

A report on

Maesycwmmer Primary School

**Tabor Road
Maesycwmmer
Hengoed
CF82 7PU**

Date of inspection: February 2025

by

Estyn, His Majesty's Inspectorate for Education

and Training in Wales

About Maesycwmmmer Primary School

Name of provider	Maesycwmmmer Primary School
Local authority	Caerphilly County Borough Council
Language of the provider	English
School category according to Welsh-medium provision	
Type of school	Primary
Religious character	*
Number of pupils on roll	139
Pupils of statutory school age	114
Number in nursery classes	13
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 22.9%)	18.1%
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 11.1%)	23.7%
Percentage of pupils who speak Welsh at home	0.0%
Percentage of pupils with English as an additional language	*
Date of headteacher appointment	01/09/2009
Date of previous Estyn inspection (if applicable)	02/04/2018

Start date of inspection	03/02/2025
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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.

Summary

Maesycwmmmer Primary is a highly inclusive, happy, safe and successful school. The headteacher provides thoughtful, committed leadership and a dedicated team of staff and governors support him well. Leaders and staff have high expectations for all pupils' learning and well-being. Pupils feel safe and thoroughly enjoy school life. They are interested and engage eagerly in a wide range of exciting learning experiences. Behaviour is commendable and most pupils attend school regularly.

There are strong and purposeful working relationships across the school and this enables pupils to learn in a caring and positive learning environment. Teachers and support staff know pupils well and plan a range of engaging activities that support their well-being and learning needs successfully. This means that most pupils, including those with additional learning needs (ALN) make at least good progress from their individual starting points.

The school has worked diligently alongside local schools to design and refine an interesting curriculum that provides pupils with a wide variety of authentic learning experiences. Pupils enjoy learning outdoors, school trips and the many interesting visitors that attend the school who deepen their understanding of their own locality and the world of work.

Teachers plan effectively to ensure pupils develop their literacy, numeracy and digital skills well over time and they ensure that they apply these skills thoughtfully in meaningful contexts. Opportunities for pupils to learn outdoors are exceptional and used successfully to support pupils' emotional well-being, creative and expressive skills. Overall, teaching is strong through the school, but occasionally, teachers miss opportunities to ensure there is enough challenge in activities to stretch pupils of all abilities.

Leaders have a very good understanding of what the school does well and what needs to improve. Work to develop pupils' Welsh speaking skills, and feedback to pupils has been particularly successful and a keen focus on well-being has led to tangible improvements in pupils' attendance. The school's relationships with parents and wider community is a strength. Parents and carers trust the school and value the useful 'open doors' sessions that enable them to support their child's learning at home.

Recommendations

We have made one recommendation to help the school continue to improve:

R1. Provide an appropriate level of challenge to all pupils

What happens next

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

Main evaluation

When they start school, around half of pupils have skills below the expected level for their age. Consequently, the school implements well-structured active play sessions and thoughtfully design learning experiences to support their early development. This means that pupils soon learn to play cooperatively with their peers, gain independence and improve their social skills quickly.

During their time in the school most pupils, including those who have additional learning needs (ALN), and those from low-income households make at least good progress in many aspects of their learning. Staff support the development of pupils' literacy skills well. The strong focus on developing pupils' communication skills, means that most pupils move from using single words and gestures to becoming confident and articulate communicators by the time they leave the school. This structured approach means that younger pupils discuss topics such as birds enthusiastically, while older pupils articulate their learning to adults confidently.

The school fosters a strong reading culture, which ensures that pupils enjoy books from a young age. Teachers play a key role in developing pupils' reading skills through a well structured approach that leads to most pupils making significant progress over time. The youngest pupils improve their vocabulary and sequencing skills through play. By Year 2, many pupils read well and use phonic strategies confidently to recognise words. Older pupils develop a mature comprehension of texts and apply their reading skills well across many subjects.

Teachers provide beneficial opportunities for pupils to write across different genres, including poetry and playscripts. The youngest pupils express themselves through emergent writing and by Year 2, many pupils form correctly punctuated sentences. Older pupils write confidently for more specific purposes, adapting their skills to suit different genres, for instance when writing a persuasive letter to the local council or an in-depth newspaper article about climate change. However, a few pupils do not have enough opportunities to write more extended pieces. on occasions, there are missed opportunities for pupils to write at length.

Across the school, teachers work effectively to improve the teaching and learning of Welsh. By mixing basic Welsh vocabulary and phrases into daily routines and lessons, most pupils develop their language skills effectively. Consequently, younger pupils exchange simple greetings and ask basic questions, while older pupils engage confidently in longer discussions.

Most pupils' numeracy skills develop well. Younger pupils gain confidence in counting and using quantitative language, while Year 2 pupils apply their knowledge practically, such as when conducting surveys and using Venn diagrams to compare cultural celebrations. As pupils progress, they develop their confidence in applying their number skills across other areas of learning, for instance when planning and budgeting for a school trip. Most older pupils calculate fractions and percentages correctly and show resilience when solving problems.

Digital competence is a particular strength in the school. Many pupils use online platforms and digital tools confidently in their learning. Teachers incorporate digital skills regularly into lessons, allowing younger pupils to use technology to support their learning and older pupils to create AI-based animations and posters. Many pupils are confident when using spreadsheets to plan and cost an adventurous holiday. Most pupils demonstrate a keen awareness of the importance of staying safe online.

