



Rhagoriaeth i bawb – Excellence for all

Arolygiaeth Ei Mawrhydi dros Addysg
a Hyfforddiant yng Nghymru

Her Majesty's Inspectorate
for Education and Training in Wales

A report on

**Aberdare Park Primary
Hirwaun Road
Trecynon
Aberdare
CF44 8LU**

Date of inspection: April 2011

by

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



During each inspection, inspectors aim to answer three key questions:

Key Question 1: How good are the outcomes?

Key Question 2: How good is provision?

Key Question 3: How good are leadership and management?

Inspectors also provide an overall judgement on the school's current performance and on its prospects for improvement.

In these evaluations, inspectors use a four-point scale:

| Judgement | What the judgement means |
|-----------------------|---|
| Excellent | Many strengths, including significant examples of sector-leading practice |
| Good | Many strengths and no important areas requiring significant improvement |
| Adequate | Strengths outweigh areas for improvement |
| Unsatisfactory | Important areas for improvement outweigh strengths |

The report was produced in accordance with Section 28 of the Education Act 2005.

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Context

Aberdare Park Primary School is in the Trecynon area of Aberdare in Rhondda Cynon Taf. It provides education for pupils between 3 and 11 years of age. There are currently 308 pupils on roll including eight children in a learning support class and 45 in nursery or pre-nursery provision. The school has 10 mainstream classes and a learning support class which provides education for children from the local area aged 3 to 7 years of age who have complex learning needs. Children enter the nursery class the month after their third birthday. About 18% of pupils have special educational needs. Nearly all pupils speak English at home and no pupils speak Welsh as a first language.

Pupils come from a wide range of backgrounds and an increasing number come from socially and economically disadvantaged homes. Four years ago, about 14% of pupils across the previous infant and junior schools were entitled to free school meals. This has increased quickly to 30% in the last six months. This is well above the local authority and all-Wales average of around 20 per cent.

There have been many changes to the education provided for pupils since the inspections of Comin Infant School and Comin Junior School during the previous inspection cycle. Following the Estyn inspection of Comin Junior School in November 2008, the school was judged to be in need of significant improvement.

At that time, Robertstown Nursery and a learning support class for the area also became part of the Comin Infants School. In April 2009, the headteacher of Comin Infants School became the acting headteacher of Comin Junior School and Robertstown Nursery, and there were three separate governing bodies, plus an interim governing body for the proposed amalgamated school. The acting headteacher became the current headteacher of Aberdare Park Primary in January 2010.

The 2010-2011 individual school budget per pupil for Aberdare Park Primary School is £2,999 which compares with a maximum of £9,064 and a minimum of £2,553 for primary schools in Rhondda Cynon Taf. The school has the 85th highest budget per pupil out of the 116 primary schools in Rhondda Cynon Taf.

Summary

| | |
|---|-------------|
| The school's current performance | Good |
| The school's prospects for improvement | Good |

Current performance

The current performance of the school is good because:

- pupils across the school are making good progress from their starting points;
- the new school has a shared mission that all staff understand and embody in their work with pupils;
- much of the teaching is of good or better quality;
- pupils generally have good learning experiences;
- provision for pupils with special educational needs is good; and
- there is highly effective leadership and management.

Prospects for improvement

The school's prospects for improvement are good because:

- the standards of pupils' literacy skills are improving at a good rate;
- leaders, managers and governors understand the school's strengths and weaknesses very well;
- the school's self-evaluation report is of good quality;
- there is detailed and effective planning for improvement;
- the quality of provision in key stage 2 is much better than at the time of the previous inspection of the junior school (November 2008); and
- the new school provides more effective and efficient provision than the previous individual schools.

Recommendations

In order to improve, the school and the governing body need to:

- establish a policy and provide more focused support for more able and talented learners in order to extend their achievements;
- develop pupils' independent learning skills consistently in all classes;
- improve attendance rates;
- raise the awareness of safeguarding issues among ancillary staff;
- improve the rigour of summative assessment; and
- give teachers more opportunity to observe and to learn from the good teaching that occurs in many classes throughout the school.

What happens next?

The school will draw up an action plan which shows how the school is going to address the recommendations.

Main findings

Key Question 1: How good are outcomes?

