

A report on
Blessed Carlo Acutis Catholic School

Merthyr Tydfil CBC

**Gwaunfarren Road
Penydarren
Merthyr Tydfil
CF47 9AN**

Date of inspection: March 2025

by

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

About Blessed Carlo Acutis Catholic School

Name of provider	Blessed Carlo Acutis Catholic School
Local authority	Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council
Language of the provider	English
School category according to Welsh-medium provision	English medium
Type of school	All age schools
Religious character	Roman Catholic
Number of pupils on roll	1057
Pupils of statutory school age	967
Number in nursery classes	52
Number in sixth form	Not applicable.
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 All age schools is 20.2%)	22.0%
Percentage of pupils identified as having additional learning needs (a) (The national percentage of pupils identified as having an additional learning need in All age schools is 8.6%)	9.0%
Percentage of pupils who speak Welsh at home	0.0%
Percentage of pupils with English as an additional language	13.3%
Date of headteacher appointment	01/09/2022

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March 2025

Date of previous Estyn inspection (if applicable)	
Start date of inspection	31/03/2025

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

Across the school, nearly all pupils' behaviour is exemplary, and they show respect towards each other and staff. Most pupils make at least adequate progress, with a minority making strong progress. Younger pupils begin with low literacy and numeracy skills but quickly improve due to effective staff support. As they progress, they develop listening skills and extend their vocabulary, with most secondary pupils engaging well in discussions and many using subject terminology accurately.

Reading is a strength of the provision for primary aged pupils, with many pupils developing an interest in reading and using their skills effectively. Many secondary aged pupils read fluently and use advanced reading strategies in English lessons, though they lack opportunities to apply these across subjects. Writing development is variable. While many pupils write legibly and for different purposes, around a half persist with frequent errors in spelling, punctuation, and grammar, partly due to variability in the impact of feedback. Pupils benefit from well-structured provision to develop their understanding of mathematical concepts, building confidence with number work and problem-solving, though over-reliance on worksheets in some classes limits deeper engagement. Pupils' digital skills are appropriately developed, particularly in the primary years, though secondary aged pupils have fewer chances to apply advanced digital skills. Welsh language development is suitably supported, with pupils participating in activities that encourage its use, although some remain reliant on prompts.

Staff build positive relationships with pupils, creating safe and engaging learning environments. Teachers generally have strong subject knowledge and high expectations, effectively planning lessons and using questioning to monitor progress. However, teachers' written feedback is inconsistent, and pupils do not always have opportunities to improve their work. Leaders are committed to building a cohesive curriculum and enriching it with real-world experiences, that develop an understanding of Wales and the wider world.

There are a few shortcomings in leadership, particularly in relation to the current leadership structure and the management of resources. In addition, leaders have not had enough impact on raising attendance. Despite financial challenges and areas for development, the school's high-quality teaching, committed staff, and pupils' positive attitudes underpin its success.

Recommendations

We have made four recommendations to help the school continue to improve:

- R1. Implement a coherent leadership structure in order to drive school improvement effectively
- R2. Strengthen resource management
- R3. Improve attendance
- R4. Improve the quality and consistency of feedback to ensure that pupils make the progress of which they are capable, particularly in writing

What happens next

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

Main findings

Teaching and learning

Most pupils make at least suitable progress in learning, with a minority making strong progress. This includes pupils who have additional learning needs (ALN), those who have English as an additional language and those from low-income households.

Across the school, nearly all pupils exhibit exemplary behaviour and demonstrate positive attitudes to learning. Most treat each other and staff with respect and engage positively with the activities that teachers provide for them. Many provide strong support for each other's well-being and learning and develop strong moral values.

Many of the youngest pupils start school with literacy and numeracy skills below those expected for their age. Staff model language effectively, allowing pupils to quickly develop their speaking skills. As pupils move through the primary age groups, they develop active listening skills and expand their vocabulary successfully. Most secondary aged pupils listen well to teachers and engage appropriately in class discussions. When prompted, many express their ideas clearly, providing extended answers to questions. Many develop a sound grasp of subject-specific terminology.

Many primary aged pupils make strong progress in developing reading skills. They develop an interest in reading and can name their favourite books and authors. They begin to apply their reading skills effectively in different contexts, such as to seek information. Many secondary aged pupils read out loud with fluency in lessons across the curriculum. In English lessons, many pupils apply more advanced reading skills effectively, such as inference and evaluation. However, pupils do not receive enough opportunities to apply these skills across the curriculum.

