



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

A report on

St Mary's R.C. Primary School

**Old Bulwark Road
Bulwark
Chepstow
Monmouthshire
NP16 5JE**

Date of inspection: June 2022

by

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

About St Mary's R.C. Primary School

Name of provider	St Mary's R.C. Primary School
Local authority	Monmouthshire County Council
Language of the provider	English
Type of school	Primary
Religious character	Catholic
Number of pupils on roll	146
Pupils of statutory school age	129
Number in nursery classes	
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 Primary is 21.3%)	7.4%
Percentage of pupils identified as having additional learning needs (a) (The national percentage of pupils identified as having an additional learning need in Primary is 22.2%)	27.9%
Percentage of pupils who speak Welsh at home	
Percentage of pupils with English as an additional language	16.3%
Date of headteacher appointment	2020
Date of previous Estyn inspection (if applicable)	15/10/2013
Start date of inspection	06/06/2022

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

St Mary's is an effective school with a strong, caring and compassionate ethos. Its pupils enjoy coming to school and are proud to be members of its community. The headteacher has worked well with staff, parents, governors, pupils and the wider community to establish a clear vision for the school and develop a sense of teamwork. Leaders know the school well and are open and honest about its strengths and areas for improvement. For example, the school recognises a need to improve how it challenges pupils to achieve to the best of their ability and to ensure that feedback to pupils helps to move them forward with their learning. This frank approach to school improvement has helped the school to identify and develop key areas of its work in recent years. The strength of pupils' Welsh language skills is a particularly good example of this.

Teachers and teaching assistants plan engaging learning experiences that help to ensure pupils make good progress with their skills during lessons and over time. They encourage pupils to become active and reflective learners who know their strengths and what they need to improve. Pupils collaborate well with each other and show respect to their peers and adults. Staff know pupils and their needs well. They ensure good support for pupils that need extra help, including those that join the school with little understanding of the English language.

Recommendations

- R1. Ensure that teachers plan effective challenge to all groups of pupils
- R2. Improve feedback processes to ensure that they support pupils to develop their skills and provide opportunities for pupils to improve their work

What happens next

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

Estyn will invite the school to prepare a case study on its work in relation to improving the quality of pupils' Welsh language skills for dissemination on Estyn's website.

Main evaluation

Learning

Most pupils join the school with literacy, numeracy and social skills at the expected level for their age. As a result of well-planned provision, most make good progress in the development of these skills during lessons and over time. Progress is particularly strong for pupils in the oldest classes. Pupils with additional learning needs (ALN) and those with English as an additional language (EAL), often make strong progress relative to their individual starting points.

As they move through the school, most pupils develop effective listening and speaking skills. Most pupils, including the youngest, talk with confidence to each other and adults. They are keen to discuss their work and school life and often feel confident enough to initiate conversations with visitors to the school. They frequently engage in purposeful discussions with their peers about their work, how to approach tasks and how successful they have been with their learning. In most cases they listen carefully to the contributions of others and respond appropriately, including when working collaboratively in pairs and small groups. They frequently demonstrate careful consideration before responding. For example, pupils in Year 5 engage in reasoned discussion as part of a small group before sharing with the class their thoughts around why rules are important in sport and wider life.

Most younger pupils make good progress in the development of their early reading skills, for instance, pupils in the reception class read back their emergent writing with confidence. They quickly develop effective phonetical knowledge that they apply well in their reading and spelling. By Year 2, they read basic texts with good comprehension and answer simple relevant questions around the content of the text accurately. In Years 3 and 4, pupils self-correct as they read, reflect well on what they have read and refer to specific passages to help answer questions. By Year 6, many pupils develop strong reading skills, take examples from the text to make specific points about its content and demonstrate genuine pleasure in reading.

In the youngest classes, most pupils quickly develop effective early writing skills. They apply their knowledge of letter sounds well to spell simple words and begin to form letters accurately at an early stage. By Year 2, many write for a range of purposes and develop an imaginative vocabulary that they use well to support their creative writing. In the older classes, most pupils build well on these skills, writing with increasing clarity in a variety of forms. For example, in Year 5 they apply their knowledge of rhyme and simile effectively to write imaginative poems in the same style as Lewis Carroll's 'The Jabberwocky'. In a few cases, pupils do not apply their understanding of punctuation accurately in their extended writing.

Most pupils in the youngest classes make good progress in the development of a range of mathematical skills and knowledge. In reception they begin to construct simple number sentences, for example recording subtraction of values up to twelve. By Year 2, they count in fives, understand the difference between odd and even numbers, and sort shapes and values according to different criteria in Carroll and Venn diagrams. However, across the school, there is a tendency for teachers to move them very quickly to abstract concepts, and this does not give the youngest

pupils sufficient time to fully embed their understanding of the practical meaning of number. In the older classes they apply their number skills well in a range of contexts, such as temperature, time, length and angles. By Year 6, pupils apply their numeracy skills well across the curriculum and to solve problems. For example, they use their knowledge of addition and multiplication to work out how many matchsticks it will take to create a repeating pattern of twenty-five triangles. In a few cases, pupils do not apply their graphing skills with sufficient accuracy and understanding.

