



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

A report on

Irfon Valley C.P. School

**Garth
Llangammarch Wells
Powys
LD4 4AT**

Date of inspection: June 2022

by

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

About Irfon Valley C.P. School

Name of provider	Irfon Valley C.P. School
Local authority	Powys County Council
Language of the provider	English
Type of school	Primary
Religious character	
Number of pupils on roll	32
Pupils of statutory school age	32
Number in nursery classes	n/a
Percentage of pupils eligible for free school meals over a three-year average (The national percentage of pupils eligible for free school meals over a three-year average in [SECTOR] is [xx]%)	11.1%
Percentage of pupils identified as having additional learning needs (a) (The national percentage of pupils identified as having an additional learning need in [SECTOR] is [xx]%)	6.25%
Percentage of pupils who speak Welsh at home	*
Percentage of pupils with English as an additional language	*
Date of headteacher appointment	01/09/2020
Date of previous Estyn inspection (if applicable)	08/10/2013
Start date of inspection	13/06/2022
This information differs slightly to the PLASC information shown elsewhere, due to the fact that PLASC figures include nursery provision, which is not part of the school and was not inspected in this inspection	

Data reported is sourced from the latest available Pupil Level Annual School Census. These figures may be slightly different to those observed during the inspection.

Further information is available from the Welsh Government My Local School website: mylocalschool.gov.wales

- a. The term 'additional learning needs' is being used to describe those pupils on the SEN/ALN register of the school.

Overview

This is a caring and nurturing small school that knows its pupils well.

Pupils feel safe and happy at the school. They behave well in lessons and around the school and respect their teachers and peers. Most pupils have positive attitudes to learning and, as a result, they make strong progress in most lessons.

Staff care for each pupil as an individual and support them all to make progress and achieve. Teachers provide engaging activities for their pupils that interest them, including a wealth of trips and visitors in school. Teachers have built the school's curriculum around a series of interesting topics, but the coverage of a few areas is not thorough enough, for example in music, science and aspects of personal and social education.

Over time, most pupils make steady and on occasions rapid progress in developing the skills they need to read, speak and listen effectively in English, and begin to communicate in Welsh. They make effective progress in their digital skills and mathematics and use and apply their skills well in their work across the curriculum. Most make suitable progress in learning how to write, for example in developing their spelling, punctuation and grammar. However, there are limited opportunities for pupils to develop their skills in writing creative and imaginative extended pieces such as stories.

The executive headteacher provides supportive leadership. Together with other leaders, she makes appropriate plans for ongoing improvement. Leaders monitor the school's work rigorously and identify swiftly wherever pupils' progress is at risk of stalling.

The few staff work very well together to create the inclusive ethos that pervades all aspects of school life. There are beneficial relationships with parents that help to support pupils' achievements. The school has made notable improvements since the last inspection. Inspectors worked with school leaders to recommend improvements to the school's governance, to strengthen the governors' role as a critical friend.

Recommendations

- R1 Address the health and safety issue identified by the school
- R2 Ensure that the curriculum is broad and balanced, and that it meets pupils' needs
- R3 Provide regular opportunities for all pupils to write creatively, at length, across a broad range of genres
- R4 Strengthen the governance of the school, to ensure that the governing body fulfils the statutory requirements and develops its role as a critical friend

What happens next

The school will draw up an action plan to address the recommendations from the inspection.

Main evaluation

Learning

Over their time at Irfon Valley Primary School, most pupils make strong progress from their starting points. They leave the school with standards at least in line with, and often above, those expected for their age. The very small number of pupils that are eligible for free school meals achieve at least as well as their peers over time. Pupils with additional learning needs make secure progress from their individual starting points.

Most pupils start the school with appropriate speaking and listening skills, and they develop their confidence to speak to their peers and to adults. They contribute their ideas and opinions to class discussions with growing clarity. Across the school, most pupils listen with suitable, often sustained, concentration, and older pupils generally wait patiently for their turn to contribute to discussions.

Across the school, most pupils read well. Younger pupils quickly develop an understanding of the sounds that letters and letter strings make and use this knowledge to blend simple words. By Year 2, many pupils recognise familiar words at sight and can work out less familiar words, for example from the context or by building the word from sounds. Overall, through the school, nearly all pupils develop their reading skills well. They read a range of high-quality children's fiction fluently and with interest, enjoying novels from a wide range of authors such as Cornelia Funke and Berlie Doughty. They read 'between the lines' to infer meaning from the text. By the time they leave the school in Year 6, nearly all pupils make strong progress in their reading to achieve reading fluency and acquire a growing love of books and literature.