Good

Standards: Good

In key stage 1, the data on pupils' attainment in National Curriculum assessment in 2010 shows that pupils performed at a relatively low level in English compared to the national benchmark and at a level broadly similar to the family of similar schools. Performance at the expected level in mathematics and science is generally the same or slightly above national and local benchmarks. In key stage 2, the data also shows a generally weak performance in English, but better outcomes in mathematics and science. In both key stages, the data shows a relatively high proportion of pupils who achieve better than the expected level for their age, especially in oracy and mathematics. Boys tend to perform far less well than girls in English, especially in writing.

Attainment in lessons and in pupils' books during the inspection shows a much better level of attainment than suggested by the 2010 assessment data. Pupils are currently achieving good standards across the school in English, mathematics and science. In addition, the current intake of the school reflects a much higher proportion of pupils entitled to free school meals (30%) compared to the proportion entitled to free school meals in 2010 (19%).

Pupils currently entitled to free school meals are making progress at a rate that is broadly equal to the performance of other pupils in the school. Pupils with special educational needs achieve well according to their ability and make good progress towards achieving the targets set for them.

In nursery and reception, pupils' oral work and mark-making skills develop well. From an early age, pupils use their phonic knowledge confidently to sound out new words. Increasingly, as they move through the Foundation Phase, children choose suitable letters to represent the sounds within words. Where they guess the spelling of new words, they use their previous knowledge of letter sounds well to make informed choices. In the Foundation Phase, children can create simple phrases and sentences in activities focused on developing their literacy skills. Children read out their own work well and a few are able to use rich, interesting language in their written work to express their views, both in work linked to topics and to the literacy scheme used throughout the school.

In older classes, nearly all pupils respond well in oral work and talk well to their partners and many can address the class naturally and confidently. Many pupils are enthusiastic readers and have reading skills appropriate to their age and ability. A few pupils can read very well. Nearly all key stage 2 pupils can refer to their favourite authors, to previous books they have read and can explain what they like about them. All less able readers were able to use word building strategies independently to tackle difficult words.

Pupils' written work shows clear progression from the start of the year as they write at more length and in increasingly complex sentences. Older pupils in key stage 1 and pupils in key stage 2 understand and use a range of technical vocabulary appropriately when discussing and manipulating their spoken and written language. Most older pupils can use a range of punctuation accurately, including speech marks, exclamation marks and question marks, and within a suitable range of written contexts. Most key stage 2 pupils can write appropriately in a given style and in a sustained way with a good appreciation of the purpose and audience for their writing.

Pupils' skills in Welsh as a second language are good and this is a particular strength across the school.

Wellbeing: Good

Pupils have a good understanding of the importance of developing a healthy lifestyle. They eat healthily in school and are keen to participate in sporting activities.

Behaviour is good throughout the school. All pupils feel safe. They show respect for one another and are courteous and polite to staff and visitors.

Most pupils are keen to learn, are well motivated and respond particularly well to opportunities to assess what they need to do to improve. Their opinions are sought and taken into account on matters of school improvement and when choosing curricular topics. However, pupils' independent learning skills are not developed well enough in all classes.

Pupils are keen to take on positions of responsibility within the school and act as prefects as well as on the Eco Committee and School Council. The School Council provides an effective and positive pupil voice that is valued by the school, for example it has directly influenced recent improvements to the school building.

The overall attendance is slightly below similar schools and the national average. The rate has shown some signs of improvement recently. Very few pupils are late for school. There were two fixed-term exclusions in 2009-2010.

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| Key Question 2: How good is provision? | Good |
|---|-------------|

Learning experiences: Good

Across the school, teachers have planned topics that effectively draw on the knowledge and experiences of the pupils. These topics provide a meaningful, interesting and engaging curriculum for pupils. Teachers base their medium and long-term planning around the progressive development of pupils' skills. Planning focuses particularly well on the development of literacy skills. There is a good balance in the work on literacy between discrete daily sessions and work across the curriculum. Most pupils have suitable opportunities to develop their numeracy and information and communication technology skills through investigative approaches. The school reflects and celebrates Welsh culture and heritage well and this supports pupils' good standards in Welsh in both incidental and formal contexts. The Eco Committee is well established and has instigated several 'green' initiatives. For

example, pupils have been involved in recycling a wide range of items such as mobile phones and jewellery. Teachers address issues relating to world events successfully through personal and social education, in school assemblies and through fund-raising for overseas charities. Older pupils in key stage 2 discuss world news in their classes regularly.

Teaching: Good

Most teachers manage their classes well and these classes are quiet, calm and purposeful learning environments. Most teachers use a wide range of effective teaching approaches and strategies. They give pupils regular opportunities to undertake independent and collaborative work in sessions. In the Foundation Phase, teachers use the outdoor environment well to extend children's learning. Teachers adapt work regularly and successfully to meet the needs of less able pupils and those with special educational needs, but less so for more able and talented pupils.