The school's participation in the Welsh sabbatical programme for teachers has had a strong positive impact on the Welsh language skills of staff. This in turn, has led to significant improvements in the Welsh skills of pupils. Overtime, most pupils develop strong Welsh language skills and are proud to be Welsh speakers. Pupils use the language regularly as part of their daily routines, such as during well-being check ins in the youngest classes. Pupils in Year 2 talk confidently about where they live and the things and people they have at home. In years 3 and 4, nearly all pupils confidently interpret simple sentences spoken by an adult and can identify whether they make sense or not. By Year 6, most pupils have very strong Welsh language skills and engage confidently in lessons that are delivered bilingually. They speak with confidence about their home lives, likes and dislikes. They talk with some fluency about what they have done in the past, for example describing how they visited the park, who they met there and what they did. Pupils reading and writing skills in Welsh reflect their confident listening and speaking skills.

Over time most pupils develop effective digital skills that they use well to support their learning. The youngest pupils are beginning to develop a range of skills, for example in the use of simple word processing and graphing programmes. The oldest pupils build well on their earlier experiences to further strengthen their skills, including combining different techniques to produce a final product. For example, manipulating text and images to create newspaper reports of their Jubilee celebrations.

Pupils develop a good range of creative skills over time. They benefit from the strong specific skills of a few members of staff. For example, pupils in Year 5 explore techniques in photography and produce highly imaginative and impressive images that play with perspective and depth of field.

Well-being and attitudes to learning

The strong nurturing environment of St Mary's ensures that pupils have a deep sense of belonging and results in most pupils feeling safe and well cared for. Most pupils are confident, inquisitive, and eager to take on new skills and experiences. Many pupils demonstrate good levels of resilience and positive attitudes to their learning. They often avoid distractions successfully when engaged in their learning. Nearly all are articulate and polite. They are keen to engage in conversation and greet unfamiliar adults with a warm, friendly wave. Most pupils understand and abide by the school rules and behave well in class and during break and lunch times. Pupils are very proud of their school.

A good range of pupil voice groups help them to develop their leadership and life skills. Members of these groups work well to ensure that they have impact on the life of the school. For example, members of the School Council and the Wellbeing Warriors led an assembly to introduce the use of well-being fidget boxes in classes

that aid pupils' concentration. Most pupils feel that staff listen carefully to their views and encourage them to influence decisions about their education, well-being and happiness. For example, pupils chose new playground equipment and decided which charities the school would support with fundraising.

As a result of the work of the Eco-Committee and learning experiences embedded into the curriculum, most pupils have a sound awareness of environmental issues and the importance of sustainability. For example, pupils in Year 5 explored the issue of coastal erosion and then designed and tested model coastal defences. Pupils develop well as ethical, informed citizens through a variety of activities, such as raising funds for local charities and supporting refugees. Overall, most pupils have a thorough awareness of fairness, equality and sustainability, however they are less aware of their rights as outlined in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC).

Nearly all pupils understand the importance of eating and drinking healthily and regular exercise to achieve a healthy lifestyle. Despite COVID restrictions limiting the availability of after school clubs, nearly all pupils take part in physical exercise activities enthusiastically, such as the daily mile and cycling week. Most understand the dangers that may arise in their everyday lives and know what steps to take to stay safe. Nearly all pupils understand the importance of staying safe online.

Nearly all pupils listen attentively to teachers and other adults and are keen to contribute to class discussions. They take turns and listen respectfully to their peers. They complete their tasks to the best of their ability and are beginning to reflect on how successful they have been. Most pupils value and respond well to the process of individual target setting. They articulate clearly and accurately what they need to do to improve their work and move their learning on.

Across the school, pupils are very supportive of one another and offer encouragement and support to peers who are new to the school. They work well together to look for solutions to difficulties. For example, when learning how to take photographs using perspective and distance to produce optical illusion, pupils in Year 5 discuss thoughtfully, offer instructions and work together to produce imaginative, high-quality images.

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

In most cases, teachers plan lessons that are relevant to pupils' interests and engage them well. They plan purposeful opportunities for pupils to work independently, in pairs and in groups. Paired work is particularly effective when teachers ask pupils to share their ideas with a partner and feed back to the class. This results in nearly all pupils engaging and contributing to class discussions. Teachers' planning for group tasks is particularly effective in the older classes. For example, pupils in years 5 and 6 collaborate well with their peers to problem solve, gather information and share ideas. In the best examples, teachers arrange their groups so that pupils support

peers with EAL by using tablets and translation apps. This is effective in removing language barriers that would otherwise limit some pupils from participating in group discussions.

