

A report on
St. Mary's Catholic Primary School

**Milford Road
Newtown
Powys
SY16 2EH**

Date of inspection: March 2025

by

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

About St. Mary's Catholic Primary School

Name of provider	St. Mary's Catholic Primary School
Local authority	Powys County Council
Language of the provider	English
School category according to Welsh-medium provision	
Type of school	Primary
Religious character	Estyn does not inspect denominational religious education or the religious content of collective worship when it is a school with a religious character. Instead, the governing body is required by law to arrange for denominational religious education and collective worship to be inspected separately.
Number of pupils on roll	61
Pupils of statutory school age	57
Number in nursery classes	N/A
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%)	33.1%
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%)	45.6%
Percentage of pupils who speak Welsh at home	0.0%

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Percentage of pupils with English as an additional language	19.3%
Date of headteacher appointment	01/01/2021
Date of previous Estyn inspection (if applicable)	23/03/2017
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

St Mary's fosters a nurturing and inclusive school community where pupils feel safe, protected, and valued. The headteacher provides considerate and compassionate leadership, supported by a strong team ethos among staff who maintain positive relationships with pupils and parents. This contributes to an inclusive culture where pupils are generally sociable and polite, and benefit from a strong anti-bullying culture.

Leaders demonstrate a suitable understanding of the school's strengths and development areas through regular self-evaluation. Governors offer robust support and challenge to the school. Where planning for improvement is effective, such as in Welsh, most pupils make good progress. Leaders are dedicated to fostering Welsh culture and language among both staff and pupils. They place importance on relevant professional development, which improves the teaching and learning of Welsh. However, the development of the curriculum and improving teaching has not received sufficient attention and a minority of pupils do not engage in their learning or make the progress they are capable of.

Staff generally develop positive and respectful relationships with pupils, creating calm and purposeful learning environments. Many pupils display positive attitudes towards their learning and generally behave well. However, in all classes a small number of pupils display low-level disruptive behaviour that impacts negatively on their learning and that of others.

Many pupils, including those with additional learning needs (ALN), make suitable progress with their oracy, reading, writing, mathematical, and digital skills. Staff interact with pupils frequently during lessons and often provide helpful prompts and feedback that assist them to correct errors and take the next steps in their learning. Generally, the impact of feedback is inconsistent and too often does not support pupils to make the progress of which they are capable. The school is in the early stages of developing a curriculum. Leaders and staff continue to review and refine this aspect of the school's work. Despite this, recent developments have not led to a consistent approach that supports reliably strong pupil engagement and progress across the school.

While leaders have put in place whole-school procedures to improve attendance, they have not had sufficient impact on how regularly pupils come to school and their punctuality.

Recommendations

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

- R1 Improve the accuracy and effectiveness of self-evaluation and school improvement activities
- R2 Improve attendance and punctuality
- R3 Develop an authentic and engaging curriculum that ensures the progressive development of pupils' skills and secures positive attitudes towards learning
- R4 Improve the impact of feedback on pupil progress

What happens next

In accordance with the Education Act 2005, HMCI is of the opinion that this school is in need of significant improvement. The school will draw up an action plan to show how it is going to address the recommendations. Estyn will monitor the school's progress about 12 months after the publication of this report.

Main evaluation

The headteacher, in partnership with the governing body, works conscientiously to provide a nurturing and inclusive school community, where all are welcome. There is a strong team ethos among staff, which helps to support positive relationships with pupils and parents. They create an inclusive culture where pupils feel safe and protected, and as a result have a strong sense of trust and belonging with their school community. St Mary's ethos and values ensure that pupils develop a good understanding of social, moral and cultural issues. By the time they leave the school, many pupils demonstrate empathy, tolerance and compassion for one another and people in different circumstances to themselves.

Leaders have a suitable understanding of the school's strengths and development areas through regular self-evaluation activities. When planning for improvement is effective, leaders clearly identify the need to improve an aspect of teaching and learning, for example in Welsh. Leaders' actions to develop this area have ensured that most pupils make good progress and can talk confidently in Welsh lessons and to unfamiliar adults in

and around the school. However notable areas for improvement have not been prioritised in a timely fashion and the development of the curriculum and improving teaching has not received sufficient attention. As a result, a minority of pupils do not engage in their learning or make the progress they are capable of.

