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

A report on

Cefn Fforest Primary School

Cefn Fforest Avenue
Cefn Fforest
Blackwood
NP12 3JX

Date of inspection: October 2022

by

Estyn, His Majesty's Inspectorate for Education

and Training in Wales

About Cefn Fforest Primary School

Name of provider	Cefn Fforest Primary School
Local authority	Caerphilly County Borough Council
Language of the provider	English
Type of school	Primary
Religious character	*
Number of pupils on roll	289
Pupils of statutory school age	216
Number in nursery classes	41
Percentage of pupils eligible for free school meals over a three-year average (The national percentage of pupils eligible for free school meals over 23.0%)	34.3%
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 16.1%)	31%
Percentage of pupils who speak Welsh at home	*
Percentage of pupils with English as an additional language	*
Date of headteacher appointment	01/09/2009
Date of previous Estyn inspection (if applicable)	11/02/2014
Start date of inspection	17/10/2022

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

Cefn Fforest Primary School provides a very caring and supportive learning experience for its pupils. Staff know their pupils well. They prioritise well-being appropriately and make useful links with the community to meet the needs of their families. The school environment is very welcoming, nurturing and inclusive.

The headteacher and senior leaders have a clear vision for the school. They encourage all staff to develop their knowledge and skills. All staff work conscientiously to identify ways in which they can improve teaching and wider aspects of school life.

Teachers adapt their teaching to meet the needs of all pupils. Teaching assistants provide useful, bespoke support for learners, including those in the special resource classes. Most pupils behave well and they are polite and considerate towards others.

The curriculum is wide ranging and relevant to the community which the school serves. There are many opportunities for pupils to use their learning in authentic contexts. Staff make very good use of the school environment, which offers interesting outdoor areas and attractive learning spaces indoors. Provision for pupils' creative development is a strong feature of the school.

The curriculum engages pupils successfully. Staff work together effectively as well as with their cluster of schools, to plan an interesting curriculum for pupils. Opportunities for pupils to take ownership of their learning by influencing how and what they learn are at the early stages of development.

Most pupils make good progress from their starting points. They become increasingly confident in using a wide range of vocabulary. Most use their numeracy and digital skills well across the curriculum. Pupils enjoy extra-curricular classes in Spanish and Mandarin and they begin to learn some British sign language. However, too many lack confidence in speaking Welsh and the school has prioritised this for further development.

Recommendations

R1 Raise standards in Welsh

R2 Increase opportunities for pupils to influence how and what they learn

What happens next

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

Main evaluation

Learning

The majority of pupils enter the school with skills that are below average. However, many make good progress from their starting points. This includes pupils who are eligible for free school meals and those with additional needs.

When they join the school, most pupils settle well into the Nursery routines and quickly develop their communication skills. They listen purposefully and for extended periods. As they move through their first years at school, the majority of pupils learn to hear and read the sounds that make up words. As their skills develop, most use this knowledge to work out unfamiliar words and read simple texts. Most show an interest in reading for information and for pleasure and many read simple texts with growing independence.

Older pupils listen purposefully, with increasing attention to detail. The majority read aloud with suitable expression. They talk about favourite authors and the features of the books they like. Many locate information in a text quickly and accurately. They consider the feelings of characters in a book, using what they know to infer how the character might think.

Younger pupils make very good progress in their speaking skills. Many join in with singing and telling stories with enthusiasm. The majority take part in question-and-answer sessions related to the topics they are exploring. For example, they discuss stories, such as ‘The Enormous Turnip’, using the new vocabulary they have learnt. They talk animatedly about their pumpkins when learning about Autumn. Most use marks and letters to label their pictures and over time, they begin to write simple sentences with increasing independence.

Older pupils make valuable contributions to class discussions and learn well from each other’s ideas. As a result of these useful discussions and opportunities to share ideas and examples, many pupils produce good quality written work. They respond to encouragement to improve the detail of their work, using increasingly adventurous vocabulary. More able pupils create suspense by using short sentences in a story and many convey empathy effectively when they write a poem through the eyes of a soldier or an evacuee in World War Two. Many pupils make good progress in spelling and handwriting. Most older pupils take great pride in their work, presenting it with careful attention to detail.

