



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 VRC School
Britannia Road
Bufferland
Pembroke Dock
Pembrokeshire
SA72 6PD**

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 Primary School is a voluntary-aided Roman Catholic school situated in the town of Pembroke Dock. Pupils attend the school from the town and the surrounding areas.

Currently, 93 full-time pupils aged between 4 and 11 years attend the school. In addition to this, 18 three-year-olds attend the nursery class every morning.

The area has high levels of unemployment. Many pupils come from economically disadvantaged backgrounds and live in an area of Pembroke Dock which is a designated Communities First area.

Nearly all pupils come from English-speaking homes. There are no pupils from homes where Welsh is the first language. A few pupils are from a minority ethnic background and have English as an additional language. Currently, 37% of pupils are entitled to free school meals. This is well above the local and national averages. Thirty per cent of pupils are identified as having special educational needs.

The current headteacher was appointed in May 2005 and the school was last inspected in November 2005. Since then, there has been one change in the teaching staff due to the retirement of the assistant head in July 2010. During the inspection, one teacher was on a Welsh sabbatical placement.

The individual school budget per pupil for St Mary's VRC School in 2010-2011 means that the budget is £3,381 per pupil. The maximum per pupil in the primary schools in Pembrokeshire local authority is £5,769 and the minimum is £2,995. St Mary's VRC School is 41st out of the 65 primary schools in Pembrokeshire in terms of its school budget per pupil.

Summary

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

Current performance

The current performance of the school is adequate because:

- the majority of pupils make sound progress by the time they leave the school;
- many pupils are happy in school and develop self-confidence during their time there;
- the school is inclusive and staff care for pupils well; and
- the learning environment is attractive and provides pupils with an appropriate place to learn.

However:

- teacher assessment results at the end of key stage 1 do not accurately reflect what pupils can do without adult support. These results tend to overstate how well pupils achieve;
- not enough pupils achieve the higher levels at the end of key stage 1 (level 3) and key stage 2 (level 5);
- attendance over the past few years has not been good enough;
- the school has not implemented the Foundation Phase fully; and
- in many classes, teachers' expectations of what pupils can do are too low and they do not challenge pupils to think for themselves enough.

Prospects for improvement

The school's prospects for improvement are adequate because:

- leaders promote a positive and inclusive ethos in the school;
- governors are generally well informed about the work of the school and are supportive towards staff and pupils;
- the self-evaluation report identifies a few of the school's key weaknesses and these appear as targets in the school improvement plan; and
- the school has a good range of strategic partnerships, which enhance pupils' educational experiences well.

However:

- leaders do not tackle underperformance well enough;
- self-evaluation and school improvement planning do not focus closely enough on improving outcomes for pupils;
- resources are not always used effectively to meet the needs of pupils; and
- the school has not fully addressed all the recommendations from the previous inspection report.

Recommendations

In order to improve, the school needs to:

- R1 raise standards of pupils' independent learning and thinking skills;
- R2 implement the Foundation Phase fully;
- R3 improve attendance;
- R4 use assessment outcomes effectively to move pupils of all abilities forward in their learning;
- R5 address issues of underperformance in teaching robustly and directly; and
- R6 link self-evaluation and school improvement planning closely to pupil outcomes.

What happens next?

In accordance with the Education Act 2005, HMCI is of the opinion that this school is in need of significant improvement. The school will draw up an action plan which shows how it is going to address the recommendations. Estyn will monitor the school's progress 12 months after the publication of this report.

Main findings

Key Question 1: How good are outcomes?

Adequate

Standards: Adequate

A significant minority of pupils enter the school with below average skills in literacy, communication and numeracy. By the age of seven, teacher assessment indicates that most pupils achieve the expected standards in English, mathematics and science.

In 2011, outcomes for pupils aged 11 were good. There was a significant improvement in results in English, mathematics and science last year. However, this followed a steady decline in performance over the previous two years. Not enough more able pupils achieve the higher than expected levels at the age of seven (level 3) and at the age of 11 (level 5).

Pupils with additional learning needs and those with English as an additional language make relatively good progress from their starting points by the time they reach Year 6. Usually there is no significant difference between the performance of pupils who are entitled to free school meals and those who are not. Girls tend to perform better overall than boys at the age of seven, but the gender gap is smaller, except in English, by the age of eleven.

In the lessons observed during the inspection, progress and achievement in classes vary too much. In the minority of lessons where standards are good, pupils recall previous learning well. They apply their skills and knowledge appropriately to new situations. However, in too many lessons, pupils do not achieve well enough. They often make slow progress because of their over-reliance on adult support. Younger pupils do not use their skills well across all areas of learning.