Teaching and learning experiences support a very strong Welsh ethos in the school that results in most pupils developing strong Welsh language skills. Throughout the school, teachers incorporate the Welsh language into their lessons to a high standard. In the best examples, lessons are bilingual and teachers confidently and naturally move from English to Welsh to promote the relevance of both languages to develop pupils' skills. In a few classes, teachers offer instruction to older pupils using Welsh and Ukrainian. This helps pupils understand and celebrate the importance of language in forming part of an identity. Teachers plan useful learning experiences that support pupils' understanding of the factors that influence and affect Wales and its place in the world. For example, pupils learn about the history of the Welsh in Patagonia and show maturity and sensitivity when considering the importance and relevance of the language.

The school is making sound progress towards implementing the Curriculum for Wales. When planning topics, teachers and support staff follow an agreed process to implement the school's shared vision for teaching and learning. Teachers are confident in using this to plan lessons that build pupils' knowledge, skills, and experience, progressively. Learning experiences are current, relevant and engaging. For example, younger pupils explore sustainability when learning that materials can be recycled or used to build model bridges and other structures. Teachers make purposeful use of the outdoor environment and wider community links to enhance learning experiences.

Staff consider carefully how to develop pupils' wider, less academic skills. They worked collaboratively to produce a progressive ladder of non-negotiables that support pupils to make good progress in developing life skills, such as social interaction and community awareness. For example, teachers plan to ensure that pupils in reception know the importance of taking turns when playing a game and, in Year 2, they know how to take turns in conversation and to not interrupt.

Staff are effective in ensuring good behaviour amongst pupils. Relationships between adults and pupils are strong and based on high levels of mutual respect. During most lessons, teachers encourage pupil-to-pupil collaboration and discussion, which often results in a bubbly and lively working atmosphere in classes. Teachers are also successful in bringing pupils' attention back to them effectively and swiftly. In nearly all cases, teachers set clear objectives for their lesson and activities, and establish high expectations for pupils' learning. They use a wide range of approaches and resources to engage and support purposeful learning experiences. However, teachers do not always plan effectively to ensure sufficient challenge to move all groups of pupils to their next steps in learning.

The school has recently developed a detailed approach to tracking pupil progress in literacy, numeracy and Welsh. Teachers and leaders are beginning to use this and other sources of information to inform their planning and to identify individuals that require targeted intervention. For example, they use outcomes from a whole school well-being survey to help shape class discussions and topics. The school's strategies to assess and monitor pupils' understanding during the lesson are effective. For

example, pupils use 'thumbs up, thumbs down' to quickly communicate with adults how well they understand new concepts and to enable teachers to adapt the lesson. Across classes from Year 3 to Year 6, pupils have opportunities to respond and make suggestions on how to improve their own work and support their peers before receiving feedback from their teachers. However, the quality of feedback across the school is variable and current approaches do not always support pupils to improve their work and develop their skills.

Care, support and guidance

The school has a warm, friendly and compassionate ethos that helps support good pupil behaviour. The highly positive relationships between pupils and adults are a strong feature of the school that contribute very effectively to pupils' level of happiness and sense of well-being. Since the return to school, staff have prioritised the well-being of pupils and supported them thoughtfully and sensitively, through activities that encourage them to talk about their experiences during periods of lockdown.

Across the school, familiar routines helpfully support pupils' well-being. For example, the check-in system at the start of the school day helps pupils to settle and be ready to learn. Although disrupted by Covid restrictions over the last two years, the school has offered, and is beginning to reintroduce, a variety of after-school clubs. For example, Spanish, choir, rugby, netball and football clubs, help to promote pupils' well-being and extend their learning beyond the school day. Provision to develop pupil's moral and social understanding is well embedded across the school, as is evident from pupils' involvement in welcoming new families to the school. Overall, the curriculum supports pupils' health and well-being effectively and provides valuable opportunities for pupils to develop their understanding of equality and diversity. For example, workshops with an anti-racism charity encourage pupils to consider the importance of inclusion and the negative effects of discrimination.

Teachers and learning assistants promote the Welsh language highly successfully and encourage pupils to learn about the heritage and culture of Wales and the wider world. Through well planned creative and cultural opportunities, including work with a Welsh artist and involvement with the Chepstow Festival of Arts, pupils have the confidence to use their imagination to express themselves through art, music and performance.

Leaders provide opportunities to ensure that pupils contribute to decisions that influence whole school provision. Pupils make frequent and valued contributions to what and how they learn across the school by contributing their ideas towards class topics and activities. Most pupils believe that staff listen to their views and consider their opinions when making decisions that affect them.