Assessment for learning is a particular strength of the school. Teachers in all classes encourage pupils to reflect on the quality of their own work and the work of their peers. The quality of teachers' marking of pupils' written work is generally good, and very good in a few classes. Marking relates well to specific learning objectives and clearly identifies areas for pupils to improve upon. Many teachers evaluate their sessions thoroughly to inform their future planning. There is careful tracking of pupils' progress, but the rigour of summative assessment is more limited. End-of-year reports for parents give a good indication of the work covered by pupils, but do not always focus enough on how well pupils have achieved.

Care, support and guidance: Adequate

The school provides a safe and secure environment for children. The school has an appropriate policy and has procedures for safeguarding. Teachers and support staff have a good awareness of safeguarding issues and procedures, but ancillary staff are not always fully aware of the correct procedures to apply.

The school works effectively with a range of external agencies to provide specialist support and facilities for vulnerable and challenging pupils.

Teachers and support staff provide very good support for children with special educational needs both within the mainstream classes and in the learning support class. Pupils' individual plans are detailed and are regularly reviewed with parents. Children in the learning support class are effectively integrated into the life of the main school. However, the school does not have a policy or procedures for meeting the needs of more able and talented pupils consistently.

Effective arrangements exist to support pupils' health and wellbeing including their moral, social and cultural development. The school is a happy, well ordered and caring environment where pupils feel valued. Parents are supportive of the school.

The school promotes the importance of healthy eating and regular exercise effectively. Pupils enjoy activities such as power walking in the nearby park.

There are clear procedures for behaviour and discipline and these are well understood and observed by pupils. Pupils are respectful and relate well to each other. They feel confident to speak to an adult with their concerns.

The school has monitoring systems in place regarding attendance and punctuality, but these have not yet been fully effective in improving overall attendance rates.

Learning environment: Good

The school's vision and motto celebrate the inclusive community at the school. The curriculum is accessible to all. The school has appropriate policies in place to promote equality.

The school is well maintained, attractive and accessible to visitors. All classes have plentiful resources that match pupils' needs well. Stimulating and attractive displays are of a high standard and celebrate the diverse work of the pupils. Classrooms are spacious and well organised. The sensory garden area is a creative use of space and enhances the provision for pupils well.

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| Key Question 3: How good are leadership and management? | Good |
|--|-------------|

Leadership: Good

The headteacher has a clear vision for the school that the governing body, the school leadership team and all the staff share and work towards.

Leaders, managers and the governing body have undertaken very effective strategic planning and have implemented appropriate initiatives in amalgamating the schools successfully. Teaching and support staff have clearly defined roles which they carry out well. Regular staff and senior management team meetings focus well on teaching methods and strategies. This ensures that staff apply initiatives consistently across the school.

The governing body is very supportive of all aspects of the school's work. It helps the school in setting its strategic direction and evaluates outcomes in all aspects of school development. The governing body takes an active role in the self-evaluation process and in forward planning. It regularly challenges the school on its performance.

The school succeeds well in taking forward national and local priorities and is implementing the Foundation Phase successfully. It is appropriately involved in partnership working and in the formation of professional learning communities. These initiatives have had a positive impact on teaching and on raising standards.

Overall, the amalgamated school provides a better quality of education for its pupils than was the case at the time of the inspections of the previous, separate schools.

Improving quality: Good

The school has a comprehensive range of self-evaluation procedures which includes

the views of governors, staff, parents and pupils. Subject leaders regularly review teachers' planning, look at pupils' work and evaluate data in relation to agreed targets. Specific staff meetings are held to share all relevant information. The senior management team monitor the quality of teaching through effective classroom observations. The self-evaluation report is of good quality. It is evaluative, focuses well on outcomes for pupils, outlines the school's successes and highlights appropriate areas for improvement.

The school improvement plan is very detailed and sets out clearly the school's priorities based on the results of the self-evaluation process and the recommendations from previous inspections at the separate schools prior to amalgamation. It breaks down development planning into realistic small steps, sets out suitable timescales and costs, and establishes appropriate success criteria.

The school has effective performance management procedures which set targets related to raising standards as well as individual professional needs. It has close links and works well with its cluster schools, particularly in relation to transition arrangements. These initiatives have had a positive impact on developing better attainment and improving teaching and learning.