The majority of pupils develop good oral communication skills. They talk to adults confidently and share their ideas appropriately. However, a few pupils in key stage 2 do not always adjust their spoken language appropriately for different situations and audiences. By the age of seven, the majority of pupils use several strategies to decode words and generally read suitable texts competently. However, they do not always fully understand what they are reading and their ability to use higher-order reading skills, such as inference and deduction, is limited. Key stage 2 pupils talk enthusiastically about the books and authors they enjoy, but they often choose books that are too easy or too difficult for them. By Year 6, the majority of pupils write appropriately for a range of purposes. However, Foundation Phase pupils rarely write independently. They rely too much on word banks and a lot of adult support. As teachers base their assessments at the end of key stage 1 on this supported work, outcomes do not accurately reflect how well pupils can write on their own.

Many pupils' numeracy skills are appropriate to their stage of development. However, the development of mathematical skills in problem-solving and investigations is limited. As a result, pupils do not use their mathematics skills effectively enough across all areas of the curriculum and rely too much on adult

support. By the end of key stage 2, many pupils develop good skills in information and communication technology. For example, they use a good range of software packages to present information and carry out research.

Pupils' standards in Welsh throughout the school are not good enough. Pupils have a very limited vocabulary and poor knowledge of phrases and sentence patterns. This restricts their ability to speak confidently and to read and write at an appropriate level.

Wellbeing: Adequate

Most pupils display positive attitudes towards healthy eating and exercise. They actively support the school's commitment to the Healthy Schools initiative. Most say they feel safe in school and value the relationships they have with staff. The majority are polite, courteous and respectful to others. Behaviour is generally good, with the exception of a very few older pupils who disturb lessons occasionally and prevent other pupils from working.

The attendance rate for 2010-2011 has improved to 93.2%, following a steady decline over the previous three years. However, it remains in the lower half when compared to that of other similar schools.

Members of the school council represent the views of pupils appropriately. Newly-appointed members are beginning to become aware of their roles and responsibilities and are involved in making decisions about fund-raising activities and the purchase of playground equipment.

Pupils develop an appropriate range of social and life skills through participation in extra-curricular activities, which promote awareness of life outside school. However, very few pupils have good enough independent learning and thinking skills to help them improve their own learning.

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

Teachers' medium and short-term planning are generally appropriate, although pupils do not have enough opportunities to contribute to planning and leading their learning. All key stage 2 pupils have access to a broad curriculum, and learning experiences cover National Curriculum requirements. Visitors to the school enhance learning experiences well and a range of educational visits enrich the curriculum successfully. Pupils enjoy the range of extra-curricular activities on offer.

The Foundation Phase has not been implemented fully. There are not enough opportunities for Year 1 and 2 pupils to learn through play. The activities on offer do not engage all pupils successfully and there are limited opportunities for outdoor learning.

Provision for pupils to develop their skills is inconsistent. Teachers identify opportunities for pupils to use literacy and information and communication technology

skills to support their work in other subjects. For example, staff encourage pupils to use their skills to enhance the presentation of work in their learning logs. However, the majority of sessions are over-directed by staff and this restricts the development of pupils' independent learning, problem-solving and thinking skills.

Relevant opportunities exist in the curriculum for pupils to learn about sustainability and the wider world. A newly-formed Eco Club offers an interesting range of activities, but only a few pupils access these.

The school provides effective opportunities to develop the children's knowledge and understanding of the history and culture of Wales. The provision for developing pupils' Welsh language skills lacks structure and does not help pupils to develop their skills progressively as they move from class to class.

Teaching: Adequate

Relationships between adults and pupils are generally good and this creates a positive ethos and a constructive atmosphere for learning. Teachers and other practitioners provide high levels of support for pupils. However, in the majority of classes, this means that staff expectations of what pupils can do on their own are too low. As a result, activities for pupils are not always stimulating or challenging enough.

In the nursery class, practitioners plan activities carefully across the areas of learning and children often select their own activities. However, teachers in other Foundation Phase classes do not build on pupils' early experiences effectively enough. They do not understand how to deliver the Foundation Phase curriculum effectively enough to achieve the best outcomes for pupils.

In key stage 2, most teachers plan a suitable range of activities that engage pupils' interest well. In a minority of classes, pupils ask questions about what they want to know and discuss how they are going to find answers to their questions. However, in many classes, the planned work and the pace of teaching do not always maintain the interest of learners.

