



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

**Abercarn Primary School
Chapel Of Ease
Abercarn
Caerphilly
NP11 5LH**

Date of inspection: April 2012

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.

Every possible care has been taken to ensure that the information in this document is accurate at the time of going to press. Any enquiries or comments regarding this document/publication should be addressed to:

Publication Section
Estyn
Anchor Court, Keen Road
Cardiff
CF24 5JW

or by email to publications@estyn.gov.uk

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Context

Abercarn Primary School is in the village of Abercarn in the Caerphilly local authority. The school serves an area that is neither economically disadvantaged nor prosperous.

There are 231 pupils aged 3 to 11 years on roll, including 45 pupils who attend the nursery on a part-time basis.

The school has identified around 16% of its pupils as having additional learning needs, including two pupils with statements of special educational need. Approximately 19% of pupils are entitled to free school meals, which is about average for the local authority and Wales. No pupil is looked after by the local authority. In the 12 months before to the inspection, one pupil received a temporary exclusion.

Nearly all pupils are of white British ethnicity. No pupil speaks Welsh at home. A very few pupils speak English as an additional language.

Since the last inspection, there have been changes in the senior leadership team. The deputy headteacher was appointed in September 2009 and the headteacher joined the school in September 2011.

The individual school budget per pupil for Abercarn Primary School in 2011-2012 means that the budget is £2,869 per pupil. The maximum per pupil in the primary schools in Caerphilly is £6,779 and the minimum is £2,494. Abercarn Primary School is 45th out of the 75 primary schools in Caerphilly in terms of its school budget per pupil.

Summary

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

Current performance

The current performance of Abercarn Primary School is adequate because:

- pupils' behaviour is excellent;
- the school provides very well for pupils' wellbeing;
- partnerships with parents are good; and
- pupils with additional learning needs make good progress on intervention programmes.

However:

- pupils' progress is only adequate;
- too many pupils do not achieve as well as they could;
- the quality of teaching is too variable; and
- planning does not yet consistently and progressively develop pupils' skills across all areas of the curriculum.

Prospects for improvement

The prospects for improvement at Abercarn Primary are good because:

- the new headteacher communicates high expectations and tackles underperformance robustly;
- in a relatively short space of time, senior leaders have developed a culture of self-evaluation that focuses well on the standards pupils achieve;
- governors support the school well and have a good understanding of their responsibilities;
- the school's self-evaluation identifies its main strengths and areas for development effectively; and
- the findings of self-evaluation feed effectively into the school improvement plan.

Recommendations

In order to improve, Abercarn Primary School needs to:

- R1 raise standards by increasing the level of challenge and expectation for all groups of pupils;
- R2 improve the standards and provision for Welsh at key stage 2;
- R3 improve the planning for the development of pupils' skills;
- R4 improve the quality of teaching and planning by using the information from ongoing assessments; and
- R5 ensure that all timescales in the school development plan are realistic.

What happens next?

Abercarn Primary School will draw up an action plan which shows how it is going to address the recommendations. Estyn will monitor the school's progress.

Main findings

Key Question 1: How good are outcomes?

Adequate

Standards: Adequate

Most pupils make adequate progress during their time in school and many pupils achieve the expected levels at the end of key stage 1 and key stage 2. However, across the school, pupils do not receive enough challenge in their work. As a result, too many pupils do not achieve as well as they could.

Most pupils achieve good standards in speaking and listening. Pupils in the Foundation Phase listen well, take it in turns to speak and readily explain ideas to their friends. In key stage 2, pupils make reasoned arguments and contribute well to debating activities and class discussions.

Pupils in reception are starting to identify initial sounds and a few can build up simple three-letter words. By the end of the Foundation Phase, a majority read simple texts well. In key stage 2, a majority of pupils have a limited range of strategies to work out unfamiliar words. More able pupils read quite fluently and are able to make inferences about the text and discuss characters. The recently-introduced sessions on guided reading and phonics are beginning to improve steadily many pupils' standards in reading. However, too many pupils still read at a level below their chronological age.

Pupils make uneven progress in developing their writing skills. By the end of the Foundation Phase, the majority of pupils spell a few simple words accurately and are starting to use their phonic knowledge to make good attempts at new words. Presentation and handwriting are generally good. More able pupils use an interesting vocabulary but have a limited awareness of sentence structure. By Year 6, a majority structure their work appropriately and write for a suitable range of purposes. Pupils' planning and redrafting skills and knowledge of spelling patterns are not well developed.