Pupils develop their numeracy skills well as they progress through the school. Many younger pupils count backwards and forwards to 20 and count on from a given number. As they move through the school, they begin to use much larger numbers and add and subtract with increasing confidence. The majority of pupils multiply 4-digit by 3-digit numbers with good accuracy. They begin to apply their numeracy skills to real-life contexts. For example, many develop their understanding of finance successfully when they solve problems such as working out the cost of a mortgage over several years and whether it will be paid off within different timescales.

Younger pupils weigh ingredients and estimate and measure the size of objects in the Jack and the Beanstalk story. Many pupils make good progress in developing the skills of measurement. For example, older pupils measure the distance their paper planes fly in metres and centimetres, comparing the results to improve their designs.

Pupils develop digital skills successfully. Most younger pupils use a programmable toy successfully, instructing it to move around a map to different locations. They log on to their own account and access their work. They word process simple sentences and change font and text size.

Many older pupils construct spreadsheets competently in order to record fitness levels. They write emails and attach a file successfully. Many use spreadsheets effectively in authentic contexts. For example, they write a profit and loss spreadsheet using formulae as part of a project involving running a doughnut company. They produce a database to compare features of different countries.

Younger pupils make good progress in speaking Welsh as they enter the school. Many use greetings in Welsh confidently. They answer the register and ask for their lunch in Welsh. Many enjoy singing Welsh songs, counting and naming colours. However, pupils do not make suitable progress in developing their Welsh skills further and most older pupils lack confidence in speaking Welsh beyond simple greetings.

Younger pupils create imaginative clay models and paintings of their pumpkins. After reading a book about decorating things with dots, they decorate their own pumpkins making patterns of spots and stripes. Their creative skills develop very well. For example, Reception pupils respond enthusiastically to dance sessions. They enjoy taking part in the expressive arts and develop good skills in mime and dance. Older pupils explore artists and different techniques and use these for their own work. They continue to develop creative writing skills well, such as to write imaginative, humorous excuses for being late to school.

Well-being and attitudes to learning

At Cefn Fforest Primary School, nearly all pupils show high levels of care and consideration for others. They have strong positive working relationships with members of staff and show mutual respect to each other. A noticeable feature of the school is that pupils are polite and courteous with each other and adults. Most behave well in class and in the different learning areas, and take pride in the school and local community. They enjoy meeting their friends and staff, and feel safe in school. Most engage successfully in activities that support them to develop their skills in the inclusive learning environment.

Across the school, many pupils settle quickly to their work and move between independent tasks sensibly. They listen attentively to each other and follow adults' instructions maturely, relative to their age and stage of development. Most talk with confidence about their work and interests and are eager to take part in a variety of experiences in class and the outside areas. For example, pupils develop their literacy and creative skills effectively while working with an artist to create a story trail. They write stories together and participate enthusiastically to perform them using the trail of willow landmarks.

Most pupils support each other beneficially when they find tasks difficult and when they come across problems in their learning. For example, the younger pupils develop their problem-solving skills effectively by working collaboratively to build different sized houses using natural resources. The older pupils guide each other well when following a digital music score as part of a creative arts activity. They play instruments enthusiastically and give praise to their classmates for their efforts. These opportunities nurture a strong ethos of celebrating the various attributes and talents of their peers.

Nearly all pupils, including pupils in the specialist resource classes (SRC), are eager to learn and have sound attitudes to the learning process. The younger pupils concentrate for extended periods of time and are resilient in developing their skills, for example when using woodwork resources confidently. Pupils who attend the nurture class persevere well when designing and making a worry bottle as a valuable contribution to supporting their well-being. As pupils move through the school, they develop a sound understanding of the importance of making mistakes as an integral part of the learning process. Most pupils use established routines to support each other in the learning process and understand that making improvements to their work will support their progress. They develop as reflective learners and are beginning to identify how they can improve their work independently.

Through the curriculum and learning activities, most pupils develop a sound understanding of the importance of a healthy lifestyle, for example how to eat sensibly and describe the benefits of being physically active. They have an appropriate understanding on how to keep themselves safe while learning online activities.

Pupils in leadership roles, such as the school and eco council are starting to contribute their thoughts and ideas on how to develop the school. As a result of the interruption to learning due to the pandemic, this is at an early stage of development. In general, pupils make an appropriate contribution to the work and life of the school, however their influence on what and how they learn is limited. Across the school, most pupils understand the importance of celebrating diversity and ensuring equality and fairness. Pupils are thoughtful and show respect for each other in a supportive learning environment.

