



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

**St Mary's R.C. (A) School
Milford Road
Newtown
Powys
SY16 2EH**

Date of inspection: November 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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Publication Section
Estyn
Anchor Court
Keen Road
Cardiff
CF24 5JW

or by email to publications@estyn.gov.uk

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Context

St Mary's Catholic Primary School is a voluntary aided Roman Catholic school situated near the centre of Newtown in Powys. The school draws its pupils from both the town and surrounding rural area.

There are currently 110 pupils on roll aged between 4 and 11 years who attend full-time, including five children of nursery age. The number of pupils has increased since the previous inspection. The school is organised into four classes for pupils of mixed ability. At age 11 years, pupils transfer to local high schools.

Around 14% of pupils are entitled to free school meals, which is lower than the all-Wales average of just over 20%. The school describes its intake as neither economically advantaged nor disadvantaged.

English is the predominant language of almost all pupils. No pupil speaks Welsh as their first language at home. A high number of pupils, just under a fifth, are from minority ethnic groups. Nearly all pupils speak English fluently. The school has identified around 16% of pupils as having additional learning needs. Two pupils have a statement of special educational need. No pupil was excluded for a fixed term during the twelve months prior to the inspection.

The school was last inspected in October 2005. The headteacher took up her post in January 2004.

The individual school budget per pupil for St Mary's Catholic Primary School in 2011-2012 means that the budget is £3,174 per pupil. The maximum per pupil in the primary schools in Powys is £14,685 and the minimum is £3,005. St Mary's Catholic Primary School is 92nd out of the 101 primary schools in Powys in terms of its school budget per pupil.

Summary

The school's current performance	Adequate
The school's prospects for improvement	Good

Current performance

There are good features in the school's work. These include:

- many pupils achieve good standards in their work by the end of key stage 2;
- standards are very good in information and communications technology, and are good in numeracy and Welsh second language;
- pupils behave very well, have positive attitudes to learning and most make good progress in gaining knowledge, understanding and skills;
- many pupils' writing contains interesting and well-developed content;
- pupils' attainment at level 5 and above in National Curriculum assessments in English is much higher than that for similar schools and Wales;
- pupils who arrive at the school with little or no English are integrated very well and make good progress; and
- teaching is good and the assessment and tracking of pupils' progress is of a consistently high standard.

However, current performance is judged as adequate because:

- a minority of Foundation Phase pupils do not read or write as well as they should;
- at key stage 1 boys' performance in National Curriculum assessments of reading and writing is much weaker than that of girls;
- at key stage 2, performance in National Curriculum assessments at level 4 and above has been below that of similar schools and Wales averages;
- attendance rates are lower than those in similar schools; and
- expectations in a few lessons are not high enough.

Prospects for improvement

The school's prospects for improvement are judged as good because:

- the school is well led and leadership roles at all levels are well understood and carried out effectively;
- the school has well-established and systematic procedures for self-evaluation, based on the analysis of performance data and first-hand evidence;
- recently-introduced strategies to raise standards in literacy are already having a positive impact on standards;
- the school has a good track record of making improvements and the recommendations from the previous inspection have been addressed successfully; and
- governors have a secure understanding of how well the school is performing and challenge the school to do better.

Recommendations

In order to improve, the staff and governors of St Mary's Catholic Primary School need to:

- R1 improve standards of literacy, especially in the Foundation Phase;
- R2 increase the proportion of pupils achieving the expected levels in National Curriculum assessments;
- R3 improve attendance rates; and
- R4 ensure that in all lessons teachers have high expectations for pupil achievement.

What happens next?

The school will produce an action plan that shows how it will address the recommendations. Estyn will monitor the school's progress.

Main findings

Key Question 1: How good are outcomes?

Adequate

Standards: Adequate

Pupils' work and lesson observations show that many pupils achieve good standards in their work by the end of key stage 2. However, a minority of pupils, especially in the Foundation Phase, do not achieve as well as they should in their literacy skills.

In lessons, pupils have positive attitudes to learning and concentrate well. Most make good progress in gaining new knowledge and understanding, and in developing and applying their skills. Pupils who arrived at the school with English as an additional language and those with additional learning needs achieve well in relation to their abilities.

Pupils listen carefully and attentively to staff and to each other. They speak clearly and confidently in class and when working in groups. Many provide thoughtful and often lengthy responses, using suitable terms and vocabulary. Most pupils are keen readers and read well, although on occasion, a few pupils do not have secure enough strategies to deal with unfamiliar words. Many Foundation Phase pupils have a satisfactory knowledge and understanding of letters and sounds. A majority read texts accurately, but a minority do not read as well as they should and are unable to tackle sufficiently demanding texts. By the end of key stage 2, most pupils are fluent and confident readers. They understand the key features of an increasingly demanding and wide range of texts, and can explain their views and opinions. Most pupils extract information effectively from a variety of sources.

