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

A report on

Phillipstown Primary School
Cefn Rhychdir Road
Phillipstown
New Tredegar
NP24 6XE

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by

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

About Phillipstown Primary School

Philipstown Primary School is in Philipstown, New Tredegar, in the Caerphilly local authority.

Currently, there are 131 pupils on roll, aged from 3 to 11, including 21 nursery pupils who attend on a part-time basis. There are four mixed-age classes at the school. The three-year rolling average of pupils eligible for free school meals is 41%, which is well above the national average of 18%. The school identifies around 17% of pupils as having additional learning needs, which is slightly lower than the national average 21%. Nearly all pupils are from a white British background. No pupils speak Welsh at home.

The school is currently a pioneer school and is working with the Welsh Government and other schools to take forward developments relating to education reform in Wales.

The acting headteacher was appointed in November 2017. The school's last inspection was in February 2012. The substantive headteacher, who is on secondment to the regional consortium, returned to school for the period of the inspection.

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

The school delivers exciting learning experiences that engage pupils well. As a result, many pupils make good progress from their individual starting points. Most pupils enjoy coming to school and they are proud of their school. The school supports the development of pupils' wellbeing successfully. Provision for pupils with additional learning needs is effective and has a positive effect on their attitudes to learning. Many pupils take on a wide range of responsibilities that successfully promote their self-esteem and life skills.

The acting headteacher and acting deputy headteacher have supported staff and pupils well through a period of considerable staffing instability. However, there are shortcomings in aspects of the school's leadership and management, particularly in relation to school improvement. Governors are supportive of the school, but they do not challenge the school well enough and their role in strategic development is limited.

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

Recommendations

R1 Ensure that the processes for self-evaluation and improvement planning focus sharply on the standards pupils achieve and the progress they make

R2 Ensure that teaching challenges and meets the needs of all pupils, including the more able

R3 Raise standards in Welsh

R4 Improve pupils' attendance

What happens next

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

Main findings

Standards: Good

Many pupils enter the school with skills that are below those expected for their age. As they move through the school, many make good progress, including those with additional learning needs. However, more able pupils do not always make as much progress as they could in a few classes.

In the foundation phase, many pupils develop effective communication skills. They listen carefully to staff and each other and contribute sensibly to class discussions. Many read well and develop an appropriate understanding of the link between letters and sounds. By the end of the phase, many older pupils develop effective writing skills. For example, they produce competent descriptions of sea creatures from the story 'Commotion of the Ocean'.

In key stage 2, many pupils speak confidently and make sensible contributions to class discussions. They work well together and respect each other's views. For example, older pupils make perceptive responses as they discuss the merits of animal testing. Many pupils in key stage 2 have positive attitudes to reading and show a good understanding of what they read. Older pupils in Year 6 discuss texts and identify themes confidently in books that they are reading. Many pupils write well in a suitable range of styles. They know how to use a range of writing techniques to improve their descriptions. Many older pupils produce effective extended pieces of written work, use punctuation appropriately and organise their writing well. For example, they create stimulating research work on fossils and international space stations. Many pupils apply their literacy skills well in a range of work across the curriculum.

Throughout the school, many pupils have positive attitudes to Welsh. By Year 2, many use simple phrases and basic vocabulary. By Year 6, the majority of pupils respond to simple questions. However, across the school, many pupils lack confidence in speaking Welsh outside of designated Welsh lessons.

In the foundation phase, many pupils develop their mathematical skills well. By Year 2, many count effectively and develop effective mental skills based on a sound understanding of place value. Many apply their mathematical skills well in a range of activities across the curriculum. For example, they compare the weight of dinosaurs using appropriate weighing scales. Many pupils continue to make strong progress through key stage 2. By Year 6, many apply suitable calculation strategies using the four rules of number to solve problems. Older pupils in Year 6 use their data-handling skills successfully to create line and bar charts in science.

Most pupils develop a wide range of information and communication technology (ICT) skills. For example, in the foundation phase, nursery pupils explore programmable toys confidently. In the reception class, many pupils select tools and colours independently when using a drawing program to create imaginative images, such as colourful monsters. By the end of the foundation phase, most pupils use a green screen to produce effective videos on the daily life of an archaeologist.   Many pupils in key stage 2 use their ICT skills successfully to present information in a

variety of interesting ways, for example, through videos, spreadsheets and presentation packages. Younger pupils in the key stage work collaboratively to create a persuasive letter to stop animal testing. By the end of key stage 2, most older pupils apply their ICT skills confidently in a range of contexts. Throughout the school, most pupils show a good awareness of how to keep safe online.

Wellbeing and attitudes to learning: Good

Most pupils enjoy coming to school and they know whom to talk to if they are worried or upset. They are confident that staff will deal with their concerns effectively. Nearly all pupils and adults have positive working relationships and this creates a warm and friendly environment.

