

Inspectors' report is another milestone on the way to becoming an "exceptional school"



The “inspirational leadership” of a headteacher has transformed the fortunes of a high school.

Ann Webb was singled out for praise by school inspectors from Estyn for galvanising teachers and pupils at Ysgol John Bright in Llandudno.

According to Mrs Webb, the report was another milestone on the way to becoming a “truly exceptional school”.

The huge progress made already has resulted in Ysgol John Bright, which has 1,200 pupils, being removed from the list of schools requiring significant improvement.

The official confirmation would have come a lot earlier had the inspection not been understandably delayed by the onset of the pandemic last year.

The improvements have been achieved during the most difficult 18 months that schools have ever faced after Covid-19 struck.

It was, she said, a massive team effort by staff, pupils, parents, governors and other stakeholders.

Mrs Webb said: “I would like to pay tribute to everybody who has played an important role in improving standards so dramatically, but the real heroes of this story are our brilliant pupils.

“The Coronavirus pandemic has presented schools with unprecedented challenges, and we’ve had the most difficult 18 months that education has ever seen and that the whole country has experienced.

“What’s really pleased me is the way that this school has not only worked really hard to keep children safe - and the report does recognise that - but that we have also continued on the school’s improvement journey and continued to drive up standards in the school.

“We were already on this upwards trajectory in 2019 and we were showing very strong improvement, as the report demonstrated.

“The pandemic has meant that we have had to wait much longer for official confirmation of the huge progress we’ve made than would otherwise have been the case.

“Having said that, we really do welcome the engagement we’ve had with Estyn over this last 18 months, and we are grateful to them for conducting this monitoring inspection.

“The team has focused on putting the learners at the centre of everything that we’ve done, so throughout lockdown they’ve been really keen to make sure that they offer live teaching and ensure that children’s education hasn’t been disadvantaged.

“Luckily, we were already ahead of the curve in terms of technology and the use of Google Classroom which streamlines the process of sharing files between teachers and students.

“Our pupils and teachers were used to using it and this meant the transition to online lessons was a lot easier.

“At the same time, we made sure that children had digital devices right from the start so, if there was any digital disadvantage, we identified this and we made sure that all of those children had a device. We gave out over 150 devices during the different phases of the lockdown.

“Meanwhile, the Behaviour and Wellbeing team and the Directors of Learning made sure that they kept in contact with families who may need additional support.

“All of this meant we were able to build on the improvements we had already made before the pandemic as part of our long-term strategy that’s not based on quick fixes, but rather on sustainable, long term success.

“What’s made all of this possible is a collaborative culture that’s now embedded as part of the school’s ethos, working with parents, governors and the wider community.

“We’re also blessed with a fantastic team of teachers, and I have also been able to recruit more excellent staff over the last five years who’ve really strengthened this community.

“We provide a rounded education that’s focused on the wellbeing of our learners, whilst at the same time driving up academic standards which have improved year on year.

“But be assured we are we’re not resting on our laurels. We are continuing on our journey to becoming an exceptional school. The future is bright at Ysgol John Bright.”

“That’s borne out by the conclusion of the Estyn report which says: “Since September 2018, the school has introduced a number of whole-school strategies to improve the quality of lesson planning and teaching.

“This has led to a coherent and consistent approach to planning and teaching during this challenging period.

“The headteacher has provided clear direction, robust accountability and beneficial support to enable middle leaders to carry out their roles effectively.

“Over time, and in particular since the first national lockdown in March 2020, she has been successful in communicating with staff, promoting collaboration between faculties and supporting the wellbeing of the whole-school community.

“As a result, she has galvanised the staff, created an open, supportive ethos for professional learning and secured a safer, more caring environment than previously was the case.”

Mrs Webb has a track record of success in implementing major school improvements.

In her previous job at Eaton Bank Academy, in Congleton, in Cheshire, her leadership as the headteacher was described as “outstanding” by inspectors from Ofsted, England’s equivalent of Estyn.

The chair of the governors, Carla Forfar, said Ysgol John Bright had benefited from those same qualities.

She said: “Ann Webb is a wonderful headteacher and her leadership has been nothing short of inspirational, particularly during the incredibly difficult time we have all experienced over the past 18 months.

“Rather than go for a quick fix, she has implemented root and branch changes that are bearing fruit and will continue to do so in the long term.

“I am delighted that the Estyn report has now confirmed something that we already knew – that Ysgol John Bright is a great school and we can look forward to the future with confidence.”