

A report on

Cwmlai Primary School

**Penygarreg Road
Tonyrefail
Porth
RCT
CF39 8AS**

Date of inspection: June 2025

by

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

About Cwmlai Primary School

Name of provider	Cwmlai Primary School
Local authority	Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council
Language of the provider	English
School category according to Welsh-medium provision	
Type of school	Primary
Religious character	None
Number of pupils on roll	427
Pupils of statutory school age	323
Number in nursery classes	50
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%)	10.4%
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%)	1.9%
Percentage of pupils who speak Welsh at home	0.0%
Percentage of pupils with English as an additional language	4.3%
Date of headteacher appointment	02/09/2024

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Date of previous Estyn inspection (if applicable)	07/11/2016
Start date of inspection	23/06/2025

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

Cwmlai Primary is a caring and inclusive school where pupils feel safe, valued, and respected. Staff and pupils share strong relationships, and pupils behave well and enjoy attending school. The school has effective safeguarding procedures in place, and nearly all pupils know who to speak to if they are worried.

The recently appointed headteacher has introduced beneficial changes to staffing, procedures and teaching. Leaders involve a suitable range of stakeholders in reviewing the school's work, helping to identify strengths and areas for improvement. For example, the introduction of a whole-school approach to phonics is beginning to improve reading outcomes for younger pupils.

Most pupils make good progress in learning from their individual starting points. This includes those with additional learning needs or from low-income backgrounds. Pupils across the school are articulate speakers and by the time they leave the school most pupils read fluently and accurately, apply their writing skills effectively and develop a sound set of mathematical and digital skills.

The school offers a broad and engaging curriculum to its pupils. However, teachers of the younger pupils do not always take good enough account of pupils' developmental needs when planning their curriculum. As a result, teachers often over direct learning and provision does not always build and extend on pupils' skills in a coherent and progressive way.

Support for pupils with additional learning needs is strong. Staff identify needs promptly and provide effective, tailored support. Pupil voice is a notable strength of the school, with pupils actively involved in influencing school life through the various leadership groups.

Teachers provide regular opportunities for pupils to learn and practise Welsh language patterns, and many pupils show a positive attitude towards learning the language. However, pupils have limited opportunities to use Welsh outside of these sessions, which affects their confidence and fluency in speaking.

Recommendations

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

- R1. Improve the school's understanding of child development to provide an appropriate curriculum and provision for the younger pupils in line with the principles of Curriculum for Wales
- R2. Improve pupils' Welsh language skills

What happens next

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

Main evaluation

Cwmlai Primary School is an inclusive and nurturing school that places the well-being of pupils at the heart of its work. A strong culture of care and mutual respect is evident throughout the school, where staff and pupils live by the school's motto: 'living and learning as one'. Pupils feel safe and valued, and the positive relationships fostered across the school underpin the respectful behaviour and cooperative attitudes of nearly all pupils. Staff feel well supported and appreciate the focus on their professional and emotional welfare. The school has robust safeguarding procedures and pupils know who they can talk to if any problems arise and that these will be responded to swiftly. Most pupils enjoy attending school and attend regularly.

In a relatively short time, the recently appointed Headteacher has brought about a significant change to the staffing structure, school procedures and quality of teaching. This has been well received by all stakeholders. Leaders have developed a comprehensive schedule of self-evaluation that includes input from pupils, parents and staff. This inclusive approach helps leaders to understand the school's strengths and areas for development. For example, the recent identification of the need to strengthen pupils' reading skills has led to the implementation of a whole-school approach to teaching phonics, which is beginning to have a positive effect.

Most pupils start school with skills appropriate for their age. From these strong starting points most pupils including those with additional needs, and those from low income families make good progress as they move through the school. Across the school pupils are articulate communicators and make valuable and thoughtful contributions during lessons. Most pupils demonstrate strong reading skills, underpinned by secure phonological knowledge. By Year 2, most pupils apply their knowledge of letters and sounds to decode unknown words successfully. As they progress, they continue to build on these skills and by Year 6 most pupils read fluently, and accurately, taking good notice of punctuation to enhance meaning and adapt their pace. Across the school, most pupils apply their writing skills purposefully through a wide range of genres. By the time they leave the school, they write competently with increasing accuracy and develop a mature writing style.

During their time at the school, most pupils make good progress in the development of their mathematical skills and show positive attitudes to learning. Younger pupils gain a secure understanding of number, measure and shape. Teachers build on this knowledge well as they move through the school. By Year 6, most pupils explain the strategies behind their answers confidently, justify their choices, and adapt their methods when necessary. Teachers provide purposeful opportunities for pupils to apply their numeracy skills across

the curriculum at an appropriate level, which supports the development of their reasoning and problem-solving skills.

Teachers plan well for the development of pupils' digital skills. Teachers of older pupils make imaginative use a new technology, including artificial intelligence (AI) to plan engaging activities that support pupils' digital, literacy and creative skills. Most pupils develop a secure range of digital skills and build on these successfully as they move through the school.

Teachers plan regular sessions for pupils to learn and recall Welsh language patterns, and, in a few instances, staff are beginning to use Welsh phrases during the day suitably. Many pupils show a positive attitude to learning Welsh. However, overall, there are limited opportunities for pupils to use their Welsh oracy skills outside formal sessions and this impacts on pupils' ability to speak Welsh with confidence and competence.

During lessons, many teachers set clear learning objectives, and plan engaging lessons and activities. Across the school staff are strong language role models and set high expectations for learning. In the best examples, teachers pause learning to address any misconceptions and help pupils to reflect on their work. Across the school, teachers provide valuable feedback to pupils, which helps them to improve their work and identify their next their next steps.

The school's curriculum is broad and balanced and provides pupils with a wide range of purposeful and engaging learning experiences. Teachers use stimulating hooks at the beginning of each term's theme to capture pupils' interest, engage them in their learning and challenge their thinking. The curriculum supports pupils to develop their spiritual, moral, social, and cultural awareness suitably through varied activities, including learning about different religions and beliefs and exploring the needs of their local community. These experiences help pupils to understand the diverse society of Wales and develop a sense of empathy for others.

In the younger classes, teachers do not take sufficient account of pupils' developmental needs in their plans. In these classes staff often over-direct activities and do not consider the developmental needs of the pupils well enough. Teachers do not provide pupils with enough time to follow their own interests, lead their own learning or develop their problem solving and independent skills effectively.

Teachers and skilled teaching assistants support pupils with additional learning needs (ALN) effectively, helping them make good progress towards their individual learning and well-being targets. Staff identify pupils' needs swiftly and tailor support appropriately.

Spotlight: Impact of pupil voice groups in developing pupils' leadership skills and the positive impact they have on their school and wider community

Pupils have valuable opportunities to influence the life of the school through a wide range of pupil voice groups and the Senedd. Here they develop an understanding of their rights and the positive impact they can have on their school and wider community. Pupils take responsibility for the effective running of these groups, and this helps them develop their leadership skills well. From Year 2, all pupils, take part in a pupil voice group where they take responsibility for leading on important areas of improvement within the school. For example, the Eco club recently improved the learning environment for all pupils through the development of an eco garden in the school grounds. Here pupils have valuable opportunities to explore the awe and wonder of nature and understand better how to take care of the planet.

Additional information

The school's arrangements for safeguarding pupils 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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