

A report on

Pontarddulais Primary School

**Upper James Street
Pontarddulais
SA4 8JD**

Date of inspection: November 2025

by

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

About Pontarddulais Primary School

Name of provider	Pontarddulais Primary School
Local authority	City and County of Swansea
Language of the provider	English
School category according to Welsh-medium provision	
Type of school	Primary
Religious character	
Number of pupils on roll	391
Pupils of statutory school age	295
Number in nursery classes	56
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 21.7%)	25.8%
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 9.2%)	11.5%
Percentage of pupils who speak Welsh at home	3.1%
Percentage of pupils with English as an additional language	3.1%
Lead partner in Initial teacher education	Yes
Date of headteacher appointment	01/09/2017

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Date of previous Estyn inspection (if applicable)	22/06/2018
Start date of inspection	10/11/2025

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

Pontarddulais Primary School is a warm and inclusive community where pupils feel safe, respected and valued. Staff cultivate warm relationships that contribute strongly to the calm and purposeful feel of the school. Behaviour is a notable strength: almost all pupils conduct themselves sensibly, treat others kindly and show pride in belonging to their school.

The headteacher has set out a clear direction for strengthening leadership and raising standards. Middle leaders are beginning to influence the school's priorities for improvement positively. However, as the senior leadership team has only recently been reorganised, their impact on improving the quality of teaching is still developing.

In many lessons, teachers plan purposeful and engaging learning activities and use questioning well to encourage pupils to explain their thinking. In a few lessons, the pace of learning is too slow.

The curriculum is broad and engaging, and it reflects the school's values and local context well. Themes such as Windrush, belonging and Fairtrade help pupils think about fairness and the experiences of others. Most pupils, including those from low-income families, participate enthusiastically and make steady progress across the curriculum. Approaches to early reading are developing securely. Pupils write for different purposes, but they have too few opportunities to write imaginatively or refine their work.

Pupils use number confidently and apply their skills successfully when given the opportunity. Many learning areas support independence and curiosity, with the forest school area being a particular strength. A few areas of the school are less well maintained, and classes for the youngest pupils are not designed effectively enough to promote effective exploration and purposeful play.

The school nurtures pupils' well-being well, and provision for additional learning needs is carefully planned. As a result, most pupils receiving extra support make good progress. Attendance, however, remains a significant challenge. Too many pupils are persistently absent, including those with additional learning needs and those eligible for free school meals, and current strategies have not yet led to sustained improvement. Governors support the school well, although they do not gather enough first-hand evidence to fully understand pupils' progress.

Recommendations

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

- R1. Strengthen strategic leadership and governance so that all leaders understand their roles and contribute effectively to school improvement
- R2. Establish a clear, shared understanding of effective teaching and ensure that self-evaluation focuses closely on its quality and impact on pupils' progress
- R3. Improve attendance, particularly for pupils eligible for free school meals and those with additional learning needs
- R4. Improve the quality and consistency of feedback so that all pupils are suitably challenged and have regular opportunities to refine and extend their writing

What happens next

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

Main evaluation

Leaders at Pontarddulais Primary School provide a nurturing, inclusive environment where pupils feel safe, respected and valued. They promote a positive ethos, in which strong relationships underpin the calm, purposeful atmosphere across the school. Staff have high expectations for pupils' behaviour, and nearly all pupils behave courteously and cooperate well with one another. They show empathy, kindness and pride in their school community.

The headteacher has a clear vision for strengthening the role of leadership to improve standards and has introduced appropriate systems to monitor progress and support improvement. Senior leaders provide valuable opportunities for middle leaders, including the ALNCo and curriculum leads, to develop their roles and contribute to school improvement. For instance, their work is beginning to strengthen teaching in reading and mathematics. However, the senior leadership team has recently restructured and is at an early stage of development. Roles and responsibilities are still becoming established, which means that leaders do not yet monitor teaching regularly enough or evaluate its impact on pupils' learning as effectively as they could.

Many lessons are purposeful and well planned. Many teachers use questioning effectively to challenge pupils and provide them with opportunities to explain their thinking. This also enables teachers to identify misconceptions and to adapt teaching to support pupils' next steps. In a few lessons, teacher talk dominates, and the overuse of strategies such as 'pit stops' interrupts the flow of learning and restricts pupils' deeper thinking. Senior leaders provide suitable opportunities for staff to discuss their professional development, and in the best cases provide specific feedback about how to improve their teaching.

