A report on

St John the Baptist V.A. Primary School

Chester Road
Penymynydd
Flintshire
CH4 0EN

Date of inspection: June 2025

by

Estyn, His Majesty's Inspectorate for Education

and Training in Wales

About St John the Baptist V.A. Primary School

Name of provider	St John the Baptist V.A. Primary School
Local authority	Flintshire County Council
Language of the provider	English
School category according to Welsh-medium provision	
Type of school	Primary
Religious character	*
Number of pupils on roll	108
Pupils of statutory school age	82
Number in nursery classes	12
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%)	4.2%
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%)	22.0%
Percentage of pupils who speak Welsh at home	0.0%
Percentage of pupils with English as an additional language	0.0%
Date of headteacher appointment	01/05/2014
Date of previous Estyn inspection (if applicable)	14/11/2016
Start date of inspection	02/06/2025

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

Leaders and staff work diligently to create a school that is warm, welcoming, and supportive. This creates an environment where pupils grow as responsible individuals who impact positively on the school and the wider community. Teachers develop highly positive working relationships with pupils, and pupils are happy and value the respect and care shown by staff and their peers. Most pupils approach their learning enthusiastically. They work well in groups and respond positively to opportunities to take on leadership roles.

In many cases, teachers use strategies, such as effective questioning, to encourage pupils to think more deeply and to make suitable progress in learning. Support for pupils with additional learning needs (ALN) is tailored carefully to help individuals make positive progress towards their personal targets. However, in general, teachers' expectations of what pupils can achieve are not high enough and lessons often lack challenge. This limits the progress that pupils make.

The school's curriculum combines Areas of Learning and Experiences (AoLEs) suitably, but the school is still developing its approach to ensure that learning experiences support pupils to build on their knowledge and understanding appropriately. Pupils share their ideas confidently, using a broad vocabulary and many develop their reading skills well. They write enthusiastically and plan their work carefully but do not develop the same level of fluency and sophistication in writing as they do in speaking. Many pupils make sufficient progress in developing their mathematical knowledge, but opportunities for younger pupils to lead their own learning are too infrequent.

Leaders monitor the work of the school regularly. This helps them to identify suitably areas in need of improvement. However, leaders' evaluations of teaching are not robust enough, such as in identifying where teachers have low expectations and do not challenge pupils well enough.

School leaders and governors work together effectively to oversee the running of the school. Leaders use relevant information to shape improvement priorities, creating positive change in key areas like Welsh language development and cultural understanding. While staff engage well with improvement strategies, these strategies sometimes lack clarity, reducing their effectiveness in improving teaching and learning.

Recommendations

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

R1.   Strengthen self-evaluation processes and use the findings to provide support and appropriate challenge, to improve the quality of teaching and learning

R2.   Increase teachers' expectations of what pupils can achieve and ensure that learning activities challenge pupils more consistently and effectively

R3.   Strengthen the curriculum so that it provides pupils with authentic and progressive learning experiences across all areas of learning

What happens next

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

Main evaluation

Leaders ensure that the school provides a calm, inclusive and safe learning environment. This underpins the school's vision for the development of pupils as positive citizens who contribute purposefully to school and society, while making appropriate progress as learners. Pupils speak proudly about their school, with a strong sense of belonging. They are happy, enjoy school and feel that they are treated respectfully by adults and other pupils. The relationships between staff and pupils, and between pupils themselves, are a notable feature. They demonstrate care, kindness, and empathy.

Nearly all pupils have highly positive attitudes to learning. Most work together in pairs and groups helpfully and supportively. They focus diligently to complete tasks. Pupils develop their leadership skills well through a suitable range of groups. They take their roles seriously and are proud that they are contributing to the improvement of the school.

Many pupils begin school with good communication and social skills. They are engaged, enthusiastic and inquisitive. As pupils move through the school, they make suitable progress in developing their knowledge, skills and understanding in many areas of learning. However, a lack of expectation and challenge means that they do not always make the progress of which they are capable. Provision to support pupils with additional learning needs (ALN) is effective and meets their individual needs well. The school identifies pupils' needs early and provides beneficial support. Staff work closely with a range of external agencies to support those pupils with more complex needs, skilfully.