Many pupils' writing contains interesting and well-developed content, using an increasingly expanding vocabulary and an appropriate range of styles. Although a majority of pupils in the Foundation Phase write and spell simple words accurately and show a basic understanding of punctuation, a significant minority of pupils have weak skills in spelling and punctuation. However, over the last two months, as a result of a more rigorous and structured approach to teaching literacy, most Foundation Phase pupils are now making better progress in improving their writing in order to bring it up to the expected standards. By the end of key stage 2, most pupils tackle writing tasks with enthusiasm and confidence. They often write at length for a variety of purposes and audiences, using interesting expressions, thoughtful constructions and a well-developed vocabulary. Most pupils' writing contains accurate spelling, punctuation and grammar, but a few still make simple errors. Handwriting and the presentation of work are generally satisfactory. Many older pupils' work is well set out and legible, but the handwriting of a few older pupils and a minority of younger pupils often has poorly-formed letters and inconsistent spacing between words.

Most pupils have good numeracy skills. They have secure knowledge and understanding of numbers and calculate effectively. Most pupils record and interpret data appropriately. Pupils have very good information and communications

technology skills which they use effectively to support their learning in subjects across the curriculum.

Pupils develop their Welsh language skills well. By the end of key stage 2, most pupils pronounce words clearly, have a well-developed vocabulary and use a range of appropriate sentence patterns.

Over the last four years, pupils' attainment at the end of key stage 1 has been uneven. Overall, it has generally been in line with the performance of similar schools. However, boys' performance in reading and writing is much weaker than that of girls

At the end of key stage 2, performance at level 4 and above has been below that of similar schools and Wales averages. However, more able pupils' attainment at level 5 and above in English has been much higher than similar schools and Wales. In English, mathematics and science boys do much better than girls at level 5 and above.

Wellbeing: Good

Pupils feel safe in school and the school deals well with any bullying. They understand how to become healthy through what they eat and from physical activity. Most take a regular part in a range of physical activities. Pupils behave very well in classrooms and around the school. They are considerate and courteous, and relate well to each other and adults. Attendance rates are lower than those in similar schools and have been so for the last three years. Most pupils are punctual to school and lessons. Pupils have many opportunities to become involved in making decisions about a wide range of issues, such as the development of the school's mission statement and improvements to the school environment. There are a number of working groups that contribute well to developing the life and work of the school. Many pupils have a satisfactory role in having a say about what and how they learn. Pupils participate in a wide range of community activities and they have well developed life and social skills. They show respect, care and concern for others.

Key Question 2: How good is provision?	Good
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Learning experiences: Good

The curriculum fully meets the requirements of the Foundation Phase and the National Curriculum. It is well planned to ensure that there is continuity and progression in pupils' learning from year to year. Teachers' medium-term plans and short-term plans are consistently good across the school and focus on the progressive development of subject skills. There is a wide range of extra-curricular and enrichment activities. Many pupils participate in these to extend and enhance their experiences.

The school plans well for the development of pupils' skills in literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology. The planning and provision for the development of pupils' literacy skills, particularly the foundation skills of reading and

writing, has improved significantly this school year and is starting to have a beneficial impact.

Provision for Welsh language development is good. The use of Welsh has a secure place in the life and work of the school with the pupils speaking Welsh with enthusiasm and enjoyment. Pupils' understanding of Welsh culture and heritage is developing well.

Pupils have many suitable opportunities to learn about sustainable development and there is effective use of the school grounds to promote this. Opportunities to develop pupils' understanding of global citizenship are more limited.

Teaching: Good

Lessons are well planned with clear and well-communicated objectives. They are structured carefully, follow a logical sequence and proceed at a suitable pace. Most activities are effective in gaining pupils' interest and involvement, but pupils are not always challenged sufficiently to do their best. Most lessons involve a suitable range of well-organised strategies and tasks to help develop pupils' knowledge, understanding and skills. In these lessons, teachers match the work appropriately to pupils' needs, with good support from teaching assistants. In most lessons, questioning of pupils is effective and occasionally questioning is particularly good with many probing, demanding questions that make pupils think deeply about their work.

Teachers' marking is of a consistently high standard, with pupils receiving very detailed feedback on their work, including what they need to do to improve. Progress is tracked effectively across the school by comprehensive assessment records, including detailed, precise and useful information of pupil progress in all subjects and areas of learning. The school makes effective use of this information to monitor the performance of individuals and groups, and to inform future planning.

Reports to parents are very clear and informative. Regular progress evenings also ensure parents are well informed about their children's achievements.