Across the school, pupils' physical and creative skills develop well. They learn to explore patterns through various artistic mediums. The youngest pupils observe and recreate artwork in different styles, while older pupils design and create intricate pop-up Christmas cards. Most pupils engage actively in performing arts, choosing to express their learning through music, drama and dance. Physical development is well-integrated into school life. Younger pupils refine their motor skills through structured play, such as modelling with clay or using drawing tools. As they progress, older pupils develop coordination through PE lessons and extracurricular sports clubs that foster a positive attitude towards physical activity.

The school ensures that pupils develop a strong spiritual, moral, social, and cultural understanding. Exploration of world religions or environmental responsibility, for example, leads to broader reflections on personal identity, human rights, and ethical values, promoting a sense of empathy and social responsibility. The school promotes equality and diversity well, including exploring other cultures and LGBT+ topics. Staff handle cases involving pupils identifying as transgender sensitively, ensuring a safe and inclusive environment. Additionally, the school celebrates the cultural backgrounds of its pupils, reinforcing diversity and respect effectively.

Spotlight 1: Raising pupils' aspirations about the world of work

Older pupils have valuable opportunities to listen to professionals such as firefighters, marines, vets, and artificial intelligence experts talking about their occupations. This helps them to develop a strong understanding of future career options and the world of work. These experiences, including workshops with scientists and exposure to technologies such as facial recognition, inspire pupils and raise their aspirations for the future. This means that they gain a clear understanding of how education connects to their future success and motivates them to think about the steps they need to take to achieve their goals.

Health and well-being are integral to the school's ethos. Pupils learn early on about the importance of maintaining their physical and mental health. By Year 6, they grasp the significance of regular exercise and mindfulness. A few pupils apply these skills practically by choreographing dance sessions to promote well-being.

Teaching across the school is effective and most lessons are engaging and stimulating. The school's useful approach to questioning and the way teachers incorporate pupils' ideas into lesson planning ensures that lessons remain relevant and motivating. Support staff play a critical role in ensuring inclusivity and personalised learning experiences, particularly for those pupils who find learning challenging or those with ALN. Most indoor and outdoor learning environments are rich and stimulating. Classrooms are well-resourced, and teachers use displays effectively to support learning and celebrate achievements. Feedback to pupils on how they could improve their work is embedded well throughout the school. Consistent reflection strategies encourage pupils to evaluate their progress, fostering resilience and confidence. As a result, most older pupils take some responsibility for their learning and are committed to improving their individual skills.

Spotlight 2: Using the outdoors to support pupils' emotional well-being and expressive arts skills

One of the strongest aspects of teaching across the school is the highly effective use of outdoor learning. Teachers and support staff use nature-based experiences to inspire pupils to develop their expressive arts skills and this reinforces classroom ideas successfully. For instance, when studying birds, Year 4 and 5 pupils created patterns based on the murmurations of starlings and created detailed drawings of feathers found in the school wildlife area. Most older pupils state that learning outside supports their emotional well-being and reduces their anxiety.

Strong leadership is the cornerstone of the school's success. The headteacher, alongside senior leaders, has cultivated a high-achieving and inclusive school culture through clear vision, strategic decision-making, and a deep understanding of pupils' needs. This leadership ensures that staff remain motivated and committed to delivering high-quality

education while prioritising well-being. This means that staff morale is high, and there is a strong sense of teamwork. Leaders have a very good understanding of what the school does well and what needs to improve. There is a good track record of improvement. For instance, work to develop pupils' Welsh language skills has been particularly successful and a keen focus on pupil well-being has led to tangible improvements in pupils' attendance.

Strong collaboration with other schools and focused professional learning has enabled the development of a purposeful and authentic curriculum tailored to Maesycwmmmer School's context. This curriculum systematically builds upon pupils' skills whilst also addressing national priorities such as provision for ALN, digital literacy, and the Welsh language. Leaders communicate well with parents and carers and staff provide useful 'family learning' sessions that enable them to support their children's learning at home. Parents believe that leaders and staff are approachable and will listen to any concerns they may have.

Governors play an active role in shaping the school's direction. They support leaders in financial management, ensuring prudent spending of grant funding and in maintaining high standards. They prioritise staff well-being and recognise its impact on the school environment. Overall, their involvement strengthens the school's ability to address challenges and sustain a positive culture of improvement.

Additional information

The school's arrangements for safeguarding pupils do not give any cause for concern

The school's arrangements for site management do not give any cause for concern

The school has appropriate arrangements for promoting healthy eating and drinking

Leaders and governors manage the school's finances appropriately, including the use of the pupil development grant.

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

Appendix 1: Numbers – quantities and proportions

The report makes references to different quantities and proportions e.g. '*most pupils...*' or '*very few pupils...*'. We use these terms to describe quantities and proportions as outlined in the table below:

nearly all =	with very few exceptions
most =	90% or more
many =	70% or more
a majority =	over 60%
half =	50%
around half =	close to 50%
a minority =	below 40%
few =	below 20%
very few =	less than 10%

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 publication. Any enquiries or comments regarding this document/publication should be addressed to:

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