Teaching and learning experiences

The school plans learning experiences that engage the pupils very effectively. These experiences stimulate and challenge pupils throughout the school. For example, the oldest pupils ran a doughnut factory which required detailed financial planning and oversight. A particular strength of the curriculum is the authenticity which sparks the pupils' interest and encourages them to work hard and make good progress. Staff plan well for the needs of groups of pupils and pupils of all abilities comment on their experiences with equal enthusiasm. The school adapts its curriculum effectively to meet the needs of pupils in the special resource classes.

The school has a robust, positive attitude to curriculum development that allows for new ideas and initiatives. The curriculum has depth in important areas, in particular, in developing pupils' well-being. The school adapts its curriculum well to the specific

needs of the pupils. For example, in the way the curriculum highlights the need for the extension of pupils' vocabulary, which has a positive impact on pupils' writing.

The curriculum has an impressive breadth. This is particularly apparent in the provision for outdoor learning, which is innovative in the way it enables pupils to gain a sense of calm and well-being. It is also evident in the emphasis on expressive arts. For example, reception pupils show great control of voice and good listening skills when expressing different moods in sound.

The school ensures that its curriculum takes good account of the local area in which it is situated, building outwards from the locality. It also raises pupils' sights to look beyond the boundaries of their own community and understand that there are possibilities that they may not have thought of for their future, for example, by bringing in visitors to inspire the pupils.

The school ensures that, at every stage of the pupils' learning, the curriculum builds progressively on previous learning. The school prioritises this and makes it a key part of staff training.

Teachers plan topic work and series of lessons to engage all pupils effectively. Staff ensure that activities for younger pupils are broad and suited to all pupils' needs. They make very good use of the indoor and outdoor spaces to enhance learning opportunities. They devise lessons which enable pupils to develop their literacy, numeracy and digital skills as well as to gain knowledge and widen their vocabulary. Teachers collaborate beneficially when planning their lessons to ensure that pupils develop skills systematically as they move through the school. However, only a minority of staff use incidental Welsh in lessons and this limits the Welsh that pupils hear and respond to.

Teaching assistants provide very effective support for pupils. They help with pupils' learning and well-being. They make a very strong contribution to all pupils. They provide expert support for pupils with additional needs in the special resource classes, and bespoke support programmes to ensure that other pupils do not fall behind.

Most lessons are successful in ensuring that pupils progress and gain confidence in their skills and abilities as they move through the school. Teachers provide clear instructions and enable lessons to move at a good pace. They provide verbal feedback that helps pupils to expand their ideas and answers. Teachers have high expectations. They are very clear about their learning intentions and they plan carefully to meet the needs of all their pupils in interesting ways. Most teachers model spoken English well and promote pupils' confidence in speaking very effectively.

Care, support and guidance

The school is a friendly and supportive community where all staff place a high priority on the well-being of pupils. Leaders, teachers and teaching assistants know pupils well and respond sensitively and effectively to their emotional and social needs through a range of appropriate strategies. The positive relationships between staff and pupils are a strong feature of the school.

Across the school, staff provide valuable opportunities for pupils to express and regulate their emotions consistently. As part of their daily morning routines, younger pupils show how they are feeling by placing sticks into different coloured pots. Older pupils appreciate the many opportunities they have to share their worries with trusted adults. Pupils in the SRC share information about their likes and dislikes and respond successfully to a variety of stimuli in the rich learning environment. Across the school, pupils have worthwhile opportunities to learn about how to keep themselves safe. The school addresses pupils' concerns sensitively, and reinforces important safety messages through activities in the curriculum. The highly skilled pupils and family support worker (PFSW) contributes successfully by providing rich activities to support pupils' well-being needs. She arranges bespoke opportunities to develop the lifelong learning skills of pupils and parents, such as art and craft workshops. The 'Big Bocs Bwyd' food bank and uniform swap shop consolidate the diligent work of staff in supporting pupils and their families in the local community.

The school works efficiently to implement the additional learning needs (ALN) reform. The additional learning needs co-ordinator (ALNCo) ensures that pupils with ALN have appropriate plans for the support needed for them to make expected progress within their age and stage of development. Throughout the school, all pupils have useful one-page profiles outlining relevant information about them to guide staff to meet their needs, including pupils in the SRC. With the support of the ALNCo and PFSW, teachers and teaching assistants adapt their practices effectively and implement consistent strategies well to create inclusive classrooms. The school works successfully with external agencies to support pupils with varied needs, including the complex health and learning needs of pupils attending the SRC. Staff receive useful training to provide effective and sustained support for pupils who have social and emotional needs. In general, most pupils make sound progress towards meeting their individual targets. The school's effective leaders provide valuable training for staff in other local and regional schools, and contribute to national conferences on effective practice in supporting pupils with ALN.

