

A report on

Dowlais Primary School

**High Street
Caeharris
CF48 3HB**

Date of inspection: March 2025

by

Estyn, His Majesty's Inspectorate for Education

and Training in Wales

About Dowlais Primary School

Name of provider	Dowlais Primary School
Local authority	Merthyr Tydfil 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	186
Pupils of statutory school age	135
Number in nursery classes	26
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%)	32.7%
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%)	15.6%
Percentage of pupils who speak Welsh at home	0.0%
Percentage of pupils with English as an additional language	11.9%
Date of headteacher appointment	01/09/2023
Date of previous Estyn inspection (if applicable)	22/10/2016
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

Dowlais Primary School is a happy and caring school, where the well-being and learning of every pupil is important. The school's curriculum is rich and pupils take part in a wide range of interesting learning experiences. Leaders and teachers have structured the curriculum so that pupils develop their knowledge and skills progressively. Most pupils engage well with their learning and develop as effective learners, with a good understanding of their strengths and their next steps.

Most pupils, including those with additional learning needs (ALN), those taught in the Learning Resource Bases (LRB) and those from low-income families, make good progress over time. Most pupils acquire effective literacy, Welsh language and digital skills, by the time they leave the school. Most pupils gain a good understanding of mathematical concepts over time, but they have too few opportunities to apply their numeracy skills in meaningful and authentic contexts.

Teaching approaches are successful in securing pupil engagement and ensuring good progress. Teachers use very effective questioning and feedback techniques that have a positive impact on pupil development. Support for pupils with ALN is strong in all classes. The bespoke approaches used in the LRB classes, ensure most pupils make good progress towards their learning goals. Teachers have high expectations for pupils' behaviour. The consistent approaches used by staff mean that nearly all pupils behave well and treat one another, staff and visitors with respect.

Leaders know the school well and have a good track record in making improvements in key areas of the school's performance. Overall attendance rates remain lower than expected and need improvement.

Governors support and challenge the school well to ensure accountability. The school has strong partnerships with local schools, community partners and parents that enrich and support the school's provision.

Recommendations

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

- R1. Improve attendance
- R2. Provide further opportunities for pupils to apply their numeracy skills in meaningful, authentic contexts

What happens next

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

Main evaluation

Dowlais Primary School is a vibrant, caring and welcoming school. Under the strong direction of the headteacher, staff work harmoniously to create an inclusive community, with high aspirations for pupils' learning and well-being. Staff know their pupils well and have positive working relationships with them. Most pupils, including those in the Learning Resource Bases (LRB), feel safe and secure in school. Nearly all pupils behave exceptionally well and show respect towards each other, staff and visitors. Over time, most pupils, including those with additional learning needs (ALN), those in the LRB classes and those from low-income households, make good progress from their individual starting points.

The school's curriculum is broad and balanced and meets the needs and interests of all pupils very well. The curriculum builds pupils' knowledge, skills and understanding progressively over time through a wide range of engaging learning experiences. The 'Dowlais 100' is embedded within the curriculum and ensures that every pupil takes part in at least one hundred enriching experiences during their time in school, regardless of any possible barriers. These include activities such as travelling by train, visiting the theatre and exploring the night sky. The curriculum offers pupils a range of opportunities to learn in engaging contexts but there are limited opportunities for pupils to explore and develop their skills in authentic and purposeful ways. Pupils benefit from a range of experiences to develop their understanding of their community, Wales and the wider world. The school develops pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural understanding well throughout the curriculum. For example, pupils regularly invite visitors to their 'Cultural Corner' where they find out about the cultures within their community.

Pupils have a strong voice in their learning and in the life of the school. Staff ensure frequent, worthwhile opportunities for pupils to play an effective role, including influencing important aspects such as safeguarding arrangements.

The school has a consistent approach to teaching and learning, which benefits all pupils. Lessons include similar features and styles that build progressively as pupils move through the school. Most sessions have good pace and offer pupils good levels of challenge to support their learning. This helps to ensure that most pupils have good attitudes to learning and engage well in their lessons. Most teachers use very effective questioning to deepen and extend learning. They provide valuable immediate feedback that supports pupils to evaluate and improve their learning in a timely way. This impacts pupil progress positively and is a strength of the school's practice. Pupils have regular opportunities to review their learning and to assess their progress and that of their peers. This helps to ensure that most pupils know how well they are doing and what their next steps are.

Structured approaches to the teaching of literacy allow pupils to build upon and apply their skills successfully. As a result, most pupils, including those in the LRB classes, make good progress. By the time they leave the school, many pupils speak confidently, read with fluency and expression and write well in a range of forms and styles, using accurate punctuation and spelling. Teachers plan a range of interesting and engaging tasks designed to develop and extend pupils' digital skills. Most pupils engage enthusiastically in these lessons, and over time, they develop strong digital skills. Older pupils' digital skills improve rapidly and many demonstrate highly effective skills with a range of devices and programs. For example, the oldest pupils write code to create motivational pedometers that count steps and communicate simple messages, which encourage walkers to walk further. Most pupils develop comprehensive mathematical skills and understanding over time. Teachers plan effectively to ensure the progressive development of pupils' understanding of mathematical concepts. However, there are too few opportunities for pupils to use and apply this understanding in other areas of the curriculum and to apply their numeracy skills in authentic and meaningful contexts. Teachers plan beneficial opportunities for pupils to learn new Welsh vocabulary and sentence patterns. Most pupils acquire effective Welsh language skills over time. There are worthwhile opportunities for pupils to develop their physical skills, which impact positively on their health and well-being.

Pupils with ALN benefit from individualised support and bespoke approaches that meet their needs very well. The school works well with external agencies to gain valuable tailored advice which strengthens provision for pupils and their families. As a result, most pupils with ALN make good progress towards their learning goals. Leaders promote daily attendance at school regularly and consistently. However, these measures have not been effective in increasing levels of attendance over time or decreasing the number of pupils who are regularly absent from school.

Leaders evaluate the strengths and areas for improvement for the school rigorously and honestly. They have clear roles and responsibilities and develop well considered plans that include relevant actions for improvement. These have a positive impact on the school's provision and pupil progress over time. The professional development of staff has a high priority and has resulted in improvements in key areas of the school's work. An example of this is the development of middle leaders, who have had a significant impact on improving the school's provision for teaching and learning. The school works well with partner schools and the wider community to strengthen its performance. For instance, the LRB staff work with local specialist schools to share and learn from teaching approaches that have a beneficial impact on outcomes for pupils.

The school's relationship with parents is strong. They are very supportive of the school and appreciate the way that it works in partnership with them to support their child's learning and well-being. The school supports families very well, for example by signposting them to beneficial local advice workshops.

Governors provide strong support and hold the school to account effectively. They have a thorough knowledge of the strengths and areas for development of the school, which they gain through a range of first- hand evaluation activities.

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:

Publications Section

Estyn

Anchor Court, Keen Road

Cardiff

CF24 5JW or by email to publications@estyn.gov.wales

This and other Estyn publications are available on our website: www.estyn.gov.wales