Senior leaders place a high value on the school's role as a lead partner for Initial Teacher Education (ITE). Staff benefit from valuable collaborative opportunities to strengthen their leadership skills, for example through developing their mentoring skills to support colleagues' professional growth.

Governors take their responsibilities seriously. They meet regularly, receive updates from leaders and staff, and understand their role in promoting pupils' well-being. They support initiatives that encourage healthier food choices and active lifestyles. However, their understanding of pupil progress and outcomes is limited. They rely too heavily on information from leaders and do not gather enough first-hand evidence to inform their evaluations, which weakens their ability to challenge and support the school's strategic direction.

The school is developing a broad and balanced curriculum that provides pupils with a suitable range of engaging learning experiences. Leaders have moved away from isolated topics to a more coherent model based on curriculum ‘threads’, which helps to ensure appropriate coverage and progression across year groups. Staff plan learning that reflects pupils’ interests, the school’s values and its local context. Work on themes, such as Belonging, Windrush, Fairtrade and anti-bullying, supports pupils’ moral and ethical understanding well. As a result, most pupils including those from low-income families, engage well with their learning, and make steady progress in most areas across the curriculum.

The school is developing a clear and structured approach to developing pupils’ reading skills. Younger pupils respond well to phonics sessions and are beginning to make good progress in decoding and blending sounds. By Year 2, many read with appropriate fluency and understanding. As pupils move through the school, they develop their ability to understand and evaluate texts suitably, although a few older pupils still find it difficult to explain why writers choose particular words or phrases and the effect these have on the reader.

Pupils write for a suitable range of purposes, including creating informative leaflets and historical reports. However, they have too few opportunities to write imaginatively or at length, and they do not routinely redraft or refine their work in response to feedback. This limits their ability to experiment with vocabulary and to produce more ambitious, creative writing.

Pupils make solid progress in mathematics and show a secure understanding of number. Many pupils choose suitable resources to support their work and explain their reasoning clearly. Staff are beginning to strengthen opportunities for pupils to apply their numeracy skills across the curriculum, and when these opportunities are planned well, pupils use their skills confidently in meaningful contexts. For example, they measure forces with a Newton meter in science, calculate data linked to historical events, and apply mathematical thinking when planning a hillfort settlement.

Although the development of pupils’ coding skills is still at an early stage, staff generally provide suitable opportunities for pupils to develop their wider digital skills. Pupils create and extract information from databases, use word-processing tools to present their ideas, and produce simple multimedia presentations.

In many classrooms, pupils benefit from well-organised and engaging learning areas that promote independence and enthusiasm for learning. The forest school area is a particular strength, providing rich opportunities for pupils to develop their problem-solving and physical skills, as well as an appreciation of the natural world. However, a few classrooms are less well maintained, and the learning areas for the youngest pupils contain too many

resources that do not support purposeful, natural or engaging opportunities for children to explore, create and develop their curiosity and independence.

Staff support pupils' well-being effectively. They foster a strong culture of inclusion in which pupils feel safe and ready to learn. Leaders provide purposeful provision for pupils with Additional Learning Needs (ALN) and work closely with teachers and support staff to identify, support and monitor their progress. Effective provision, such as the Oasis Room and sensory circuits, helps pupils regulate emotions and re-engage positively. As a result, most pupils with ALN make good progress from their starting points.

The family liaison officer builds strong relationships with families and supports vulnerable pupils well. Staff know their pupils and families well and respond promptly to their needs. The school offers effective transition arrangements, including links with the Flying Start setting and local secondary schools.

Pupils enjoy being part of voice groups, such as Criw Cymraeg, the Ethical Team and Health Heroes, and these make meaningful contributions to school life. Older pupils take on roles such as prefects and corridor monitors, to support younger pupils and to help to maintain the school's calm and respectful environment.

Despite the school's efforts, attendance remains a priority for improvement. The rate of persistent absence is too high, particularly among pupils eligible for free school meals and those with ALN. Although leaders use appropriate systems and offer suitable support through the family liaison officer, strategies to improve attendance have not yet had sufficient impact.

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.

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