Staff provide appropriate opportunities for pupils to develop leadership skills in different groups such as developing the outside classroom as a creative and stimulating learning area. For example, many pupils in the SRC enjoy looking after animals on the school grounds which supports their well-being effectively. Pupils are starting to share ideas on how to develop different aspects of their work. However, pupils do not have enough opportunities to influence and take ownership of their learning or contribute to the wider developments of the school.

Through inviting visitors to school and going on educational day and residential trips, staff support pupils to develop their skills and enhance their learning successfully. For example, a creative practitioner develops pupils' literacy and physical movement skills effectively in dance sessions. Pupils engage well in extra-curricular activities, such as the sewing and football clubs and benefit from a range of opportunities, such as singing in a variety of services and concerts. Pupils enjoy taking part in learning international languages in Spanish and Mandarin clubs.

School acts of collective worship make a valuable contribution to pupils' spiritual and ethical development. Staff provide opportunities for pupils to act and reflect on values, and encourage them to apply them in local and national contexts. Pupils learn about social and moral aspects through their learning activities and take part in

charitable events. For example, the older pupils develop a beneficial understanding of emotional well-being by engaging in Mental Health Week. In addition, pupils make valuable international links that support their understanding of living in different countries around the world such as Canada and India.

Leaders monitor pupils' attendance closely. The school's arrangements and culture of safeguarding pupils meet requirements and give no cause for concern.

Leadership and management

The headteacher, ably assisted by the deputy headteacher, has established a powerful, inclusive vision for the school. This vision drives the positive ethos that extends to all areas of school life. Every individual is made to feel important and shown that they belong to the school community. This vision is understood and lived out by staff throughout the school.

Senior leaders set high expectations for staff, pupils and themselves. They prioritise the well-being of staff and create an ethos where everyone can be a leader in their field of responsibility or expertise. For example, teachers work in triads on aspects of research into effective classroom practice and present valuable summaries to guide teaching in the school.

The school gathers first-hand evidence of how well pupils are performing and analyses this evidence carefully to inform the next steps in development planning. For example, the school uses assessments in mathematics to identify common strengths and weaknesses in pupil performance. The current development priorities include clear milestones for progress and identify staff responsibilities, training needs and costs. The school uses research data beneficially to identify the effectiveness of strategies and outlines actions and success criteria clearly. It also takes good account of the latest research into which strategies work best.

The school has a strong track record for making and sustaining improvements. Leaders maintain a relentless focus on continuing to improve the quality of teaching and have established good practice in the use of outdoor areas, the teaching of writing and in delivering a rich curriculum.

Leaders link all improvement priorities to national, regional and local priorities. They place particular emphasis on ensuring that pupils who are entitled to free school meals and those from low-income households are supported in their well-being. The school engages with the families of these pupils in meaningful ways that reduce the impact of poverty. For example, the school provides food at significantly reduced prices, recycles school uniform and teaches parents how to cook healthy food. The pupil development grant is appropriately focussed on a good range of worthwhile initiatives that improve the well-being and skills of identified pupils. Leaders establish strong relationships with parents and quickly communicate any daily issues of learning or well-being. They also keep parents well-informed about developments in the school.

Governors provide sound support for the school. They are committed and enthusiastic about the impact of the school in the community. Governors ask pertinent questions in meetings, for example, regarding the use of Covid recovery

fund and have a good oversight of the school's budget. They have a good knowledge of the way the school promotes healthy eating and drinking, which is a strength of the school.

Leaders create a positive culture where the professional development of all staff takes a high priority. Teaching assistants take a full part in professional development and have been trained in support programmes that successfully enhance pupils' skills in literacy, numeracy and emotional well-being. The school places a strong emphasis on training new leaders. Staff have been trained for senior leadership, middle management and higher-level teaching assistant roles and these staff lead effectively. The school links its professional development purposefully to self-evaluation findings and improvement priorities. For example, an evaluation of the needs of the pupils resulted in effective training about trauma to give the staff a better understanding of the issues some pupils in the school might face.

Evidence base of the report

Before an inspection, inspectors:

- analyse the outcomes from the parent/carer 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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