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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 Street  
Ystradgynlais  
Swansea  
SA9 1AP**

**Date of inspection: November 2010**

**by**

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



**INVESTORS | BUDDSODDWYR  
IN PEOPLE | MEWN POBL**

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:

<b>Judgement</b>	<b>What the judgement means</b>
<b>Excellent</b>	Many strengths, including significant examples of sector-leading practice
<b>Good</b>	Many strengths and no important areas requiring significant improvement
<b>Adequate</b>	Strengths outweigh areas for improvement
<b>Unsatisfactory</b>	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 Maesydderwen is an 11-18 mixed comprehensive school maintained by Powys local authority. There are 540 pupils on roll compared with 610 at the time of the last inspection in 2004. 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. Ystradgynlais is a designated Communities First project area. Just over 15% of the pupils are entitled to free school meals, which is above the local authority average and below the Welsh average for secondary schools of 17.1%.

Most pupils come from English-speaking homes, with only 7% stating that they speak Welsh at home, and around 8% of pupils are fluent in Welsh. Just over 1% of pupils receive support for English as an additional language. The full range of ability is represented in the school. Currently, 22% of the pupils have additional learning needs with around 4% having statements of special educational needs. These are above the local authority and national averages.

There have been significant changes in senior leadership since the last inspection. The deputy headteacher has been in post since September 2010. The school has also implemented staffing cuts due to a deficit budget.

The 2010-2011 individual school budget for Ysgol Maesydderwen is £4,024, which compares with a maximum of £4,555 and a minimum of £3,686 for secondary schools in Powys. The school has the fourth highest budget per pupil out of the 13 secondary schools in Powys.

## Summary

<b>The school's current performance</b>	<b>Adequate</b>
<b>The school's prospects for improvement</b>	<b>Good</b>

### Current performance

The school's current performance is adequate because:

- there has been an upward trend in the school's performance at key stage 3;
- many teachers have high expectations of pupils;
- pupils feel safe and well-supported in the school; and
- many teachers provide constructive oral and written feedback to pupils on their work.

However:

- results at key stage 4 have been inconsistent over recent years, and often below the average for similar schools on free-school-meals benchmarks; and
- the curriculum at key stage 4, and the sixth form, does not offer a broad range of vocational experiences.

### Prospects for improvement

The school has good prospects for improvement because of:

- the clear leadership, and high expectations, of the headteacher;
- the senior leadership team's clear understanding of areas for improvement;
- curriculum leaders' secure focus on improving pupil outcomes and the quality of teaching and learning; and
- robust arrangements for self-evaluation.

## Recommendations

In order to improve, the staff and governors of Ysgol Maesydderwen need to:

- R1 continue to improve standards across all key stages;
- R2 make sure that all departments use pupil performance data to inform planning;
- R3 ensure that all teachers match the work to pupils' needs;
- R4 develop the curriculum at key stage 4, and the sixth form, by extending vocational opportunities;
- R5 increase the use of incidental Welsh; and
- R6 continue to work closely with the local authority to reduce the deficit budget.

### **What happens next?**

The school will produce an action plan that shows how it will address the recommendations. Progress in addressing the recommendations will be monitored by the local authority.

## Main findings

### Key Question 1: How good are outcomes?

**Adequate**

#### Standards: Adequate

In 2010, the school's overall results, when compared to both the national and family averages, are better at key stage 3 than they are at key stage 4. While there has been a pattern of improvement at key stage 3 over the last three years, the results at key stage 4 have fluctuated.

In 2010, results in the core subject indicator at key stage 3 place the school in the top quarter of similar schools according to free-school-meals benchmarks, although over the last three years results have been below the family of schools and Wales averages. In 2010, pupils perform well in Welsh, science and mathematics when compared with similar schools. Results in English have improved and have been similar to the family average for the last two years. At level 6 and above, pupils perform above the family and national averages in all three core subjects. Pupils' progress from the previous key stage in 2010 is as expected, having been just below expectations for the previous two years.

In key stage 4 in 2010, the level 2 threshold including English or Welsh and mathematics is below the average for similar schools. In 2009, performance was much better than average, but the performance in 2008 was similar to that for 2010. This pattern is also reflected in the level 2 threshold, the core subject indicator and the average wider points score. Performance in 2010 in English and science is in the lowest quarter of that for similar schools according to free-school meals benchmarks and well below the average for the family of schools. However, the results in mathematics are above the average results for similar schools. Over the last three years, no pupil left school without a qualification, which is better than the family average. Pupils' progress from the previous key stages is generally as expected.

In the sixth form, the level 3 threshold and wider points score for 2009 were below the Wales average. However, the provisional 2010 results show that all 17-year-old students achieved the level 3 threshold, and this is above the Wales average. The school's average wider points score has improved since 2009 but it still remains below the Wales average.