The school gathers a great deal of assessment data. Records that track pupils' progress are in place, but they do not help teachers to identify pupils' needs or allocate support enough. Most teachers use a limited range of assessment for learning strategies, but staff do not fully understand how they should use these to inform planning and to help pupils to improve. For example, staff do not link their marking to learning objectives and success criteria enough.

Care, support and guidance: Good

The school has effective arrangements in place to support pupils' health and wellbeing. It promotes the benefits of healthy living well across the curriculum and there are appropriate rules and procedures in place that most pupils understand and follow. The school makes appropriate provision for the development of pupils' social, moral, spiritual and cultural development. Pupils feel able to approach staff for advice and guidance. The school's provision for personal and social education

supports pupils well in developing respect for others and social awareness. For example, a group of pupils regularly raises money for charities, such as Catholic Aid For Overseas Development (CAFOD). There are appropriate policies and procedures in place for dealing with harassment and bullying.

The school makes good use of a relevant range of support services. It has developed positive relationships with the behaviour support teacher and youth worker. They provide teachers with good support, but this has not yet had a significant enough impact on the behaviour of a few specific pupils with challenging behaviour. A few pupils benefit significantly from the effective intervention of the speech and language service.

The school has an appropriate policy and has procedures for safeguarding.

The policy and arrangements for pupils with additional learning needs are supportive and lead to improved outcomes for these pupils. There are appropriate procedures in place for staff to identify pupils with additional learning needs as soon as possible. Support staff deliver an appropriate range of intervention programmes that benefit individuals and small groups of pupils. Individual plans are in place, and parents and pupils are involved in identifying individual targets whenever possible. However, occasionally, teachers do not share targets with support staff effectively and this hinders the progress of a few pupils.

Learning environment: Good

The school is a caring community with an inclusive ethos. All pupils receive equal access to all areas of the school's provision. Staff encourage pupils to respect one another and develop tolerant attitudes. For example, when pupils who have English as an additional language join the school, they are welcomed, are well supported and make good progress.

The school is maintained to a good standard and staff use the indoor space well to enhance pupils' learning. Classroom displays celebrate pupil achievement effectively and support learning well in a few classes. There is a planned programme of relevant improvement for classrooms and the outdoor learning environment. The school has a good range of resources, including extensive equipment for information and communication technology.

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

Leaders and managers are committed to ensuring that pupils feel valued and happy at school. All members of staff understand their roles and responsibilities and have relevant job descriptions. Leaders are good adult role models for pupils and promote values that make a positive contribution to the school ethos and wellbeing of pupils. Recent changes in staffing and uncertainty about future leadership roles mean that senior leaders have not always been able to focus on the school's key strategic priorities well enough.

Regular staff meetings, together with generally appropriate performance management procedures, make a positive contribution to the professional development of the majority of members of staff. However, leaders do not address underperformance in some teaching robustly.

Governors carry out their statutory duties diligently, and are kept well informed by the headteacher. Through their regular contacts with teachers and pupils they are confident that the school fosters pupils' welfare and self-esteem appropriately. They understand that they are responsible for holding the school to account for standards, but they do not always challenge the school robustly enough in this area of its work.

Action towards meeting local and national priorities is limited. Although relevant staff have undertaken appropriate training, leaders have not ensured that staff have implemented the Foundation Phase fully and effectively. The school is involved in a Welsh Government initiative to develop assessment for learning. However, progress towards implementing good practice in assessment is limited.

Improving quality: Adequate

The school has an appropriate cycle of self-evaluation and planning for improvement, which is firmly embedded within the school. All teachers contribute to the evaluation process by completing annual reports on the subjects for which they are responsible. Leaders seek the views of parents through annual questionnaires and the school council represents the views of pupils. Self-evaluation draws on first-hand observation of pupils' work. There is a suitable programme for the monitoring of teaching, although this does not always focus closely enough on the relationship between teaching and pupils' standards.

The majority of teachers are involved in networks of professional practice, which match school improvement priorities well. This work is beginning to have a positive impact on standards. For example, recent developments carried out in information and communication technology have brought about improvements in boys' writing.

The school improvement plan highlights a few appropriate priorities for improvement, which are identified through self-evaluation. The plan is detailed, but it contains too many targets and tasks and these do not focus closely enough on improving pupil outcomes. The school has had limited success in addressing the recommendations from the previous inspection report.