In the Foundation Phase, pupils speak Welsh regularly as part of their daily routines. They use a range of phrases appropriately and respond well to questions. Progress across key stage 2 does not build well enough on the standards achieved in the Foundation Phase. By the end of key stage 2, many pupils' standards in Welsh are unsatisfactory.

Pupils with additional learning needs make good progress on literacy intervention programmes and most have improved their reading by a significant amount. Support for pupils with additional needs varies too much between classes and as a result not all pupils make the expected progress in lessons.

Pupils' performance at key stage 1 at the expected level (level 2) or the higher level (level 3) does not generally compare well with that of schools in the same free school meal band. In key stage 1 in 2010-2011, the school was in line with the average for the family in English and above the average in mathematics and science. There has been an upward trend in the proportion of pupils achieving the core subject indicator over the past three years.

In key stage 2, pupils' performance at the expected level (level 4) in English, science and the core subject indicator has varied when compared to that of other similar schools. Overall, pupils' performance in English, mathematics and science has generally been around the family average. Over the past three years, pupils' performance at the higher level (level 5) has generally compared well with that of the family in all three subjects. However, there has been a three-year downward trend in the proportion of pupils achieving the higher level in English and mathematics.

The differences in the attainment of boys and girls generally follow national trends. By the end of key stage 2, the progress of pupils that are entitled to free school meals is similar to that of other pupils within the family.

Wellbeing: Good

Nearly all pupils are motivated, enthusiastic and attentive learners. They display pride in their work and their school. Their behaviour is excellent both during lessons and around the school. Pupils show courtesy, care and concern for each other and respect for staff and visitors.

Nearly all pupils feel safe in school and are confident that staff will treat any concerns seriously and act upon them quickly and fairly.

Nearly all pupils have positive attitudes towards maintaining a healthy lifestyle. They have a clear understanding of the importance of eating a balanced diet and taking regular exercise. For example, many pupils develop their fitness well by taking part in games and other physical activities both during and after school.

Members of the school council have a developing understanding of their roles and responsibilities. They recently helped to revise the school's anti-bullying policy and to set up the system of playground buddies.

Many pupils take on additional responsibilities. They support each other well in lessons and at playtimes. Many pupils take part in community activities, such as raising funds for the local church and charitable organisations.

When given the opportunity, the majority of pupils demonstrate very good problem solving skills.

The overall attendance rate is about 92%. This is a little lower than in other similar schools in the family, but close to the local authority average.

Key Question 2: How good is provision?

Adequate

Learning experiences: Adequate

Many learning experiences are varied and engage most pupils well. The long-term planning of the curriculum ensures that it meets statutory requirements. However, a minority of teachers' short-term planning does not take good enough account of these plans or build well on pupils' prior learning experiences.

At the start of lessons, many teachers make pupils aware of the skills they will be using. They track the coverage of skills taught effectively, but do not yet plan to develop pupils' literacy, numeracy and information technology skills consistently and progressively across all areas of the curriculum.

Many teachers plan the use of outdoor spaces well to enhance pupils' learning. They make good use of trips, visitors and the local community to widen pupils' learning experiences. Teachers plan a number of effective extra-curricular activities that many pupils attend well.

The school addresses education for sustainable development and global citizenship through a variety of themed weeks. However, teachers do not plan enough opportunities for pupils to learn about these areas across the curriculum. As a result, a majority of pupils do not have a secure understanding of environmental and global issues.

In the Foundation Phase, teachers plan to develop pupils' Welsh skills progressively. Provision in key stage 2 does not build well enough on the standards achieved in the Foundation Phase. The school develops pupils' understanding of the history and culture of Wales appropriately.

Teaching: Adequate

Nearly all teachers establish good working relationships with their pupils and generally deploy support staff well. Introductions to lessons are usually lively and capture pupils' interest. A majority of teachers have effective questioning techniques and encourage pupils to think for themselves. Recent professional development opportunities have started to improve the quality of teaching in many classes. However, the quality of teaching across the school is too variable and in a minority of lessons there is still a lack of pace and pupils are required to listen for too long.

Too many teachers do not use on-going assessments to make sure they plan to meet the needs of pupils with different levels of ability or have high enough expectations of what their pupils can achieve. As a result, pupils only make adequate progress.

Most teachers provide pupils with good oral feedback. They mark work consistently against the agreed success criteria and most pupils know how well they have achieved. Marking does not always give pupils enough guidance on how to improve their work. Most teachers give pupils good opportunities to assess their own learning.