The gap between the performance of boys and girls at key stage 3 has closed over the last three years. Although the difference is very small in mathematics and science, girls perform significantly better than boys in English and the difference is greater than the family and Wales averages. At key stage 4, girls perform significantly better than boys in the level 2 threshold including English or Welsh and mathematics. Over the last three years, pupils entitled to free school meals have performed well. Pupils with additional learning needs make the expected progress.

At the end of 2009-2010, nearly all key stage 4 pupils continued in full-time education by staying on in the sixth form, or by enrolling onto further education courses. This is

better than the local and national averages. There are no school leavers from Year 11 who are not in education, training or employment, compared with the Wales percentage of 5.7% and the local authority percentage of 2.1%. Over 70% of pupils went on to higher education after the sixth form.

In general, pupils make good progress in lessons. They demonstrate the relevant skills, knowledge and understanding that enable them to build on their learning. Many pupils transfer and apply their literacy skills well to enhance their learning across the curriculum. They listen well and read with understanding. They also write with technical accuracy and have an understanding of purpose and audience. Pupils' oral contributions make good use of the technical vocabulary that is relevant to the subject. Pupils who have basic skills needs, on entry to the school, make good progress.

In key stage 3, pupils' achievement in Welsh second language is good when compared with similar schools. However, for the small number of pupils taking Welsh first language, achievement has been in the bottom quarter for the last three years. At key stage 4, nearly all pupils follow the Welsh second language full course at GCSE, and achievements are good.

### **Wellbeing: Good**

Pupils feel safe and well-supported in the school. They feel that the school deals quickly and effectively with issues, including the few related to bullying. Pupils are developing a good understanding of healthy living and eating. The '5x60' physical activities programme offers a good range of activities during lunchtime and after school. They are well attended.

Pupils contribute well to many aspects of school life. The School Council helps to develop school policies, contributes to the process of appointing senior members of staff and members are represented on the school's governing body. Pupils participate well in charity and community work.

Pupils value the opportunities to give their views on relevant school issues. They often give these views through pupil questionnaires and the School Council. Pupils also respond well to opportunities for them to have a say on what and how they learn.

Pupils are motivated to do well and willingly engage in activities within the classroom. They display pride in their work and enjoy their lessons. Pupils have good skills in working together and problem solving.

There has been a significant improvement in attendance over the last three years and the school is in the top quarter of similar schools. Punctuality for lessons is good.

Behaviour is good and pupils show respect and care for others. Pupils are courteous and well-behaved around the school. Only one pupil has been permanently excluded since 2005. The number of fixed-term exclusions compares favourably to national figures.

<b>Key Question 2: How good is provision?</b>	<b>Good</b>
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### **Learning experiences: Adequate**

The school offers a broad and appropriate range of learning opportunities throughout the key stages. However, the provision of vocational experience in key stage 4 and the sixth form is limited. The new National Curriculum requirements at key stage 3 are firmly in place, and transition arrangements ensure that the curriculum builds on pupils' existing knowledge and understanding gained in their primary schools.

At key stage 4, the curriculum has quickly broadened to fully meet the Learning and Skills (Wales) Measure by offering a wider range of courses, including those as the result of collaboration with other providers. In the sixth form, there is a relatively narrow range of courses on offer, particularly vocational routes. The school provides many extra-curricular opportunities for pupils to enrich their experiences.

The delivery of skills is inconsistent across the key stages. At key stage 3, there is a suitable range of strategies to develop continuity and progression in skill development, including basic skills. At key stage 4 and post-16, teachers identify the skills that underpin learning, but the monitoring and progression of them is inconsistent.

The school promotes effectively pupils' understanding of the Welsh dimension through the curriculum and a variety of school events. A good feature of the school's provision is that most pupils learning Welsh as a second language are entered for the full course at GCSE. There are opportunities to use Welsh outside Welsh lessons. However, these aspects are underdeveloped.

The school provides some opportunities for pupils to learn about sustainable development and global citizenship. The school's eco-committee raises awareness of sustainability issues, and the school is helping pupils to understand about global citizenship by developing their links with the local community and places in other parts of the world. However, the work is not well co-ordinated and too little attention is given to global citizenship.

### **Teaching: Good**

Most teachers have good subject knowledge and plan their lessons well to ensure that pupils progress effectively through the key stage 3 and key stage 4 curriculum. Many teachers have high expectations and establish good relationships with pupils that foster learning. Lessons are well-structured, and a good range of learning resources is used to stimulate pupil interest and to develop relevant skills, knowledge and understanding. Health and safety issues are appropriately addressed by teachers in practical lessons such as design and technology and science. Learning support staff are used effectively in lessons to support pupils with additional learning needs.