Partnership working: Good

The school has effective links with a wide range of partners. It promotes links with the community and with parents, who value the ease with which they can approach the headteacher and staff. There are good strategic links between the school and the Flying Start pre-school playgroup on the site. These help to prepare children for entry to the Foundation Phase and improve their standards in basic skills on entry to the school nursery.

The school collaborates well with outside agencies that engage with pupils' health and welfare, and this helps to remove barriers to learning for many pupils. Teachers

and support staff meet regularly with staff from neighbouring primary and secondary schools to plan activities and to assess pupils' progress. This eases pupils' transition to secondary school. Links with other Catholic schools in the diocese broaden pupils' educational and social experiences significantly.

Resource management: Adequate

Leaders and managers pay appropriate attention to managing staffing and financial resources. The school has plenty of well qualified staff and all teachers receive appropriate time for planning, preparation and assessment. Where leaders allocate staff appropriately and according to their expertise, they deliver the curriculum effectively, although this is not always the case where a few teachers are working outside their range of experience.

Leaders ensure that spending decisions relate appropriately to the needs of pupils but, in a few classes, teachers do not always ensure that the good resources available are used effectively enough to enhance learning. For example, the majority of Foundation Phase teachers do not make good enough use of the extensive outdoor space available to them.

Taking into account the limited progress since the last inspection, and the overall adequate standards achieved by pupils, the school gives adequate value for money.

Appendix 1

Commentary on performance data

The number of pupils in each year group at St Mary's is small and varies considerably from year to year so data needs to be treated cautiously.

A significant minority of pupils enter the school with below average skills in literacy and numeracy. By the age of seven, at the end of key stage 1, teacher assessment outcomes indicate that most pupils achieve the expected standards in English, mathematics and science. According to this data most attain level 2, in line with national expectations, in English, mathematics and science. Achievement of the core subject indicator (the expected performance in English or Welsh, mathematics and science in combination) has been above family, local authority and national averages for four out of the last five years. However, in lesson observations during the inspection, pupils' work did not reflect this level of performance. Results at the higher level (level 3) do not compare favourably with those of other, similar schools.

By the age of 11, at the end of key stage 2, pupil outcomes over the past five years have fluctuated a great deal. In 2011, all pupils reach the expected level 4 in English, mathematics and science. This is well above the local authority and national average and places the school at the top of its family of similar schools. However, this followed a steady decline over the previous two years. This can be partially explained by changes in the number of pupils with additional learning needs joining the school in Year 6 in previous years. However, attainment at the higher than expected level (level 5) has not changed significantly in recent years and it is often well below the performance of other, similar schools in all three core subjects.

Appendix 2

Stakeholder satisfaction report

Responses to parent questionnaires

Twelve parents or carers completed the questionnaire. Most expressed a high level of satisfaction with the school and this is in line with national comparisons. All parents say that their children like school. Many feel that staff treat their children fairly and with respect. Most believe that pupils are helped to settle when they join the school and are confident that their children are safe there. Most think that behaviour is good. All agree that the school encourages their children to eat healthily and to take regular exercise. Most parents who responded think that the school is well run and they understand what to do if they wish to make a complaint. All parents who returned the questionnaire think that their children are making appropriate progress. However, a few do not feel that they know enough about how well their children are doing and do not feel that homework always builds well on what their children are doing at school. This is in line with national figures. All parents think teaching is good and are happy that teachers expect pupils to do their best. They believe that teachers help their children to become more mature and to take on responsibility so that they are well prepared for the move to the secondary school. All parents think that their children receive enough additional support for their additional learning needs.

Responses to learner questionnaires

Forty-seven pupils in key stage 2 completed the questionnaire and responses to most questions were positive. Nearly all agree that the school helps them to be healthy and provides them with plenty of opportunities to be physically active. Most feel that they are doing well and nearly all think that teachers and support staff help them to learn and to make progress. Most pupils say that they feel safe in school and know whom to talk to if they are worried or upset or are finding their work difficult. A few pupils think that bullying is not dealt with effectively enough. Nearly all think that there are enough resources to enable them to learn effectively and many believe that homework helps them to improve on their work in school. Around half of pupils are concerned that behaviour in lessons is not always good enough and that this sometimes prevents them from getting their work done as well as they could. This is significantly higher than the national average. However, only a few pupils have concerns about behaviour during lunch and break times.

Appendix 3

The inspection team

Sarah Morgan	Reporting Inspector
Mike Munting	Team Inspector
Helen Adams	Lay Inspector
Susan Lugg	Peer Inspector
Sharron Nicholas (head teacher)	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