

A report on
Pontygwaith Primary School

**Graig Street
Pontygwaith
Ferndale
RCT
CF43 3LY**

Date of inspection: March 2026

by

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

About Pontygwaith Primary School

Name of provider	Pontygwaith 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	
Number of pupils on roll	155
Pupils of statutory school age	126
Number in nursery classes	19
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%)	35.6%
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%)	4.0%
Percentage of pupils who speak Welsh at home	0.0%
Percentage of pupils with English as an additional language	4.0%
Lead partner in Initial teacher education	No
Date of headteacher appointment	01/11/2023

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Date of previous Estyn inspection (if applicable)	04/06/2018
Start date of inspection	09/03/2026

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

At Pontygwaith Primary School, the headteacher provides strong, thoughtful leadership, supported effectively by staff and governors. Together, they share a clear vision that promotes a nurturing, inclusive and supportive school community, consistently communicated to staff, pupils and families. This means that the school has a calm and purposeful ethos where pupils feel safe, valued and confident. Leaders prioritise pupils' well-being, which is reflected in respectful relationships and robust safeguarding arrangements understood by all staff.

Leaders demonstrate a strong understanding of the local community and work proactively with parents, using timely communication, family learning events, and targeted support to enhance pupils' learning and well-being. Family engagement is a notable strength, with parents actively involved through initiatives such as the 'Celebration of Learning' events, which contribute notably to improved pupil participation and attendance.

Over time, many pupils, including those pupils with additional learning needs (ALN), make suitable and at times good progress from where they start. Younger pupils develop language and communication skills well and talk confidently about their learning. Reading is a strength across the school, pupils progress well from using early phonics to become fluent expressive readers. Writing skills develop appropriately, although a minority of pupils struggle to sustain ideas and extend their writing. In Welsh, younger pupils develop listening and speaking skills well, but older pupils have too few opportunities to extend spoken Welsh which limits their confidence and progress.

In mathematics, most pupils develop calculation skills and an understanding of number, shape and measure well, though opportunities to apply these skills across the curriculum are less well developed. Pupils develop digital skills suitably and their physical skills successfully through outdoor learning, swimming and a wide variety of sports. Teaching is largely effective, due to supportive and creative learning environments and strong relationships. In the most effective lessons, teachers use questioning successfully and clear expectations promotes good collaboration, though at times feedback to pupils about how they can improve their work is inconsistent across the school.

The curriculum is broad, engaging, and effectively linked to local culture and Welsh history. Outdoor learning opportunities support pupils' practical skills and well-being successfully. Systems for identifying and supporting pupils with additional learning needs are highly effective, enabling most pupils to make good progress. Leaders and governors have sound self-evaluation and budgeting procedures, though monitoring is not always precise enough to identify specific areas of teaching that need to improve.

Recommendations

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

- R1 Strengthen self-evaluation and improvement planning to focus more sharply on the aspects of teaching that have the greatest impact on learning
- R2 Strengthen the level of challenge overall and ensure that feedback supports pupils to improve and refine their work
- R3 Improve pupils' writing skills

What happens next

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

Main evaluation

At Pontygwaith Primary school, the headteacher provides strong, thoughtful leadership, supported effectively by school leaders and governors. Together, they share a clear vision that promotes a nurturing, inclusive and supportive school community, which is consistently communicated to staff, pupils and families. This means that, the school has a calm, purposeful ethos where pupils feel safe, valued and confident.

Leaders prioritise pupils' well-being, reflected in respectful relationships and a nurturing environment. Pupils feel well cared for and safeguarding arrangements are robust and clearly understood. Leaders understand the local community and work proactively with parents, using timely communication, family learning events, and targeted support to enhance pupils' learning and well-being.

Spotlight: 'One community, one school, improving attendance'

Family engagement is a notable strength across the school. Staff build highly effective partnerships with parents, carers and the local community, helping them to support their children's learning and understand the importance of good attendance. Events such as the regular 'Celebration of Learning' sessions allow parents to take part in activities alongside their children. Staff provide sensitive, individualised support for families and ensure learning is accessible to all. As a result of this strong work, families engage well with the school and pupils' attendance continues to improve.

Many pupils, including those with additional learning needs (ALN), make suitable and at times good progress in most areas of the curriculum over time. In the early years, pupils develop their language and communication skills well from low starting points. They talk confidently about their activities and explain their ideas clearly when working with adults and their peers. As they move through the school, many pupils listen carefully and discuss their work with increasing confidence. By the time they reach the oldest classes, many speak confidently about their learning, although a few older pupils find it difficult to express their ideas clearly.