In a few lessons, teachers do not allow enough time to review lesson objectives and to establish the extent of pupils' learning. Also in a few lessons, the work is not well

matched to the different needs of pupils and expectations are not as high as they should be.

Many teachers provide constructive oral and written feedback to pupils on their work. These comments provide guidance to pupils on what they need to do to improve the work. Many teachers regularly ask open ended questions that encourage pupils to think carefully before they offer their responses to the questions.

There is a common system in place for all departments to track and record pupil progress across all key stages. All departments analyse National Curriculum assessment and examination results thoroughly, but in a few departments this information is not being used well enough to improve standards. Parents are kept well-informed of their children's achievement and progress through the termly and annual reports.

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

The school provides a high level of care. It has very good arrangements for ensuring that Year 7 pupils settle in well. The school identifies pupils' needs when they join and ensures that these needs are met. Targeted support for groups of pupils across the school has resulted in significant improvements in outcomes and attitudes to learning.

The school has an appropriate policy and procedures for safeguarding pupils and responds quickly and effectively to concerns regarding pupils' wellbeing. Provision for personal and social education is very good and has a positive impact on the health and wellbeing of the pupils.

Pupils, parents and carers receive detailed advice and guidance on the available support at the school, and how it can be accessed. However, parents and pupils are not as well-informed as they should be about post 14 options. There is suitable provision for learning coach support for 14 to 19-year-olds.

The school successfully promotes pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.

The school has developed a successful policy with effective procedures for promoting good behaviour. This includes a wide range of rewards and sanctions.

The involvement of external agencies in personal and health provision is a strong feature of the school. The school also works well in partnership with external agencies and specialist services to ensure that the needs of pupils are met. Pupils with additional learning needs receive good support and are involved in all aspects of school life. However, the process of setting targets for pupils with additional learning needs and reviewing progress is not fully embedded in all departments. The well-qualified team of learning support assistants provide very good support for pupils with additional learning needs. Parents are kept well-informed and are fully involved with their child's education.

## **Learning environment: Good**

Through the personal and social education programme, and relevant policies and procedures, the school is effectively promoting equality and social diversity. The equal opportunity and diversity policy has been updated to ensure that all staff and pupils are fully aware of the legislation that relates to the rights of minority ethnic pupils. The very few incidents of bullying in the school are dealt with promptly and appropriately.

The recent new buildings provide a stimulating learning environment that is valued by the staff and pupils. Pupils have had the opportunity to contribute to the design of the next phase of the building programme. Pupils also have access to a suitable range and quality of learning resources. The school grounds are well-maintained and toilet facilities are kept clean and tidy. Pupils have good access to sports facilities at the school.

<b>Key Question 3: How good are leadership and management?</b>	<b>Good</b>
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## **Leadership: Good**

The headteacher and senior leaders form a strong, coherent and effective team that is fully committed to school improvement. They have an honest and realistic view of the school's strengths and weaknesses, and have set out clear priorities for improvement. Recently, the school has improved its use of performance information and introduced more specific target setting for subject teams and individual pupils. Senior managers have high expectations of staff and pupils, and this is communicated effectively. Roles and responsibilities at all levels are clearly defined and well-understood. There is a common purpose and a secure focus on improving pupil outcomes and the quality of teaching and learning.

Many curriculum managers fulfil their role efficiently and contribute well to improving standards and provision. However, a few do not yet have enough impact on pupils' standards and progress. Pastoral leaders support pupils well and have recently increased their role in monitoring and tracking pupils' achievements and progress.

Performance management arrangements are well-established and focus appropriately on delivering the school's priorities and plans. They help tackle underperformance and lead, together with improvement plans, to professional development activities.

Governors are supportive, well-informed about the work and performance of the school, and actively involved in setting the strategic direction. They make good use of the information, including performance data, to carry out their role in monitoring and challenging the school.

The school takes full account of national and local priorities which feature prominently in policies and improvement plans. It has responded well to Welsh Assembly Government current priorities, including Learning Pathways 14-19, improving literacy and numeracy and the School Effectiveness Framework.

### **Improving quality: Good**

The school has robust and systematic arrangements for self-evaluation that are focused strongly on accountability and challenge. The school's self-evaluation report is accurate and securely based on evidence, and outlines a clear picture of the school's strengths and weaknesses.

Leaders and managers analyse data and information from a good range of sources thoroughly. They make good use of first-hand evidence of the quality of teaching and learning, including external reviews by the local authority and advisory services, to inform self-evaluation.

The school has rigorous systems for monitoring pupils' wellbeing and is developing good processes for collecting and analysing the views of pupils. This has resulted in improved attendance, and in better arrangements to ensure that the School Council operates more effectively in contributing to school improvement.