The school has an appropriate system to track pupils' progress. The majority of teachers are beginning to use this information effectively to set end-of-year pupil targets. There are effective moderation procedures at school and cluster levels.

Parents and carers are well informed about their child's achievements, wellbeing and development.

Care, support and guidance: Good

The school has very effective arrangements to promote the wellbeing of all its pupils. As a result, pupils have a very good understanding of how to manage their own feelings and nearly all have high levels of self-esteem. There are good procedures in place to deal with any disagreements between pupils. A strength of these procedures is the way in which pupils help each other to resolve arguments.

Learning experiences promote pupils' personal development well, including their social, moral, spiritual and cultural development. There are effective arrangements to promote pupils' understanding of healthy living. The newly introduced procedures for monitoring and promoting attendance, such as weekly class awards, have improved whole-school attendance figures.

The school has good procedures to identify pupils with additional learning needs quickly. Catch-up programmes are well run and pupils generally make good progress in these sessions. Individual education plans are appropriate. Support staff use the plans well to meet individual needs in one-to-one sessions, but not all teachers use the plans well enough in their daily lessons. Parents are well informed about their child's progress and are very happy with the level of support they receive. The school uses a good range of specialist services to support pupils and families with particular needs.

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

Learning environment: Good

The school is an inclusive community where all pupils are valued and treated equally. All pupils have equal access to the curriculum. Diversity is promoted well through themed weeks and the provision for personal and social education.

Recent refurbishments have ensured that pupils with disabilities can be included in all aspects of school life. Recent improvements to the school building and grounds, such as the redevelopment of the forest school area and inner courtyard, have enhanced the learning opportunities for all pupils.

There is a wide range and variety of resources to support teaching and learning. These are generally well matched to pupils' needs. The recent purchase of laptops and other information and communication technology equipment has improved the school's provision and are well used by pupils. Attractive displays in corridors and most classrooms help to celebrate pupils' work.

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

The recently appointed headteacher has communicated a clear vision for the school that is well supported by staff, parents and the governing body.

The senior leadership team focuses appropriately on raising pupils' standards. Leaders communicate high expectations of those they manage and tackle underperformance robustly. This is having a positive effect in many classes and, as a result, Abercarn Primary is an improving school.

Senior leaders analyse data effectively and use the information well to monitor pupil performance. Regular staff and senior leadership team meetings focus clearly on school priorities.

Staff roles and responsibilities are well defined. Curriculum co-ordinators have recently gained a better understanding of their roles and are developing more of a whole-school overview of their subjects. There are appropriate systems in place for the performance management of staff, which focus appropriately on their professional development needs and the school's development priorities.

The governing body receives detailed information about the school's performance and areas for development. Members support the school well and have a good understanding of their responsibilities. The governing body generally challenges the school well about the standards it achieves.

The school addresses local and national priorities appropriately. The Foundation Phase is well established. The recent focus on raising pupils' standards in reading has resulted in improvements. The school is beginning to develop its practice in line with the School Effectiveness Framework and is implementing aspects of assessment for learning successfully.

Improving quality: Adequate

In a relatively short space of time, senior leaders have developed a culture of self-evaluation that focuses well on the standards pupils achieve. The school's self-evaluation report reviews all aspects of school life thoroughly and identifies the main strengths and areas for development effectively. The views of pupils, staff, parents and the governing body contribute well to the self-evaluation process.

Senior leaders carry out a good range of monitoring activities that focus well on pupils' standards. Activities include data analysis, regular lesson observations, scrutiny of planning and pupils' work, and listening to learners. As a result, senior leaders have an accurate understanding of standards in the school.

Self-evaluation findings feed effectively into the school improvement plan, which is a comprehensive and robust document. Although it contains detailed targets and clear success criteria and allocates responsibilities and funding effectively, timescales for the completion of targets are not always realistic.

Many of the initiatives introduced recently are in their early stages and have not yet had time to impact on the quality of provision or raise pupil's standards. Progress against the majority of the previous inspection recommendations has been appropriate, although raising standards in Welsh at key stage 2 remains an area for improvement.

The school has recently established internal networks of professional practice. These have resulted in beneficial and regular professional development opportunities for staff and have improved the quality of teaching in the majority of classes and the school's provision for addressing pupils' basic skills.

Partnership working: Good

The school has strong links with partners, such as the local church, that impact positively on pupils' wellbeing.

Partnership and communication with parents is a strong feature of the school. There are good links with local businesses to raise pupils' awareness of the world of work and to introduce them to new skills. There are also long-established and beneficial links with regional further education and teacher training institutions.