Care, support and guidance: Good

The school is a caring community and supports pupils' health and wellbeing successfully. It promotes well pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development through a wide range of well-planned activities and experiences. There is effective working with a number of specialist agencies to support individual pupils where necessary. The induction arrangements for pupils starting school are thorough and enable them to settle in quickly and progress well. The school has procedures and an appropriate policy for safeguarding.

The provision for pupils with additional learning needs is very good. Pupils requiring support are identified early and the appropriate intervention is put in place. Individual education plans are useful in guiding the support for those pupils with additional learning needs. In particular, the school provides very well for pupils who enter the school with little or no ability in English. These pupils are integrated very well and

make good progress. Parents are generally well informed about their child's progress through regular consultations.

Learning environment: Good

The school has a clear and well-communicated Christian ethos that values all pupils and ensures equality of opportunity. It is effective in realising its vision statement of 'living, laughing, learning and listening in the light of the Lord'. Over the past five years, the school has been successful in welcoming an increasing number of children from a range of different ethnic backgrounds. The school has an appropriate disability equality scheme and plan, and its accessibility plan ensures that all children are given every support to play a full in school life. All forms of harassment and discrimination are effectively discouraged.

Pupils have enough books and equipment, including information and communication technology equipment, to do their work. The accommodation is of high quality and is suitable for the numbers of pupils and the planned activities. The buildings and grounds are well maintained and provide an attractive and stimulating environment that is used well.

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

The school is well led. The headteacher has a clear and well-communicated vision for the school. She provides a challenging sense of direction and has recently established a culture that strives for improvement. Since the previous inspection leadership roles within the school have developed well. Additional responsibilities for staff are clearly defined and well balanced. Teaching staff with leadership roles carry out their responsibilities conscientiously and their work supports school improvement priorities effectively. All staff work well together as close teams. Performance management for teaching staff is securely established and the setting of targets supports personal development and the raising of standards for pupils. However, the use of pupil outcome data to monitor staff performance is underdeveloped.

Governors carry out their role effectively, providing appropriate strategic direction to the school. They have a secure understanding of how well the school is performing in relation to Wales averages and when compared with similar schools, and use this information well to challenge the school to do better. The statutory requirements that were not met at the time of the previous inspection are now in place.

The school takes appropriate account of national and local priorities. Work on developing pupils' Welsh language development has had a significant impact on standards.

Improving quality: Good

There is now a strong commitment throughout the school to promoting improvement. The school has well-established and systematic procedures for self-evaluation. These include the regular use of first-hand evidence obtained through lesson

observations and the detailed analysis of performance information. The school takes good account of the views of pupils and parents. Termly 'drop-in' sessions provided for parents to meet with the headteacher are a very useful opportunity for parents to share their views with the school.

The school development plan is based on the findings of self-evaluation activities. It is focused appropriately on raising standards in key areas, and contains specific actions and clear targets, which are numerical where appropriate. One of the main priorities within the current school development plan is to raise standards in literacy. Strategies detailed in the development plan have recently been introduced across the school and are already having a positive impact on standards. The school has a good track record of making improvements and the recommendations from the previous inspection have been addressed fully.

There is good provision for supporting the professional development of all staff and this frequently involves close working with, and visits to, other schools both locally and further afield. The sharing of good practice within the school is particularly well promoted through the use of the 'Good Practice Handbook'.

Partnership working: Good

The school has effective links with a range of partners that make a considerable contribution to improving pupils' wellbeing and outcomes. The partnership with parents is a strength of the school. Parents feel welcome, are kept well informed and know their views are valued. Pupils benefit from the school's well-established links with the community, which includes their involvement in local events and fund raising work for charities.

There are appropriate links with a range of external agencies such as the educational psychology service, and the speech and language service. The schools' partnership with the local authority has successfully supported work on Welsh language development and the healthy school's initiative.

Established links with pre-school providers help pupils settle quickly into school and careful transition plans and joint activities support pupils' smooth transition to secondary schools. Partnership with the local secondary school and the cluster of primary schools has been used effectively to ensure consistency of teachers' assessments in the core subjects. The school takes full advantage of opportunities to share resources with these partners.

Resource management: Adequate

The school manages its financial resources well with planned spending allocated to meet school priorities. There is a sensible balance between the responsibilities undertaken by the governors and those delegated to the headteacher. The school provides the best standard of accommodation possible within the budget and a good range of appropriate learning resources. The budget is monitored carefully by the headteacher and the governing body's finance committee.

The school has sufficient well-qualified staff to enable the curriculum to be taught effectively. All staff are deployed well to make best use of their time, expertise and experience. There are well established arrangements to support the professional development of all staff.

Overall the school provides a high level of care, support and guidance for pupils. Many pupils achieve well through the effective delivery of a relevant and varied curriculum. However, because standards of achievement are adequate overall, the school provides adequate value for money.

