

A report on
Thornwell Primary School

**Thornwell Road
Bulwark
Chepstow
Monmouthshire
NP16 5NT**

Date of inspection: June 2026

by

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

About Thornwell Primary School

Name of provider	Thornwell Primary School
Local authority	Monmouthshire 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	254
Pupils of statutory school age	184
Number in nursery classes	35
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%)	22.5%
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%)	21.7%
Percentage of pupils who speak Welsh at home	*
Percentage of pupils with English as an additional language	*
Lead partner in Initial teacher education	No
Date of headteacher appointment	01/09/2015

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Date of previous Estyn inspection (if applicable)	22/02/2020
Start date of inspection	22/06/2026

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

Thornwell Primary School is a happy, caring and inclusive school where pupils feel welcomed, valued and well supported. Strong relationships between staff and pupils create a positive ethos in which most pupils enjoy learning, behave well and develop high levels of well-being. Leaders have established a clear vision that places pupils, staff and the wider community at the heart of the school's work.

The curriculum is broad, engaging and enriched by an exceptional outdoor learning environment. The school farm, forest area and community gardens provide authentic opportunities for pupils to develop skills and deepen their understanding of sustainability.

Leadership and governance are effective. Robust self-evaluation and improvement processes have secured sustained progress over time. The school ensures that professional learning aligns appropriately to school improvement priorities. The school has strengthened provision in the younger classes, where pupils make strong progress in the development of their communication and oracy skills through purposeful play and exploration. Across the school, most pupils develop strong reading, writing and mathematical skills which they apply purposefully in the outdoor areas. Pupils make slower progress in the development of their Welsh oracy skills.

The school provides highly effective support for pupils with additional learning needs (ALN) and those facing barriers to learning, with innovative provision that promotes confidence, resilience and well-being.

In many lessons, teaching provides purposeful learning experiences that enable pupils to make good progress. However, the quality of teaching is not consistent across the school. In a few lessons, teachers do not adapt learning sufficiently to meet pupils' individual needs or break activities into manageable steps. In these lessons, pupils become disengaged and this reduces the progress they make.

The school uses a range of initiatives to promote and support regular school attendance. Despite this, attendance for pupils eligible for free school meals has declined in recent years and persistent absence, while improving, remains too high.

Recommendations

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

- R1 Reduce variability in teaching to ensure that all pupils are engaged in their learning and make good progress
- R2 Improve pupils' Welsh oracy skills
- R3 Improve attendance, particularly for those pupils who are eligible for free school meals

What happens next

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

Main evaluation

Thornwell Primary School is a happy and caring school where pupils are welcomed, valued and nurtured. Warm relationships between staff and pupils contribute to a calm and caring ethos. Most pupils display positive behaviour and enthusiasm for learning. Leaders' rigorous commitment to the school's vision promotes and develops high levels of well-being in pupils, staff and local community partners.

The school curriculum and outdoor learning environments are carefully designed, working hand in hand to support the school's vision.

Spotlight 1: Highly effective outdoor provision

The school's impressive outdoor learning environment enhances the school curriculum exceptionally well. The learning environment is purposeful, well-resourced and stimulating, comprising of a school and community farm along with a forest area, pond and community gardens. The school uses these resources productively, providing all pupils with a wealth of opportunity to develop and apply a range of skills whilst gaining a broad understanding of sustainability and the natural world. Regular and shared engagement with these resources provides pupils with a strong sense of belonging whilst also providing rich opportunities for engagement with members of the local community.

The curriculum provides a broad and varied range of authentic learning experiences that incorporate the interests and ideas of pupils effectively. Pupils reflect upon their own

values and beliefs thoughtfully whilst learning about and celebrating diversity across the school and the wider world. The curriculum prepares pupils for their next stage of learning well.

Leaders and governors evaluate the work of the school robustly. Together, they have secured a successful track record of improvement over time. Governors carry out their roles with increasing knowledge and understanding. Through regular engagement with the school, governors provide effective support for school improvement and staff well-being.

Leaders set and model high expectations for teaching and learning. They use robust monitoring processes to evaluate teaching and to track pupil progress. Leaders use this information effectively to identify areas for improvement. They are aware of variations in the quality of teaching and are beginning to utilise effective practice within the school to address this.