From reception onwards, most pupils learn to write in a legible print script. Most write their news regularly using correctly punctuated sentences, and on occasions write longer pieces as part of their topic work, for example when finding out about their favourite animal. As they progress through the school, most pupils develop a neat, joined script. Many spell accurately, write neatly and punctuate correctly. However, across the school, there are too few opportunities for pupils to write creatively at length across a wide range of genres, for example through writing imaginative, extended stories.

Across the school, pupils make suitable progress in developing their Welsh language communication skills. From reception onwards, most pupils listen attentively to instructions and narrative in Welsh and respond appropriately. Most pupils develop a wide vocabulary of Welsh words, as they broaden their learning experiences. For example, they gleefully recount the 'psygodyn jeli' and 'cranc' they saw during their trip to Cardigan Bay. From Year 3 to Year 6, pupils practice further patterns and respond to simple questions in Welsh. However, they are reluctant to extend their answers to respond more fully, for example using 'achos', or to continue a conversation.

Most pupils across the school make secure progress in developing their mathematical skills. Most younger pupils develop a beneficial knowledge of their

number bonds, and complete simple calculations to add, subtract, multiply and divide correctly. Most pupils develop a good understanding of the concept of measures, for example weighing and measuring items with growing accuracy. Increasingly and where the provision allows, most pupils develop the skills they need to solve problems and reason about mathematics. As pupils progress through the school, most use and apply their numeracy skills confidently, for example to compare their running speed with that of a house cat and a cheetah.

Most pupils develop strong digital skills that they use purposefully and regularly in their learning. For example, with support, many Year 1 and Year 2 pupils publish their own, illustrated versions of The Lighthouse Keepers' Lunch. By the end of their time at the school, most pupils use their digital skills effectively for research and to record their learning. They use their coding skills to create animated characters in games.

Pupils develop their artistic, creative and physical skills appropriately. For example, nearly all pupils sing enthusiastically during acts of collective worship, which supports their spiritual development and sense of school community well. Older pupils devise and perform a moving dance sequence for Remembrance Day.

Well-being and attitudes to learning

Most pupils enjoy school and are enthusiastic about their learning. They say that they feel safe in school and know that an adult will help them if they feel upset or worried. Older pupils particularly appreciate anti-bullying lessons, where they relish the time and safe space to reflect.

Overall, pupils have very positive attitudes to learning. Nearly all pupils are confident to speak to visitors, for example about their work, hobbies and interests. Most pupils behave well, both in lessons and around the school at breaktimes. They understand the school rules – be ready, be respectful, be safe – and refer to them regularly in class. They listen attentively to their peers and to adults, and most sustain their concentration well, especially where the task interests them. For example, during an act of collective worship concerning the parable of the lost sheep, pupils were particularly enthusiastic and eager to share their personal experiences of sheep farming in the locality. Most pupils work collaboratively with their peers and regularly contribute successfully to shared tasks. Many also work successfully independently.

Most pupils know how to keep themselves healthy, for example by eating a balanced diet or keeping themselves fit and active. Many participate in sports clubs outside of school and are keen to resume their participation in school when the restrictions allow. They know how to keep themselves safe. For example, during hot weather, many pupils use the shade sensibly and apply sun cream appropriately. Most know how to stay safe online, for example identifying safe websites and keeping passwords secure. Most pupils feel that they are treated fairly and respected by both their peers and adults.

Adults listen regularly to pupils' views, for example asking them for their opinions when planning for topic work for the term. Recently, as the pandemic restrictions recede, the school has reinstated the pupil voice groups such as the school council, sports ambassadors and Dreigiau Coch. These have a suitable influence over the

day-to-day life of the school, for example in supporting the appointment of a new executive headteacher and influencing the revised behaviour policy.

Owing to the coronavirus pandemic, inspectors will not report pupils' rates of attendance during the academic year 2021-2022. Inspectors will, however, consider the school's provision for monitoring and improving attendance as part of inspection area 4 (care, support and guidance).

Teaching and learning experiences

Across the school, strong teaching is underpinned by warm, respectful professional relationships between adults and pupils. Teachers have high expectations of pupils' behaviour and provide appropriate support and challenge where it is needed. They know their pupils well and generally tailor work successfully to meet their needs. Lessons are well structured, and teachers' explanations are clear. As a result, pupils behave well, respect the adults and their peers, and engage positively in their learning. On occasions, teachers overuse worksheets, however, and this limits the opportunities for pupils to set out their work independently or write more than a brief response.