The standards and quality of provision in key stage 2 in the amalgamated school is much better than in the previous junior school at the time of the last inspection.

Partnership working: Good

The school works well with parents. Nearly all the parents who responded to the questionnaire stated that the school keeps them well informed and that they feel comfortable about approaching the school on any matters of concern.

The school has established valuable links with the local community. It organises visits to local shops, places of worship and other places of interest. Members of the community are invited into school to work with pupils on aspects of topic work. This contributes well to pupils' understanding of community life and to their learning in general.

There are successful transition arrangements with the local secondary schools and the schools has established effective links with the local cluster of schools to aid its moderation and standardisation processes.

The school benefits from the services of external agencies, such as the health service, social services and the educational psychologist.

The school works in partnership with University of Wales Institute Cardiff and Trinity St David's College in the delivery of initial teacher training and with Coleg Morgannwg and University of Glamorgan in the training of classroom assistants.

The school has undertaken several effective joint resourcing projects, such as cluster-based funding of in-service training in critical skills and the planning of skill-based learning initiatives.

Resource management: Good

The school has a sufficient number of appropriately qualified staff to teach the curriculum effectively. The teachers and support staff work well together as a team and have developed a whole-school approach to creating an exciting learning environment for pupils.

Teachers use their planning, preparation and assessment time well by working in teams. This has a positive effect on the quality of planning and has ensured strong continuity in the development of key skills across the curriculum.

The school is particularly well equipped and resourced. Teachers and pupils use the resources well.

The school succeeds well in securing appropriate outcomes for pupils. It has managed the amalgamation of the three schools very well. Overall, it provides good value for money.

Appendix 1

Stakeholder satisfaction report

Responses to parent questionnaires

Twenty parents or carers completed the questionnaire. Overall, they expressed a very high level of satisfaction with the school. Nearly all agree that their children enjoy school and all feel that their children were helped to settle when they joined the school. All parents who responded state that their children are making good progress and they are very satisfied with the behaviour of children at the school. The questionnaires show that parents feel the quality of teaching, the teachers' expectations of their children and the support they receive are all good. Many believe that homework builds well on the work their children do at school. All those who responded to the questionnaire believe that the school is well run and that their child is safe at school. A few parents felt that they were not kept as well informed as they could be about the progress of their child and a few did not understand the school's procedure for dealing with a complaint.

Responses to learner questionnaires

Ninety-nine pupils in key stage 2 completed the questionnaire. Most responses were very positive. All pupils say they feel safe in school. Most feel that the school deals with any bullying well and nearly all know who to talk to when they feel worried or upset. Nearly all agree that the school helps pupils to keep healthy and they get a lot of chances to be physically active. All but a very few feel that they are doing well at school and know what to do when they find work hard and nearly all feel that teachers and support staff help them to make progress. A few pupils feel that they do not have enough equipment, books and computers to do their work, and few more feel that the behaviour of other children could be better at playtime and lunchtime and in class.

Appendix 2

The inspection team

| | |
|------------------|---------------------|
| Barry Norris | Reporting Inspector |
| Glyn Roberts | Team Inspector |
| Deirdre Emberson | Lay Inspector |
| Simon Bates | Peer Inspector |
| Philippa Thomas | School Nominee |

Copies of the report

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Year groups and key stages

Schools use a common system of numbering year groups from the start of compulsory schooling to 18 years of age. This system emphasises the importance of continuity and eases communication among schools, governing bodies, parents and LEAs.

The term 'Reception' (R) refers to the year group of pupils in a primary school who reach the age of five during the academic year. Year 1 refers to the year group of pupils who reach the age of six during the academic year and so on. Year 13 is the year group of students who reach the age of 18 during the academic year.

Primary phase:

| | | | | | | | |
|------|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|------|-------|
| Year | R | Y1 | Y2 | Y3 | Y4 | Y5 | Y6 |
| Ages | 4-5 | 5-6 | 6-7 | 7-8 | 8-9 | 9-10 | 10-11 |

Secondary phase:

| | | | | | | | |
|------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| Year | Y7 | Y8 | Y9 | Y10 | Y11 | Y12 | Y13 |
| Ages | 11-12 | 12-13 | 13-14 | 14-15 | 15-16 | 16-17 | 17-18 |

The four key stages cover the following year groups:

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|-------------|---------------------|
| Key stage 1 | Year 1 and Year 2 |
| Key stage 2 | Year 3 to Year 6 |
| Key stage 3 | Year 7 to Year 9 |
| Key stage 4 | Year 10 and Year 11 |