Most pupils behave well in lessons and around the school. They are polite and well mannered, greet adults happily and show courtesy to others. Most share equipment in class and on the yard supportively and act responsibly to keep themselves and others safe. Most pupils interact well with pupils outside of their usual classes during 'Flip It Up' enrichment activities.

Most pupils have a secure understanding of how to stay safe when using the internet and older pupils appreciate the need to protect their identity online. Many pupils understand the need to eat and drink healthily and to take regular exercise. They organise their own fruit tuck shop successfully and many benefit from taking part in the range of physical activities that the pupils themselves organise. For example, they run on the yard each day during break times. The 'iActive' pupil voice group encourages pupils to participate at strategic stations on the school yards in such activities as cheerleading, netball and parachute games.

Most pupils are proud of their school and the roles they play within it. They have a wide range of opportunities to engage in various pupil voice groups, which together make up a strategic executive committee, called 'iVoice'. These groups work closely with adults to plan and to deliver events for other pupils and parents. For example, the 'iTech' group delivers internet safety assemblies for pupils and parents to ensure that pupils keep themselves safe online.

From an early age, most pupils show positive attitudes towards their work. They engage fully in lessons and they show an enthusiasm for learning. For example, younger pupils in the foundation phase eagerly demand the return of 'Buzz Lightyear' to their classroom. Most pupils demonstrate resilience when completing tasks independently and approach new and challenging topics and ideas with enthusiasm. Pupils ask suitable questions to deepen their understanding and they display these on the school 'iWonder' learning walls.

Many pupils respond positively to the school's focus on improving attendance and they understand the importance of attending school regularly. However, over the last three years, attendance levels have remained lower than those in similar schools. Most pupils are punctual at the start of the day.

Teaching and learning experiences: Good

Teachers explain work well and question pupils skilfully in order to assess their understanding and to promote their thinking skills. Their interactions with pupils reflect the high value that they place on developing and maintaining pupils' wellbeing. Staff manage pupils' behaviour well. A very effective and committed team of support staff contributes purposefully to the work of teachers in classes and in specific intervention groups. Teachers give pupils constructive feedback and, as a result, many pupils have a clear understanding of how to improve their work. There are regular opportunities for pupils to reflect on their own and others' work. In a few cases, where teaching is less effective, teachers do not have high enough expectations of pupil achievement, particularly in relation to the more able, and they do not adapt the work to meet pupils' needs well enough.

The curriculum provides a wide range of learning experiences for pupils so that they engage successfully in their learning. Teachers incorporate the four purposes of the new curriculum into their planning appropriately and pupils have purposeful opportunities to contribute to the topics they study. Teachers plan creative and innovative approaches. For example, the school has introduced 'Bear Grylls' in science, 'dino detectives' in the foundation phase and astronaut day as part of numeracy work in Years 3 and 4. Their lessons take good account of pupils' existing knowledge and understanding as they move through the school. In key stage 2, for example, purposeful planning of themes and topics, with real-life contexts in technology and science, engages pupils' interest well. For instance, pupils learn about astronauts' experiences in space and the work of archaeologists. In addition, visitors from the local Winding House lead archaeology workshops for pupils.

Planning for the development of pupils' literacy and numeracy skills is effective and takes careful account of the national frameworks. The school is developing its provision to meet the requirements of the digital competency framework well. Pupils have begun to explore new aspects of ICT, such as coding and the use of programmable robots.

Staff have established the principles of the foundation phase in their own practice successfully. Teachers plan interesting learning experiences for pupils indoors and outdoors. For example, pupils in the nursery and reception classes prepare a stimulating film on pirates as part of their work on 'iWonder'. Throughout the foundation phase, teachers ensure a beneficial balance of teacher-led and child-led, independent learning activities.

The school ensures that pupils have good opportunities to learn about their locality and the culture and heritage of Wales. For example, the school celebrates St David's and St Dwynwen's Days and pupils regularly contribute to Welsh history workshops. There are annual residential visits to the Urdd centre at Llangrannog. However, there are too few opportunities for pupils to use and improve their Welsh skills outside of designated Welsh lessons.

Care, support and guidance: Good

The school is a caring, supportive and inclusive community where nearly all pupils feel that staff treat them fairly and with respect. Staff know pupils well and create a

nurturing ethos that helps to build pupils' confidence and self-esteem. There is an increasing emphasis on developing pupils' understanding of their human rights and this is having a positive impact on their behaviour and attitudes.

The school has developed an appropriate system to track pupils' progress and wellbeing. Teachers are beginning to use this information effectively to identify and to support those pupils who are at risk of underachieving.

Provision for pupils with additional learning needs is good. Appropriately-trained staff deliver a suitable range of intervention programmes to improve targeted pupils' literacy, numeracy and emotional skills. For example, the structured reading and writing programmes in key stage 2 have a significant, positive impact on pupils' progress. Parents and pupils engage fully in planning and reviewing individual education plans. Staff adapt interventions, where possible, to meet the circumstances of individual families and they provide valuable additional support for parents. There are effective links with a variety of external agencies and the school shares its effective practices with other schools in the local authority.