Teachers assess pupils' work and progress regularly and take swift action whenever progress slows. They provide regular written and verbal feedback for their pupils. Immediate verbal feedback during learning activities is particularly effective. In a few instances, teachers' written feedback identifies suitable opportunities for pupils to improve their work. When this happens, pupils respond well and refine their work appropriately in response. However, on occasions, teachers' written feedback simply provides a narrative context for a task or a generic congratulatory comment. In these instances, the feedback is not specific enough to help pupils to improve their work.

Teachers devise learning experiences that are exciting, relevant and engage nearly all pupils. These build cohesively on pupils' knowledge, skills and understanding as they move through the school. Teachers have reviewed the school curriculum suitably to prepare for the Curriculum for Wales. However currently, the school's curriculum is not broad and balanced enough. For example, over time, it does not currently provide the full breadth of learning experiences in science and music, or in aspects of personal and social education such as the recent relationships and sexuality code.

The provision for pupils to develop their skills in the Welsh language, and to promote the advantages of learning Welsh, is strong. Teachers use Welsh regularly and confidently to give instructions and interject appropriate Welsh vocabulary into their explanations, particularly in the foundation phase. The provision for developing mathematical, numeracy and reading skills is also beneficial, resulting in strong standards and progress. For example, teachers use real life contexts such as shopping (both in the pretend shop and online) to plan tasks so that pupils can find the best value for money. This develops pupils' ability to use and apply their mathematical skills well in everyday situations. Teachers develop pupils' wider reading skills alongside a love of books and the enjoyment of reading. For example, they read appropriate whole-class novels to their pupils, related to their topic. However, the provision for pupils to write extended pieces regularly in a broad range

of genres is less well developed. As a result, pupils do not develop their writing skills as well as they could, particularly when writing creatively.

Teachers encourage pupils to express their views about what they learn and are beginning to incorporate these into their planning. For example, as part of Wellbeing Wednesdays, pupils decide some of the practical activities that they want to do, such as building bird boxes and pond dipping. The school has extensive outdoor areas that provide attractive opportunities for learning. The foundation phase outdoor area is particularly well resourced and used purposefully by younger pupils, alongside the pre-school playgroup.

There are a wide range of educational trips and visitors to school that enrich pupils' learning. During the pandemic, the school continued to use these opportunities through video links. For example, the foundation phase class took part in an online question and answer session with a vet in their Builth Wells surgery. In Years 3-6, pupils' food and farming topic 'Sow, grow and farm' was brought to life through a visit from a local produce vendor, who brought unusual vegetable produce for the pupils to sample.

Care, support and guidance

The school is an inclusive, nurturing community that provides for each pupil as an individual. The very small class and cohort sizes mean that adults know the pupils very well and tailor the provision to meet their needs. For example, following the recent pandemic, leaders identified a need to strengthen the provision to support pupils' well-being and physical and mental health, resulting in Wellbeing Wednesdays that pupils enjoy very much.

There is appropriate provision for the few pupils with additional learning needs, that includes strong partnership working with agencies such as speech and language support. As a result, these pupils make at least the progress they should. Pupils new to the school and those whose circumstances may make them vulnerable to underachievement often make rapid progress, because of the warm and nurturing environment.

Since the pandemic restrictions have been lifted, the provision has supported nearly all pupils to resume their participation in decision making at a school level. The culture promotes pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development appropriately, for example in sharing pupils' successes through celebration assemblies and through moments of reflection. There are worthwhile opportunities for pupils to perform to their peers, for example in the recent Jubilee talent show.

Staff have recently introduced a beneficial, centralised system to note any changes in pupils' behaviour. This enables teachers and teaching assistants to communicate more efficiently, respond pro-actively when they see a pattern emerging, and for part-time staff to keep abreast of the very few behavioural concerns. Together with the refreshed behaviour policy, this approach supports pupils to behave well and receive timely well-planned support, should they need it.

Leaders have successfully established a strong culture of safeguarding, and there is no doubt that all adults have pupils' safety and well-being at heart. Recently, the

school's leaders identified a health and safety issue. They are working with the local authority to arrange for this work to be completed soon.