Across the school a majority of pupils develop appropriate writing skills. Many develop a legible handwriting style, although a minority do not apply a fluent style consistently. They learn to write in different genres suitably and for different purposes. In a minority of cases, secondary aged pupils do not structure their extended writing carefully enough. Across the school, around half of pupils write with too many spelling, punctuation and grammatical errors.

The provision for mathematics across the school is well-structured and supports teachers to plan purposeful activities that support pupils in developing and embedding their skills over time. As a result, most pupils make steady progress in their number work and apply a range of strategies with increasing confidence.

Teachers of the youngest pupils ensure that they develop a secure understanding of early number concepts through the effective use of practical resources. Primary aged pupils develop a good understanding of the four mathematical operations and have useful opportunities to extend their mathematical vocabulary. Teachers routinely encourage them to explain their reasoning which supports the development of their problem-solving skills. As pupils progress through the primary years, they represent data with growing sophistication. In a few instances, particularly in the older primary classes, pupils' work is restricted by the overuse of worksheets. This limits their ability to develop greater mathematical fluency and apply their learning in more engaging and meaningful contexts. Many pupils in the secondary phase demonstrate secure understanding of shape and measure. They apply Pythagoras' theorem and linear scale factors accurately to determine unknown lengths in triangles. Many pupils also convert between different metric units reliably and calculate area and other measurements using suitable methods. These skills allow pupils to engage confidently with more advanced mathematical content and apply their knowledge in a range of contexts.

In general, pupils develop their digital skills appropriately. Younger pupils use devices purposefully during role play and control simple programmable toys with growing confidence. By Year 6, they organise data using spreadsheets and begin to use simple formulae. When given the opportunity, many secondary aged pupils apply basic digital skills suitably. However, the opportunities for them to apply more advanced skills purposefully and judiciously to enhance their learning in work across the curriculum are limited.

Many pupils develop Welsh language skills suitably. The youngest pupils enjoy singing daily songs as part of their regular routine, supporting them begin to embrace the language appropriately. By the end of Year 6, many pupils convey simple information suitably, drawing upon the most familiar sentence patterns, and using prompts to assist them when required. A majority of secondary-aged pupils continue to make suitable progress and demonstrate positive attitudes towards learning Welsh. They pronounce words clearly and correctly contributing positively to language exercises in class. A minority do not develop fluency in conveying information and remain over-reliant on sentence builders when they answer aloud or in written form. Pupils receive suitable opportunities to speak Welsh outside of the classroom, for example when performing in community events such as the 'Noson Lawen'.

Many pupils apply creative skills effectively in a wide range of contexts. The youngest pupils choose freely from a range of resources to create their own artwork, and older pupils develop a good understanding of tone, shade and colour through their work on the artist, Kyffin Williams. Many secondary aged pupils include their own experiences or cultures in pieces of art inspired by Welsh artists effectively. They apply thought tracking and mime techniques effectively to show character emotions in drama lessons.

Most pupils develop physical skills appropriately. The youngest pupils benefit from activities that assist them to develop fine motor skills suitably. Primary-aged pupils develop coordination, catching and throwing skills, for example in cricket and tennis sessions. Secondary-aged pupils benefit from worthwhile opportunities to apply physical skills, for example in a broad range of outdoor education activities.

Teachers and support staff forge positive working relationships with pupils. They create a caring ethos where pupils feel safe and secure. Staff have a sound understanding of pupils' needs, and they manage behaviour with care and sensitivity.

Across the primary phase, most teachers and support staff recognise and understand how young children learn. They use this knowledge to plan creative, enabling learning environments, which engage pupils in their learning successfully whilst developing their early skills. Most teachers demonstrate secure subject knowledge. They introduce subject specific vocabulary and key concepts effectively. For example, when supporting secondary aged pupils to develop their persuasive writing, English teachers introduce analysis using the Aristotelian Triangle approach.

Across all age ranges, most teachers make effective use of resources to support pupils to make appropriate progress. In most instances, teachers organise resources effectively creating environments which encourage pupils to be resourceful and independent. They have suitably high expectations of what pupils can achieve and plan learning that supports and challenges them successfully. Support staff are deployed effectively to provide additional support for those who need extra guidance.

Many teachers use a range of strategies suitably to monitor pupils' progress within lessons. They use questioning effectively to check on pupils' learning and to challenge their thinking. In a few lessons, teachers share pupils' learning with their peers, identifying strengths and addressing any areas to develop skilfully. This provides valuable opportunities for pupils to reflect on and improve their work.