Staff across the school develop positive, professional and respectful relationships with pupils. This helps to ensure that classrooms and other learning spaces are generally calm and purposeful places in which to learn. Many pupils use the school's indoor and outdoor environments sensibly and engage with their learning happily.

On occasion, teachers use a helpful range of questions and prompts to support pupils' learning during lessons. In the best cases, staff interact with pupils frequently and provide helpful prompts and feedback that help them to correct errors and take the next steps in their learning. Despite this, the impact of written feedback is inconsistent overall and often does not support pupils to improve their learning.

The school benefits from a strong team of teaching assistants who provide a helpful variety of support and scaffold for individual and groups of pupils. They are good language role models and provide pupils with sensitive and thoughtful guidance.

Many pupils display positive attitudes towards their learning. In general, they follow instructions, rules and routines efficiently and exhibit good effort in their learning. However, across the school, a few pupils display low-level disruptive behaviour that impacts negatively on their learning and that of others. As a result, they do not engage appropriately with their learning and do not always carry out their activities as expected.

In general, pupils are sociable and polite and welcome visitors with friendly greetings. Most pupils feel safe at school and feel respected and treated fairly. There is a strong anti-bullying culture within the school. Pupils are well cared for and know who to turn to should they have a problem. Pupil leadership groups, notably the Ciriw Cymraeg, are beginning to influence the life and work of the school. As a result, pupils have taken responsibility and worked collaboratively to create a positive ethos and promote the Welsh language.

A majority of pupils begin school with social, communication and numeracy skills that are expected for their age. By the time they leave the school, many pupils, including those with additional learning needs, make suitable progress from their starting points.

Teachers plan regular opportunities for pupils to apply their skills in other areas of learning. This helps to ensure that many pupils develop sound oracy skills. In general,

pupils listen well to teachers and their friends and respond appropriately when questioned about their activities, interests and experiences. Many pupils make suitable progress in the development of their reading skills. By the time they leave the school, many pupils read with appropriate expression, accuracy and understanding. They make suitable progress in the development of their writing skills. However, there are not enough opportunities for pupils to write at length across a wide enough range of genre and, overall, pupils' presentation skills are underdeveloped. The school is in the early stages of developing a curriculum. Leaders and staff continue to review and refine this aspect of the school's work, but recent developments have not led to a consistent approach that supports reliably strong engagement and pupil progress.

Many pupils make sound progress in the development of their mathematical skills. For example, pupils use their skills to measure objects or identify shapes in the outdoor environment. In general, pupils apply the skills they develop in literacy and numeracy lessons to a similar level when using them in their topic work.

Teachers provide a suitable range of digital learning experiences and as a result many pupils make solid progress in the development of their digital skills. Pupils become familiar with how to use digital devices to support and enhance their learning from an early age. As they move through the school the oldest pupils develop a purposeful range of skills and understanding. They enjoy coding and programming and use spreadsheets and databases appropriately to present and analyse data.

Leaders have appropriately addressed a few national priorities, such as addressing the impact of poverty on pupil progress and the implementation of Welsh Government's ALN reform. The school provides valuable support for pupils with ALN. They collaborate well with outside agencies and partners to support these pupils to make suitable progress. Leaders foster positive relationships with parents and the community. Parents appreciate the work of the school and feel supported. Leaders have developed a whole-school approach towards improving attendance. However, rates of attendance remain too low, with a few pupils regularly arriving late and leaving early from school.

The school effectively supports pupils in their transition from one phase of learning to the next as well as their transfer to secondary school. Leaders work closely with local nurseries and key workers to ensure smooth transition for all pupils as they begin their school life.

Governors provide robust support and challenge to the school. The governing body are aware of national priorities. For example, they understand the need to improve pupils' progress in Welsh and to implement ALN reform. The governing body have a significant

range of professional expertise and contribute well to school life and to its place within the community. They understand the school's improvement priorities and they assist leaders to implement and monitor improvement work well.

Additional information

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

The school's arrangements for site management give cause for concern and have been brought to the attention of the local authority.

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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