The school has a positive culture of reading. Leaders have established clear approaches to developing pupils' reading skills progressively, and pupils have regular opportunities to practise these skills. Younger pupils make a good start by learning letters and sounds and begin to blend them to read simple words. As they get older, many pupils read with increasing accuracy and fluency and enjoy discussing their books. Leaders are beginning to strengthen reading further through whole-class study of more challenging texts.

Many pupils develop their writing skills appropriately as they move through the school. Younger pupils begin to write simple sentences and use basic punctuation with increasing accuracy. Older pupils write in a good range of genres and often use an increasingly varied vocabulary. In the best cases, pupils produce imaginative and engaging work, although a minority do not develop their ideas well enough in extended writing and do not apply spelling, punctuation and grammar accurately enough. In addition, the quality of handwriting and presentation is too variable.

Younger pupils develop suitable listening and speaking skills in Welsh. As they move through the school, many gain a good understanding of basic vocabulary and simple patterns. Opportunities for older pupils to extend their spoken Welsh are not always consistent, so a few pupils lack confidence and do not make as much progress as they could.

In mathematics, younger pupils develop their understanding well through practical activities and hands-on learning. As they move through the school, many pupils learn appropriate calculation methods and develop their understanding of number, shape and measure using suitable mathematical vocabulary accurately. At times, opportunities to apply numeracy skills across the curriculum are less well developed. Pupils develop a suitable range of digital skills, for instance when creating presentations or collecting data using spreadsheets. Older pupils begin to learn basic coding skills, although progression is not always strong enough for a few pupils to use technology in more advanced ways. Pupils develop their physical skills successfully through outdoor play, swimming, outdoor classroom activities and sports sessions, which support their confidence and well-being.

Across the school, teachers and support staff create positive learning environments and maintain respectful relationships with pupils. As a result, nearly all pupils behave well in lessons and show positive attitudes to learning. Where teaching is most effective, staff explain learning clearly, model language well and ask purposeful questions that encourage pupils to think and work collaboratively. In a few lessons, the level of challenge is too low, which reduces pupils' engagement and progress. Teachers provide regular feedback, but at times focus too much on praise rather than helping pupils understand how to improve. Consequently, a few pupils do not always know their next steps, and opportunities for them to refine and improve their work, particularly in extended writing, are less well developed.

School leaders show sharp awareness of local and national priorities. For instance, they work collaboratively with other schools and the wider community to develop a curriculum that reflects the school's context, helping pupils develop a strong sense of Cynefin. The curriculum is broad and engaging, with a strong sense of identity and place. Learning experiences draw well on the local area and the culture and history of Wales. This helps

pupils develop pride in their community, while also learning about the wider world. Pupils benefit from a good range of creative experiences, and many produce work of a high quality. The school makes effective use of its limited outdoor space, including a well-planned outdoor learning programme that develops pupils' practical skills and supports their well-being.

Systems to identify and support pupils with ALN are highly effective. Skilled support staff provide targeted interventions that support pupils' literacy, numeracy and emotional development, enabling these pupils to make good progress towards their individual targets. All pupils have suitable opportunities to contribute to their learning and many take part enthusiastically in leadership groups. They take pride in these roles, although the impact of these groups is at times reduced because they do not meet often enough to influence school decisions. Transition arrangements are effective and help pupils settle quickly into school and prepare older pupils well for the next stage of their education.

Leaders identify appropriate whole-school priorities and, overall, self-evaluation activities are comprehensive. They draw on a range of useful evidence from first-hand monitoring, meetings to discuss pupil progress and regular staff discussions to identify school strengths and areas to improve. Generally, this helps leaders to highlight relevant priorities for development. At times, monitoring activities are not precise enough to identify specific areas in teaching and learning that need to improve. This limits leaders' ability to secure consistent improvements in these aspects across the school.

School governors are knowledgeable and well informed about the school's work. They understand the school's context and priorities well and receive useful updates on progress against school priorities. They visit school regularly and often undertake learning walks and listen to pupils talk about their learning. This allows them to support and challenge school leaders effectively. Leaders and governors manage and spend the school's budget carefully. They monitor expenditure and assess the impact of the pupil development grant thoroughly.

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/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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