Overall, there is a lack of consistency in the quality of written feedback to pupils. There is an over-reliance on pupils' self and peer marking which is not always effective in assisting pupils to improve their work. In a minority of cases, teachers do not identify key errors in spelling, punctuation and grammar. Too often, pupils do not receive opportunities to act on teachers' written feedback to improve their work. As a result, pupils' progress in their writing skills is not as strong as it should be.

Leaders are committed to developing a coherent and progressive 3–16 curriculum. Staff are beginning to ensure that the curriculum is building progression in knowledge and skills. However, in a very few subjects in the secondary phase, current approaches to thematic planning leads to weaknesses in how effectively learning is sequenced.

Themes, topics and educational visits provide primary aged pupils with a clear purpose for learning and promote their understanding of their place within their community and the wider world effectively. There is a strong emphasis on the concept of Cynefin, and pupils benefit from valuable opportunities to explore Welsh history, including the lives of key figures such as Aneurin Bevan and Owain Glyndŵr. In addition, pupils visit Big Pit to explore working conditions in the mining industry and study the history of iron production in Merthyr. These experiences are used effectively to link learning to broader global issues such as the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child or thoughtful work on the Windrush generation. Older primary-aged pupils benefit from regular opportunities to develop French speaking skills. Staff enhance the older pupils' curriculum through purposeful use of community links and real-life experiences. Activities such as visits to care homes and work with local businesses provide pupils with authentic contexts for learning. A wide range of educational visits and cultural experiences, both local and international, contribute effectively to pupils' personal development and broadens their understanding of the world around them.

The curriculum offer for pupils in Years 10 and 11 is suitably diverse and meets their needs and interests appropriately. Pupils have access to a range of general and vocational pathways, including specialist routes such as construction, performing arts and outdoor learning. Provision for more able pupils includes worthwhile opportunities to undertake additional mathematics and take part in the Seren network.

There is a clear and consistent focus on supporting pupils' health and well-being across all ages. Curriculum themes and planned activities help pupils to reflect on their emotions and develop strategies for managing negative feelings. Pupils explore important topics such as equality, human rights and belonging, and the health and well-being curriculum is mapped clearly from Nursery to Year 11. This includes well-considered, age-appropriate content. These aspects reflect the school's commitment to fostering a safe, respectful and inclusive learning environment.

Well-being, care, support and guidance

Blessed Carlo Acutis Catholic School is a caring and inclusive community where most pupils feel valued. The school's mission to inspire "faith, families, and futures with Christ" is embraced by the entire school family, guiding their dedication and commitment.

The school consistently applies its anti-bullying policy and as result most pupils feel safe, free from bullying and harassment. Pastoral teams work collaboratively to promote pupils' well-being, building strong relationships with families by providing the support that assists them to engage positively in school life. The school's community focused approach enables staff to build strong relationships between various community groups. For example, the school hosts cultural events that reflect the diversity of the pupils' backgrounds. This impacts positively on families and supports smooth transition when joining the school or moving between sites. Pupils from low-income households benefit from a wide range of support. This includes breakfast, help with uniform and subsidised extra-curricular activities and educational visits.

The school meets the requirements of the Additional Learning Needs and Educational Tribunal Act to support pupils with additional learning needs. Pupils' one-page profiles provide useful information for staff about pupils' barriers to learning and what helps them to succeed. The school liaises effectively with external agencies and provides worthwhile support for those pupils who are new to English or who have additional needs. Transition is a notable strength of the school. On entry to school, staff use a useful pre-nursery tracker. This helps them to identify pupil needs at an early stage. By Year 6, transition arrangements are tailored carefully to individual needs. This supports most pupils with ALN to make at least appropriate progress. In addition, the school runs a successful programme for parents of pupils transferring to the secondary campus.

The school encourages pupils to develop future aspirations well. Many secondary pupils feel that the school helps them to make decisions about their next steps in post-16 education or work. The school places a strong emphasis on outdoor learning, particularly for its oldest pupils. This includes opportunities for pupils to participate in the Duke of Edinburgh's award scheme.

Most pupils are punctual to lessons and ready to learn. This is a notable feature of the school. The school's community focus team works sensitively with families to promote school attendance and to address persistent absence. However, leaders do not sufficiently monitor and analyse attendance data. As a result, they do not have a secure enough picture of whole school attendance levels which have not recovered to pre-pandemic levels. In addition, the gap in attendance between secondary aged pupils eligible for free school meals and those who are not has increased. The school has appropriate procedures for safeguarding pupils. This includes ensuring that staff receive suitable training.