Appendix 1

Commentary on performance data

Key stage 1

Over the last four years, pupils' attainment in the core subject indicator (the overall performance in English, mathematics and science at the expected levels for pupils of seven years of age) at the end of key stage 1 has been uneven. It was above the family average from 2008 to 2010, but fell below it in 2011. This same uneven pattern can be seen when performance is compared with similar schools based on free-school-meal benchmarks. This indicates that over the last four years the school has been twice in the top 25%, once in the bottom 50% and once in the bottom 25%.

Pupils' attainment in English has generally followed the same pattern as the core subject indicator over the last four years. It has been similar to the family averages and generally around the average when compared with similar schools based on free-school-meal benchmarks. For oracy, the performance has been similar to the family averages over the last four years. There is a similar pattern for reading, although boys' performance is much weaker than that of girls. Writing was above the family average from 2008 to 2011, but fell to well below in 2011. Again boys' performance is weaker than that of girls, but the gap is not as pronounced as that for reading.

Pupils' attainments in mathematics and science at key stage 1 are about average for the family. Girls do much better than boys in mathematics at level 2 and level 3, but in science boys do much better than girls at both levels and to a greater extent than the family and Wales average.

Key stage 2

Over the last four years, pupils' attainment in the core subject indicator at the end of key stage 2 has been below the family and Wales averages. When compared with similar schools based on free-school-meal benchmarks, the school has been in the bottom 50% for three of the last four years and in the bottom 25% for the other year.

In 2011, pupils' performance in English has been similar to family and Wales averages over the last four years, but has been in the bottom 50% or bottom quarter for similar schools based on free-school-meal benchmarks. However, more able pupils' attainment at the higher level 5 over the same period has been much higher than family and Wales averages and is in the top 25% for similar schools based on free-school-meal benchmarks. Oracy and writing are generally below the family average, and reading is generally similar to it.

Pupils' attainment in mathematics over the last four years has been similar to that of English, although it was much better in 2010. The performance, however, is not as good as English when compared with similar schools based on free-school-meal benchmarks. At the higher level 5, more able pupils' performance is generally similar to the family and Wales. Performance in science is similar to the family, but usually

below Wales averages. However, when compared with similar schools based on free-school-meal benchmarks, performance is either below or well below the average.

Boys do better than girls in the core subject indicator and by a greater extent than the family or Wales. This contrasts to the Wales average where girls do better. In English, girls do better than boys at roughly the same amount as the family and Wales averages for level 4 or above, but unusually boys do significantly better than girls at level 5 and above. There is a similar pattern for mathematics and science at level 4 and above, but boys do much better than girls at level 5 and above in both subjects. Pupils eligible for free school meals and those who arrive at the school with English as an additional language achieve well.

Appendix 2

Stakeholder satisfaction report

Responses to learner questionnaires

Estyn received responses from 46 learners in key stage 2.

All pupils feel safe in school and say that the school deals well with bullying. They also know what to do if they find their work hard and say that homework is helpful. All pupils consider that they have enough books, equipment and computers to do their work. Nearly all say that pupils behave well in lessons and that they can get on with their work. All say that behaviour at playtime and lunchtime is good. The proportion saying that behaviour is good in classes is significantly higher than the proportion saying this in other schools. Nearly all pupils believe they are doing well in school, and that teachers and other adults help them to make progress. Nearly all also believe that the school teaches them to be healthy and that they have many opportunities to exercise regularly. Most pupils feel that they have someone to talk to if they were worried or upset.

Responses to parent questionnaires

Estyn received 22 responses to the parent questionnaire. Parents gave a positive or very positive response to the questions.

All parents are satisfied with the school. Nearly all state that it is well run, and that their children are safe and like the school. All parents indicate that their children were helped to settle in well when they started school. All also consider that there is a good range of extra-curricular activities and that their children are encouraged to be healthy. They feel comfortable about approaching the school to discuss matters about their child's education and wellbeing.

All parents believe that their children are making good progress. They consider staff expectations to be good and say that homework reinforces learning. They also indicate that teaching is good and nearly all believe that staff support their children well. Nearly all feel that their children are well prepared for moving on to the next school.

All parents feel well informed about their children's progress and nearly all believe that staff treat all children fairly and with respect. All believe that pupils behave well in the school, and that the school helps them to become mature and take on responsibility.

Appendix 3

The inspection team

Nigel Vaughan	Reporting Inspector
Linda Williams	Team Inspector
Dylan Jones	Lay Inspector
Kevin Phelps	Peer Inspector
Barbara Legge	School Nominee

Copies of the report

Copies of this report are available from the school and from the Estyn website (www.estyn.gov.uk)

Under the Independent School Standards (Wales) Regulations 2003, the school must provide copies of the report to all parents of the school. Where a pupil is subject to placement by a local authority, a copy of the report should be sent by the school to each relevant authority.

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:

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