The school has effective strategies to identify and meet pupils' additional learning needs. Purposeful intervention programmes support pupils to make sound progress relative to their individual starting points. Leaders monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of support programmes carefully, making adaptations to improve the quality of provision where needed. Review meetings focus well on pupils' individual plans, what is working well and what could be better to support pupils to make progress. Good use is made of external services and partnerships to provide

purposeful support for learners, including pupils with EAL. The school is making appropriate progress to meeting the requirements of ALN reform in Wales.

Leaders monitor pupils' attendance appropriately and have sound strategies in place to ensure good rates of pupil attendance. These include rewards for pupils, regular monitoring of individual pupils' attendance and close communication with parents. The school works well with external agencies and officers, such as local authority educational welfare officers, to intervene where there are specific concerns.

The school has sound procedures for keeping pupils safe. Staff have a good understanding of the school's child protection arrangements and know the actions to take should they have a concern about a pupil. Leaders work effectively with governors to review and update health and safety arrangements to ensure the well-being of pupils and staff. For example, they worked quickly with the local community to make adaptations to perimeter fencing to allow a family of refugees to make use of a house adjacent to the school site.

Leadership and management

In both her temporary role and following her recent successful appointment to the substantive post, the headteacher has worked collaboratively with staff, parents, governors and the local community to create a strong shared vision for the school. She worked purposefully with senior leaders to survey the opinions of stakeholders, gaining their views on how they feel the school should support pupils to become active and happy members of their community and wider society. Staff members at all levels of responsibility view themselves as part of the school team. They know that their views and contributions will be valued by senior leaders. Staff welcome the autonomy leaders give them to experiment and develop their practice and the school's provision. This is a key element in the school's successful school improvement journey.

The school has strong systems and processes and all staff are clear about their roles and responsibilities. Staff value the clarity that leaders provide and understand how their work as teachers and support staff enables the delivery of high quality teaching and learning. Senior leaders have successfully established high expectations around the quality of provision and the standards achieved by pupils. They have worked with staff to create clear guidelines around elements of provision and standards, such as the quality of presentation and handwriting, that have a positive impact on outcomes for learners. Leaders recognise a need to ensure that staff have a shared understanding of what good quality provision looks like and have worked well with other schools to begin to develop a joint view of what constitutes high standards and effective learning. Leaders have developed strong processes to ensure that staff understand their responsibilities in terms of child protection and keeping pupils safe.

Leaders have built strong partnerships with parents. Parents feel well consulted on the work of the school and how it can be improved further. During lockdown, leaders worked successfully to ensure that parents remain engaged with the school. For example, by encouraging parents to join assemblies online when it became impossible for them to do so in person. Communication with parents, staff and governors is regular and clear. This helps to ensure that stakeholders feel well informed and part of the school community.

Leaders are addressing national priorities effectively. Its work to develop the Welsh language skills of pupils is particularly notable and results in most pupils leaving the school with strong skills in the language. The school has appropriate arrangements in place to promote healthy eating and drinking.

The headteacher and senior leaders work well to ensure that governors have a clear understanding of the work of the school, its strengths and areas for improvement. Many governors play an important part in school life and are regular visitors. Its committee structure and meetings are effective in ensuring that governors discuss the full range of the school's work. Leaders have worked with governors to improve the rigour of their work in recent years. They also accurately recognise the need to further develop governors' role in the gathering of first-hand evidence to ensure a sufficient level of challenge to the work of the school. Leaders work well with governors to manage and deploy resources. In recent years, they have made difficult decisions to ensure that the school recovered from a significant deficit position. They use grant funding well to improve provision and support the progress of pupils, including those at risk of underachieving as a result of deprivation. The work the governing body have undertaken recently with leaders to help house a family of Ukrainian refugees reflects the school's welcoming ethos and strong role in the community.

Self-evaluation processes are a developing strength of the school. Leaders have put in place a well-focussed monitoring timetable that covers a wide range of the work of the school. Increasingly, staff with a variety of roles and responsibilities engage in monitoring activities as part of their curriculum teams, such as looking at pupils' books and listening to learners. School improvement priorities are well focused and closely linked to the outcomes of self-evaluation activities. The school is developing a strong track record of improvement. For example, as a direct result of school improvement actions there have been marked improvements in the standard of pupils' reading and the quality of pupils' Welsh language skills.

Leaders ensure a wide range of professional learning to support the work of the school. The school is beginning to engage purposefully with research to assist in developing its provision. For example, the headteacher has established an online continuing professional development area for staff to view and share their learning. During periods of lockdown, staff engaged in professional development courses and completed research when working from home. The attendance of teachers on a Welsh sabbatical course has had a significant positive impact on Welsh language skills of pupils. By putting in place arrangements for these teachers to train colleagues and teach classes in addition to their own, leaders have ensured significant improvements in the skills of staff and pupils across the school.

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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