bullying. It manages behaviour well by using 'restorative principles' to foster shared values of fairness and justice.

Staff in the 'learning centre' and the 'specialist teaching facility' support pupils with emotional and social needs well. The school has strong links with a range of outside

agencies such as mental health teams, psychologists, and police community support officers. In addition, all staff are trained in supporting vulnerable learners.

The personal and social education programme is a strong feature and helps pupils to lead healthy physical and emotional lives. This provision, as well as assemblies and registration sessions, helps to develop pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development well. A notable example is the provision in Year 7 for pupils to develop their self-esteem, resilience and decision making skills through, for example, activities where they learn about body language and how to deal with arguments which take place via social media.

The school provides beneficial healthy option meals in the canteen and has appropriate arrangements for healthy eating and drinking. It also provides plenty of worthwhile opportunities for sport and fitness activities. As a result, pupils have a sound understanding of how to keep fit and healthy. There is a suitable range of extra-curricular activities including numerous clubs, musical activities, and educational visits that enriches pupils' experiences. In many cases, these clubs are run by sixth form pupils. The school prepares pupils well for the world of work and for making informed choices about their future, including higher education.

The school has an appropriate system for tracking the academic progress of individuals and groups of pupils, at subject, year and whole school level. As a result, the school identifies underperformance suitably and provides targeted intervention for pupils experiencing problems. These interventions include the mentoring programme, the work of the 'tutor club', and programmes to improve literacy and numeracy skills. However, in general, interventions have not had enough impact on standards.

Providing opportunities for pupils to voice their opinion is a strength of the school. As well as the work of the school council and the eco committee, pupils have also worked with organisations such as Oxfam and UNICEF. These worthwhile initiatives help pupils understand the needs and rights of others, both locally and in the wider world. However the profile of these initiatives within the life of the school is too low and the discussions and decisions of pupil groups are not publicised well enough.

There are effective procedures to identify and support pupils with additional learning needs. Pupils' individual action plans are useful documents which include appropriate strategies to meet pupils' needs. The progress of pupils with additional learning needs is tracked suitably against their individual targets for improvement.

The specialist teaching facility provides valuable support for pupils on the autistic spectrum. These pupils participate fully in the life of the school and work well alongside their peers in mainstream classes. This enriches all pupils' experiences. The school assists parents well to support their children with their work. They provide valuable termly booklets outlining topics and tasks pupils will be studying in each subject. The school uses social media effectively to communicate with parents and they are welcomed into the school. Parents receive informative reports commenting on pupil progress in subjects and important attributes. However a few of the targets set for pupils are not sufficiently robust.

Safeguarding arrangements meet requirements and give no cause for concern.

## **Leadership and management: Adequate and needs improvement**

The headteacher provides assured and purposeful leadership. Together with an experienced senior leadership team, she communicates a clear vision and promotes shared aims and objectives. This approach has contributed successfully to the strong community ethos, supportive and engaging learning environment, and the high levels of wellbeing within the school. Leaders have also identified and responded effectively to the need for a wider variety of courses enhanced provision in the sixth form in order to meet the needs and interests of all learners. However, despite these strengths, leadership at all levels has not had sufficient impact on improving standards and the quality of provision.

The school operates efficiently on a day-to-day basis. Roles and responsibilities for all staff are defined clearly in detailed and specific job descriptions. Expectations and guidance for all areas of the school's work are communicated appropriately, for example through the school handbook, policy documents and a structured programme of meetings.

There are suitable line management systems to reinforce priorities and to monitor and quality assure the school's work. A recent restructuring of leadership at all levels is helping to provide an appropriate level of challenge, and promote team working and consistency of approach. Minutes of meetings between learning leaders and their line managers show a clear focus on pupil achievement and progress, and include appropriate action points which are generally followed up. However, there remains too much inconsistency in the effectiveness of a minority of middle leaders.

Performance management objectives include useful, measurable targets that relate directly to the quality of teaching and learning and to the specific responsibilities of members of staff. These targets help identify relevant professional development opportunities that reflect the school's priorities and staff's personal aspirations, and are, on the whole, suitably challenging. Leaders generally address issues of underperformance appropriately.

The school's self-evaluation and improvement planning systems are suitable and based on findings from a useful range of evidence. The school also seeks the views of pupils and parents on a variety of issues and uses this feedback increasingly effectively to influence aspects of the school's self-evaluation and improvement planning.

Senior leaders have a secure understanding of the school's relative strengths and areas for development based on an appropriate analysis of data. Middle leaders also evaluate their areas of responsibility suitably. However, leaders across the school are not sufficiently robust when evaluating particular aspects of their work, and a few key judgements are too generous.

Leaders produce useful 'at a glance development plans'. These summarise well the school's key priorities and those of individual learning areas. The plans include generally appropriate actions to address these priorities. However, a few performance targets are not sufficiently ambitious and a few important areas for improvement have not been addressed quickly enough.

Most staff participate in a worthwhile range of staff development activities. These include useful opportunities to share effective practice in specific aspects of teaching. This is beginning to have a positive impact on pupils' learning, such as in the development of their ICT skills.

There is a sufficient number of suitably qualified staff who are deployed efficiently. The accommodation, resources and engaging environment support pupils' learning well.

Members of the governing body show strong commitment and provide valuable support to the school. Governors have a secure understanding of the challenges the school faces, and its key priorities. Although the governors are suitably informed about key aspects of the school's work, their understanding of the school's performance is underdeveloped and they do not challenge areas of underperformance robustly enough.

The headteacher and governing body monitor the school's finances carefully. However, the school currently has an unlicensed deficit budget with significant projected deficits over the next three years. It has not produced an appropriate plan to reduce this deficit.

Specific budgets such as the pupil development grant are used appropriately and have led to improvements in the performance of particular groups of pupils, including those 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](http://www.estyn.gov.wales))

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

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