The school provides a range of motivating, extra-curricular activities for primary aged pupils. The primary playground ambassadors are particularly effective in leading their peers successfully during organised play. Whilst the school provides fewer extra-curricular opportunities for secondary aged pupils, partly due to a short lunch break, they benefit from a few experiences that provide opportunities to develop physical skills and self-worth, such as the popular cheerleading group. In addition, the school runs a successful annual whole-school production and the school choir performs in community events.

Leading and improving

The headteacher is passionate leader who offers purposeful leadership to the school. She has a clear vision for a school that is unified from ages 3 to 16, which is well understood and shared among staff. The school's mission, 'inspiring faith, families and futures with Christ', helps provide a consistent and meaningful focus to meetings, planning and day-to-day activity. As a result, there is a coherent, values-driven approach which underpins much of the school's work.

Senior leaders are supportive of the headteacher and staff. They work collaboratively and offer encouragement and appropriate professional challenge in their line management meetings. In general, they have a good understanding of the strengths and areas for improvement in teaching and learning across the school. Leaders have high expectations of their staff and where necessary, challenge underperformance robustly. However, the school's current leadership structure limits the full realisation of the head teacher's vision. Leaders' responsibilities often overlap, and lines of accountability are often unclear. The structure does not promote full ownership of key aspects across phases. As a result, the school has not made enough progress in ensuring curricular and pedagogical coherence.

A clear calendar of useful self-evaluation activities supports leaders in reviewing provision. Many middle leaders are enthusiastic about their role and lead their areas of responsibility capably. They have a clear understanding of the strengths and areas for improvement within their departments or areas of learning. Pastoral leaders do not currently contribute purposefully to self-evaluation, which limits their ability to understand and improve the provision for supporting pupils' attendance.

Whole-school improvement planning focuses on clear aims and a wide range of actions. Most departmental development planning aligns well with whole-school priorities and includes sensible steps to support improvement. However, whole-school and departmental planning does not always align clearly with findings from self-evaluation. In a minority of cases, success criteria are focused on the completion of actions rather than the intended impact on pupil learning and progress.

Overall, performance management procedures are suitable. Leaders agree objectives in collaboration with staff, ensuring that they reflect individual roles appropriately. The headteacher maintains oversight of all objectives and draws on them to inform the school's professional learning offer suitably. However, objectives do not always focus closely enough on improving learning.

The school provides suitable professional learning opportunities which support staff to develop their practice and share successful approaches. Staff receive beneficial opportunities to develop their leadership skills through participation in 'Drive Forward' teams, where they take ownership of aspects of whole school development. In addition, there are clear annual opportunities for professional learning that include cross-phase collaboration and work with external partners. The school is a lead school for initial teacher education which offers staff access to useful opportunities to develop their wider professional knowledge. The school has established a useful whole-school coaching strategy to improve teaching. All staff participate in coaching activities, and this has begun to shape a more reflective culture.

Governors are committed and enthusiastic supporters of the school. They promote the school's ethos well and provide strong support to the headteacher. Their understanding of the school's strengths and areas for development is generally secure. Governors have a clear understanding of their responsibilities in relation to promoting healthy eating and drinking. However, they do not always challenge school leaders as effectively as they could.

Currently, the school has a substantial budget deficit. There are several factors that contribute to this, including the current leadership structure, inconsistent application of control measures, and insufficient consideration of how to ensure the best value for money. The school makes appropriate use of its pupil development grant to support pupils eligible for free school meals.

Leaders have made suitable progress in responding to a range of national priorities, including Curriculum for Wales, the Additional Learning Needs and Educational Tribunal Act and promoting the Welsh language. Overall, leaders have not had sufficient impact on improving pupils' attendance.

Despite shortcomings in leadership, the overall impact of teaching on learning across the school is strong, and pupils' attitudes to learning are exceptionally positive. These outcomes reflect the commitment and professionalism of staff.

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.

Currently, the school has a substantial budget deficit. There are a number of factors that contribute to this, including the current leadership structure, inconsistent control measures and a lack of thorough consideration of how to ensure the best value for money. The school makes appropriate use of its Pupil Development Grant to support pupils eligible for free school meals.

Evidence base of the report

Before an inspection, inspectors:

- analyse the outcomes from the parent 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 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 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, where appropriate
- visit a broad sample of lessons, 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
(<http://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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