Throughout the school, many pupils speak clearly and maturely for their stage of development. They explain information and their ideas using a well-developed vocabulary. Many older pupils use specialist vocabulary accurately and respond to questions confidently. The school has clear and effective strategies to help develop pupils' reading skills. Pupils have frequent opportunities to read with adults, and teachers use these sessions beneficially to further pupils' skills and understanding. However, staff do not always question and support pupils effectively enough to help them develop a secure understanding of what they read. Many younger pupils develop a strong grasp of the link between letters and sounds quickly. By Year 6, many pupils read well and demonstrate a useful understanding of what they have read.

The school's curriculum supports teachers in building on pupils' writing skills suitably. Many younger pupils are enthusiastic writers and write independently for a wide range of purposes. Many older pupils plan their writing suitably and make helpful improvements to initial drafts, explaining why they have made changes. However, a majority of pupils' writing does not reflect the same level of fluency or sophistication as their verbal communication skills.

Teachers are beginning to use curriculum guidance to help them consider ways in which they can teach mathematical concepts more effectively and ensure that pupils have opportunities to use and apply this learning. As a result, many pupils make suitable progress in developing their mathematical skills. Where this is most effective, teachers ensure that pupils apply their skills to a high standard when solving problems. However, in too many instances, teachers do not match the level of challenge to pupils' needs well enough.

Most pupils' digital skills develop suitably. Teachers ensure that pupils have a useful range of opportunities to develop their digital skills, such as creating instructions to control a simple robot and using basic formulae in spreadsheets.

Teachers ensure that pupils have a broad and beneficial range of opportunities to learn about the history and culture of Wales. Nearly all teachers model the Welsh language consistently and effectively. They ensure that pupils have regular opportunities to practise speaking in Welsh. As a result, many pupils develop their Welsh language skills competently.

Throughout the school, pupils feel confident to ask questions and embrace mistakes as part of their learning journey. A majority of teachers use questioning effectively to encourage pupils to think more deeply and to explain their reasoning. However, in too many cases, teachers' expectations of what pupils can achieve are not high enough. In the younger classes, teachers do not provide authentic learning experiences that enable pupils to make progress consistently. Opportunities for them to lead their own learning are too infrequent. Many teachers provide pupils with useful verbal feedback during lessons. This helps to address pupils' misconceptions but teachers' written feedback for older pupils does not always help them to understand well enough how to improve their learning.

The school is refining its curriculum to incorporate all Areas of Learning and Experience (AoLEs) suitably into topics. Learning experiences often include Humanities and Science and Technology, for example, but teachers do not always plan effectively to reflect Curriculum for Wales to enable pupils to develop their knowledge, understanding and skills across all aspects of the curriculum.

The school supports pupils effectively to develop their understanding of healthy relationships. Older pupils explore what a good friend is and how their actions can affect others, including how to resist pressure from peers. Most pupils are developing a good understanding of how to be healthy.

Through opportunities to explore world religions, cultures, and values pupils are developing respect for others. The school is beginning to develop pupils' understanding of its diverse local and wider community. Pupils are beginning to understand the contribution of people from different backgrounds to the culture and life of Wales.

Leaders, including governors, work collaboratively to set a suitable strategic direction for many aspects of the school's work. They promote attendance and punctuality effectively, and as a result pupils' attendance is strong. There is an effective culture of safeguarding at the school. Governors play an active role in the life and work of the school. They know the school's strengths and have a suitable understanding of the school's current priorities and progress towards addressing them.

Leaders undertake a suitable range of evaluation activities and use information and data appropriately to identify areas in need of improvement, and to give a sense of impact of improvement work. Staff across the school respond positively to school improvement strategies. Where leaders focus improvement work carefully, it brings about positive change. This helps the school address priorities, such as improving pupils' Welsh language skills and their understanding of the culture and heritage of Wales. This also exemplifies well how the school engages with the local cluster of schools to support improvement.

Arrangements to distribute responsibility are beginning to develop appropriately and professional learning aligns appropriately with school improvement priorities. Professional learning supports staff to meet the health and well-being needs of pupils successfully and helps staff with career development appropriately. However, opportunities to observe best practice within and beyond the school are limited and leaders do not always ensure that professional learning has sufficient depth to ensure that teachers understand fully why they are implementing specific approaches. Leaders do not always evaluate teaching or learning experiences well enough to identify and address the difference they make to pupils' progress. In a few instances, improvement strategies are too vague, intentions are not clear, and there is a lack of clarity about what the school is trying to achieve. In these cases, there tend to be numerous strategies that the school covers superficially, with not enough depth to ensure a positive impact on teaching and learning.

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/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

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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