Development plans are firmly based on the outcomes of self-evaluation. They have detailed success criteria and clear, challenging targets. There are systematic links between whole school plans and departmental plans with all focusing on improving outcomes for learners. Senior leaders monitor and review these plans regularly and effectively. However, a few middle leaders do not analyse pupil outcomes rigorously enough to raise standards effectively.

The school is active and effective in addressing areas for development. All staff are clear about the school's priorities for improvement. Teachers' professional development, identified through performance management, links well to whole school development. Many middle leaders have benefited from leadership training, which has helped them to develop their areas of responsibility.

Leaders and managers take good account of the views of staff to design improvement strategies. There are many well-structured opportunities for teachers to share and explore their professional knowledge.

There is a clear awareness amongst staff of the need to raise standards through more effective teaching. Lesson observations by the school and local authority show that prioritising the development of learning strategies has had a positive impact on the quality of teaching. These initiatives, however, have yet to impact fully upon pupil outcomes.

### **Partnership working: Good**

The school works very well with the community groups and agencies, often taking a lead role, where appropriate. It plays an important part and makes a substantial contribution to the Communities First work. Many local agencies and groups see the school as being a key and vital partner in their work. Working relationships are very positive and productive. The school's involvement with community agencies has contributed significantly to improving pupils' wellbeing and engagement in education and training.

Relationships with parents are good. Parents are well-informed about the work of the school and of the progress and achievements of their children. They find it straightforward to approach the school where necessary. Attendance at parent meetings about pupils' progress is particularly high.

The school works very well with its partner primary schools as part of the local cluster arrangements. Key stage 2 and key stage 3 assessment arrangements have helped to improve curriculum continuity in the National Curriculum core subjects.

The school plays a full role in 14-19 developments in the local authority area, including the school modernisation programme that is concerned with post-16 provision. This partnership working has helped to increase the number of options at key stage 4. There are formal agreements between the school and other providers at post-16 to address the currently limited provision and meet the requirements of the Learning and Skills (Wales) Measure for this age group.

There are well-developed working arrangements with a wide range of agencies, including health and social services.

### **Resource management: Adequate**

The school manages its resources well. There are good systems to ensure that funding is directed towards strategic priorities. There is a robust and transparent system for the allocation and review of capitation. Leaders and managers ensure that development plans are costed efficiently and monitored carefully to ensure that spending is in line with the school's financial planning. There are clear links between the school budget, and the school's strategic and development plans and priorities are focused strongly on improving outcomes for learners.

The school deploys staff effectively and efficiently. The school has restructured the senior and middle leadership so that staffing structure is more effectively focused on raising pupil outcomes. Leaders and managers organise meeting time well to focus on school priorities.

The school has a decreasing deficit budget which is approved by the local authority. It is working effectively with the local authority to manage the budget successfully.

Overall, the school provides adequate value for money. The school manages its resources carefully to secure improvement. Pupils are well cared for and supported in their learning; attendance and behaviour are good, and the school contributes positively to pupils' wellbeing, but standards are adequate.

There is good participation at post-16, but class sizes are too small to be viable. The sixth form, therefore, does not provide good value for money.

## **Appendix 1**

### **Stakeholder satisfaction report**

#### **Responses to parent questionnaires**

Estyn received 124 completed questionnaires from parents / carers. The vast majority expressed positive views about the school. Responses show that pupils are well-supported as they settle in at the school, and are making good progress as they progress through the key stages. Nearly all parents feel that staff have high expectations and that they relate well to the pupils. They also value the homework that is given. Many parents say that they are kept well-informed about their child's progress, although a few disagree. Nearly all parents feel comfortable about approaching the school if they have any questions or concerns, and they feel that the school is well run.

#### **Responses to learner questionnaires**

Estyn received responses from 132 pupils, selected at random from across the age range. Many pupils feel safe in school, although 20% of pupils indicated that they did not feel safe. A similar percentage of pupils feel that the school does not deal well with issues of bullying. Most pupils feel that they are doing well at school and that the teachers help them to make good progress and deal with any problems that occur. A minority of pupils feel that, on occasion, they are not able to do their work because of poor behaviour. Most pupils say that they are encouraged to take on responsibilities and are well-prepared to move on to the next phase of their learning. A minority (37%) of pupils in Year 10 and 11 did not feel that they were given good advice when choosing their courses in key stage 4.

## Appendix 2

### The inspection team

Ray Owen HMI	Reporting Inspector
Sarah Lewis HMI	Team Inspector
Meinir Rees HMI	Team Inspector
Julie Ann Price	Lay Inspector
Keith Maher	Peer Inspector
Joe Taffurelli	School Nominee

## Copies of the report

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## 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' (R) refers to the year group of pupils in a primary school who reach the age of five during the academic year. Year 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	R	Y1	Y2	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:

Key stage 1	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