In many lessons, teachers demonstrate a clear understanding of pupils' individual starting points. They communicate high expectations and clear learning intentions. Teachers and support staff match effective questioning strategies successfully to pupils' needs, helping to develop and deepen pupils' understanding during lessons. Lessons move along at a suitable pace, and most pupils engage well and make strong progress. However, in a few lessons, teachers do not consider the individual needs of pupils well enough. Teachers do not explain the purpose of learning fully and fail to break tasks into manageable steps. As a result, the pace of learning slows and pupils become disengaged. In these instances, teachers do not adapt their teaching approaches sufficiently, which limits the progress pupils make.

Leaders ensure that all staff receive purposeful professional development, closely linked to school development priorities. Leaders identify staff interest or expertise in a curriculum area or teaching approach and support them to develop this well. Recent improvements to teaching and learning approaches across the younger classes have improved staff's ability to adapt and refine the classroom to meet pupils' emerging interests and needs. Staff in the youngest classes place a high value on developing pupils' oracy skills through play, exploration and hands-on experiences. They use the school environment effectively to provide opportunities for pupils to collaborate, and to develop and apply new vocabulary. Although many pupils start school with skills below those expected for their age, they develop their communication skills quickly.

Across the school, many staff help pupils to explain and discuss how they learn and to recognise the next steps in their learning successfully. From a young age, most pupils learn to reflect upon and evaluate their work articulately. By the time they leave school, most

pupils develop strong oracy skills, drawing upon a wide range of vocabulary to suit a particular audience.

The school fosters a love of reading well. Staff ensure that pupils develop necessary pre-reading skills by exploring a range of picture and story books before teaching formal reading. As pupils progress, they take increasing responsibility for their own reading development. By the time they leave school, many pupils read with fluency, expression and the ability to retrieve information efficiently. Pupils' ability to use advanced reading skills such as inference to establish meaning are less well developed.

Teachers ensure that pupils develop their writing skills systematically. The youngest pupils explore mark-making and develop letter formation using a range of media well. By the time they leave school, many pupils apply their writing skills confidently across the curriculum using well-chosen vocabulary, an appropriate range of punctuation and accurate spelling. The quality of handwriting and presentation is variable throughout the school.

During their time at the school, many pupils develop a strong understanding of the number system and make good progress in the development of their mathematical skills. The school environment provides pupils with rich opportunities to develop and apply numeracy skills through authentic contexts. An over-reliance on the use of worksheets in a minority of classes restricts pupils' ability to reason and to solve problems.

Many pupils demonstrate enthusiasm for learning Welsh. Teachers model Welsh regularly throughout the day and pupils respond with understanding to a range of bilingual instructions. Most pupils display confidence when rehearsing vocabulary and sentence patterns in daily Welsh lessons. However, pupils do not have enough opportunities to practise and build upon the Welsh they have learnt previously. As a result, many pupils do not engage in simple Welsh conversations confidently or accurately.

The school's focus on developing pupils' independent learning skills enables most pupils to demonstrate high levels of independence and choice when learning. Pupils across the school develop strong digital skills and use technology routinely to model ideas, to solve problems and to document their learning.

The school places a high priority on identifying and supporting barriers to learning and this ensures that many pupils, including those from low-income households and those with additional learning needs (ALN), are equipped to, and make, good progress from their individual starting points.

Spotlight 2: Innovative approaches to reducing barriers to learning

The school provides an extensive range of individualised support programmes that support pupils' academic, physical and mental health needs effectively. The school's Safari Class complements mainstream teaching well, providing effective support for pupils who struggle with anxiety and emotional dysregulation. Innovative intervention strategies including therapeutic horticulture and access to the school farm support individual pupils to develop confidence and resilience well. Recently, a joint project with the local authority has enabled external pupils who are currently not attending their school to access the resources to support well-being and to reduce anxiety.

The school uses a range of initiatives to support attendance. The Sensory Star group provides an effective buffer between school and home for pupils with anxiety at the beginning of each day. However, the attendance of pupils who are eligible for free school meals has declined over time. The number of pupils who are persistently absent from school has reduced but remains too high.

Additional information

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

A site management concern was raised during the inspection, and the local authority has been notified.

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. The school is currently facing financial challenges. The headteacher and governing body are working closely with the local authority to address these.

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.

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Publication date: 24/08/2026