Leadership and management

The executive headteacher has successfully worked with the school community to develop and implement a vision for the education and wellbeing of all pupils. This is focused on creating a happy, caring, stimulating and inclusive learning environment where everyone develops pupils' independence, confidence and curiosity. The executive headteacher is well respected by the staff, who appreciate her collaborative and inclusive leadership style that is well suited to a very small school. She has prioritised staff well-being, particularly following the recent pandemic, and as a result staff feel valued and appreciated. The staff team is cohesive and, in turn, well focused on improving their pupils' outcomes.

Staff share the many responsibilities suitably between them. There are appropriate generic job descriptions however, these do not fully document the wide-ranging and extensive responsibilities of the post holders. For example, the executive headteacher is also the additional learning needs co-ordinator but this is not reflected in the job description.

The executive headteacher, supported by the local authority business partner and a governor, manage the school's funding effectively. Leaders allocate resources suitably, including the pupil development grant for example to provide targeted pupils with the support they need. There are appropriate arrangements for healthy eating and drinking.

Leaders timetable self-evaluation activities appropriately across the year and these draw on a suitable range of monitoring processes. For example, leaders and teachers scrutinise pupils' work, monitor lessons, take part in pupil progress professional dialogues and purposefully track pupil progress over time. As a result, leaders identify appropriate priorities for the coming year, which include improving the outcomes for groups of learners. However, although leaders' monitoring accurately pinpoints shortcomings in the provision, on occasions these findings do not feed through sharply enough to become improvement priorities. For example, leaders' monitoring rightly identifies that the range of writing experiences is not broad enough. However, writing is not currently an improvement priority.

The executive headteacher manages the performance of all teachers and teaching assistants effectively through the school year. Staff development targets link appropriately to school development priorities. There is a worthwhile range of professional learning activity.

Leaders have rightly prioritised the development of purposeful opportunities for pupils to develop their Welsh language skills successfully. Staff are beginning to work collectively to implement the Curriculum for Wales. They have considered their current commercial scheme and mapped opportunities to use the local environment, history and culture more purposefully. However, overall, the school's emerging plan for the new curriculum does not focus tightly enough on the specific needs of pupils within the school.

The governing body are supportive of the school and are knowledgeable about the work staff and pupils are doing. The executive headteacher keeps them informed of standards within the school and progress in priority areas of development. However, currently there are not enough governors to share the workload between them. For example, sub-committees do not have their full complement of members, so their work does not feed efficiently into the full governing body. Governors are not proactive enough in setting the school's strategic direction and acting as a critical friend to the school's leaders, and they do not always fulfil their statutory requirements. For example, policies are not always reviewed in a timely manner and the governing body annual report to parents does not meet Welsh Government requirements.

Teachers and leaders have strong professional relationships with parents. For example parents receive a wealth of information about the school and feel able to approach teachers about their child's progress and aspects of school life. The school takes good account of parents' views and suggestions. For instance, the school surveyed parents on several occasions during the recent pandemic and implemented many of their suggestions to improve the blended learning experiences for all pupils. The Friends of the School work together to raise beneficial funds that are used to support activities such as school trips, to ensure that no child is left out.

Evidence base of the report

Before an inspection, inspectors:

- analyse the outcomes from the parent/carers and pupil questionnaires and consider the views of teachers and the governing body through their questionnaire responses

During an inspection, inspectors normally:

- hold a meeting with parents/carers to hear their views on the school and its effectiveness
- meet the headteacher, governors, senior and middle leaders (where appropriate) and individual teachers to evaluate the impact of the school's work
- meet pupils to discuss their work, to listen to them read and to gain their views about various aspects of their school
- meet groups of pupils in leadership roles, such as representatives from the school council and eco-committee
- visit a broad sample of classes, including learning support groups and undertake a variety of learning walks to observe pupils learning and to see staff teaching in a range of settings, including classrooms, support groups and in outdoor areas
- where appropriate, visit the specialist resource base within the school to see pupils' learning
- observe and speak to pupils at lunch and break times and at a sample of after-school clubs, where appropriate
- attend assemblies and daily acts of collective worship
- look closely at the school's self-evaluation processes
- consider the school's improvement plan and look at evidence to show how well the school has taken forward planned improvements
- scrutinise a range of school documents, including information on pupil assessment and progress, records of meetings of staff and the governing body, information on pupils' well-being, including the safeguarding of pupils, and records of staff training and professional development

After the on-site inspection and before the publication of the report, Estyn:

- review the findings of the inspection alongside the supporting evidence from the inspection team in order to validate, moderate and ensure the quality of the inspection

Copies of the report

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

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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