The school has established a range of worthwhile pupil groups, which help to improve aspects of school life. Pupils have a strong voice in the school and they feel that school leaders listen to them well. For example, various pupil groups are successful in encouraging pupils' physical activity, improving the school environment and supporting pupil and parent ICT skills. Visitors to the school and school governors provide additional, positive role models for the pupils and share real-life experiences of citizenship. For example, elected local officials visit the school to talk about their role in local government.

The school has effective arrangements for promoting healthy eating and drinking. Regular physical education sessions, including the daily mile and a wide range of extra-curricular sports, such as football and netball, provide worthwhile opportunities for pupils to enjoy the benefits of a healthy lifestyle. The 'iActive' committee encourages sporting activities and an active lifestyle for all pupils well.

Staff ensure that pupils benefit from many opportunities to develop their creative skills. For example, pupils participate in drama and musical workshops and they perform their dance showcase at the Blackwood Miners' Institute. Older pupils have beneficial opportunities to create and produce their own animated films.

The school develops pupils' spiritual, moral and social development effectively. It promotes respect and tolerance well through planned lessons, pupils' voice groups and charity events. The school also encourages pupils to understand about equality, diversity and global issues appropriately. For example, it has taken a leading role in the Global Learning Programme of Wales. This is helping to raise pupils' awareness of world poverty and sustainability effectively.

The family engagement programme is a strong feature of the school. Staff work closely with parents and encourage them to attend 'Flip It Up Friday' sessions with their children so that they can engage with them in learning experiences on a range of themes. Pupils and parents also have opportunities to develop their creative, technological and cooking skills in purposeful joint sessions.

The school's arrangements for safeguarding pupils meet requirements and give no cause for concern.

Leadership and management: Adequate and needs improvement

Over the last year, a period of instability and staffing disruption has posed many challenges for the leadership and management of the school. The acting headteacher has worked appropriately with the acting deputy headteacher, seconded from another school, to address these and has placed pupils' wellbeing at the centre of the school's work. Staff and governors share this vision and succeed in creating an inclusive community for pupils.

Regular staff meetings help to create a suitable team ethos. An important focus of the meetings has been the development of adults' ICT skills and this is contributing well to pupils' standards in ICT.   However, these meetings do not always generate clear action points and this makes it difficult for leaders to monitor whether agreed actions have been successfully achieved.

Leaders have a suitable track record of introducing improvements. For example, they have developed a pupil tracking system and improved opportunities for family learning through events such as the forest school. In addition, standards in reading for targeted pupils have improved markedly, with many pupils increasing their reading age significantly.

Self-evaluation processes are developing appropriately and leaders consider a range of evidence, such as learning walks, lesson observations and the scrutiny of pupils' books. Subject leaders produce useful monitoring reports in areas such as literacy and numeracy. However, senior leaders are not always clear enough about the school's performance and the levels of progress that pupils are making across the school.

The school's self-evaluation processes identify many of the school's strengths and areas for improvement appropriately, but the analysis of the findings from self-evaluation is too generous at times and lacks rigour. The school development plan identifies a manageable number of areas for improvement. However, it does not identify clear time scales or persons responsible for carrying out important actions. Priority areas tend to lack focus and tend not to reflect the outcomes of the school's self-evaluation well enough. As a result, the school has made limited progress in meeting its key priorities over the last year.

The performance management process is appropriate and generally links closely to priorities identified in the school's development plans. However, at present, it is difficult for the process to operate effectively because of the significant changes in staffing.

The acting headteacher ensures that all staff receive beneficial professional learning opportunities. Training opportunities link effectively with the school's development plan. Support staff attend staff meetings and have worthwhile opportunities to access suitable training. The work of support staff has a positive impact on pupils' wellbeing and their progress, for example by developing pupils' creative skills in the forest school. There are suitable opportunities for members of staff to work with other schools. For example, the acting deputy headteacher has led training opportunities internally and in other schools and has focused on the effective and innovative use of digital learning.

The school addresses national and local priorities well, particularly through initiatives to reduce the impact of poverty on pupils' educational achievement. In addition, plans to implement the digital competency framework are developing successfully and this is having a positive impact on pupils' ICT skills.

Members of the governing body are supportive of the school. They visit the school regularly, receive appropriate reports from the headteacher, review financial matters purposefully and take part in self-evaluation processes. However, they do not have a clear enough understanding of the school's strengths and areas for development and their role in strategic development is currently limited.

The school manages its budget effectively. Expenditure decisions link closely to the school's priorities for improvement. The school uses the pupil development grant well to support vulnerable pupils, for example by developing their literacy skills through successful intervention programmes.

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.

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