The school has a successful pre-school programme that ensures the smooth entry of children into nursery education.

Transition links are effective in supporting pupils as they move to secondary education. Pupils from Year 5 and Year 6 participate in a variety of joint activities, including outdoor education, drama classes and science activities. The school shares resources well with the local secondary schools and makes good use of their facilities to improve pupils' learning experiences. Transition arrangements for vulnerable Year 6 pupils are good. There are effective moderation procedures with other schools to support accurate assessment of pupils' standards of work.

Resource management: Adequate

Leaders manage the deployment of staff and resources well. Teachers and support staff have roles that make the best use of their expertise. The school's arrangements for teachers' planning, preparation and assessment time have helped to improve pupils' learning experiences.

The school manages its budget well and spending decisions are linked closely to school priorities. Recent spending has improved the internal and external environments and the provision for information and communication technology. Leaders have appropriate plans to use the school's surplus budget to improve provision and standards further.

Most pupils make adequate progress during their time in school. The school provides adequate value for money.

Appendix 1

Commentary on performance data

Pupils' performance at key stage 1 at the expected level (level 2) or the higher level (level 3) does not generally compare well with that of schools in the same free school meal band. For the past three years, pupils' performance in the core subject indicator has been in the lower 50% when compared with the relative performance of other schools. Pupils' performance at the expected level in English and mathematics improved in 2011 and moved the school into the upper 50% of similar schools. Pupils' performance in science at the expected level is variable and has been in the lowest, upper and then lower quarters when compared to the results of other similar schools.

In key stage 2, over the past three years, pupils' performance at the expected level (level 4) in English and the core subject indicator has been variable when compared with that of other similar schools. There has been a three-year downward trend in pupils' performance in mathematics. For the past three years, pupils' performance in science has been in the lower 50% or lowest 25% when compared with that of other similar schools.

In key stage 2, pupils' performance at the higher level (level 5) in English and mathematics has generally compared well with that of other similar schools. However, there has been a three-year downward trend in both subjects, and in 2011 the school was in the lower 50% when compared with other similar schools in English, mathematics and science.

When compared with performance levels within their family of schools, pupils' performance is better. In key stage 1 in 2010-2011, the school's performance was in line with the average for the family in English and above the average in mathematics and science. There has been upward trend in the proportion of pupils achieving the core subject indicator over the past three years compared with the family of schools.

In key stage 2, pupils' performance in the core subject indicator has been in-line with or slightly above the average for the family in recent years. Pupils' performance in English, mathematics and science has also generally been around the family average. Over the past three years, pupils' performance at the higher level has generally compared well with that of the family in all three subjects.

In key stage 1, pupils entitled to free school meals do not generally perform as well as other similar pupils in the family, local authority or Wales. There is no significant difference at key stage 2.

In key stage 1, girls consistently perform better than boys in reading. The difference in performance is usually similar to the average gap for the family. There are no significant differences in the performance of boys and girls at the expected level in key stage 2.

Appendix 2

Stakeholder satisfaction report

Eighty-eight pupils completed the learner questionnaires. Their responses are mainly in-line with that of pupils in other schools in Wales. Pupils in Abercarn Primary School are more positive about the behaviour of other children at playtime and lunch time.

All pupils think that teachers and other adults help them to learn and make progress. Most think they are doing well at school and that their homework helps them to understand and improve their work.

Nearly all pupils:

- feel safe in school;
- think the school deals well with any bullying;
- know whom to talk to if they are worried or upset;
- say the school teaches them how to keep healthy and that they have plenty of opportunities to get regular exercise;
- know whom to ask if they are finding their work hard;
- think that they have enough books, equipment and computers to do their work; and
- agree that other children behave well at playtime and lunch time.

A minority think that the behaviour of other children in class stops them from getting their work done.

There were 37 responses to the parent questionnaire and 14 attended the meeting for parents. Their responses are in line with or more positive than those of other parents in Wales.

All those who responded agree that:

- their child likes the school and was helped to settle in well when they started;
- their child is making progress and that staff expect their child to work hard;
- pupils behave well in school;
- their child receives appropriate support in relation to any particular individual needs;
- teaching is good and homework helps their child to build on what they have learnt in school;
- there are regular opportunities for regular exercise; and
- the school helps their child to become more mature and take on responsibilities.

Nearly all those who responded are satisfied with the school and think it is well run. They think that their child is safe in school and that staff treat children fairly and with respect. They understand the school's procedure for dealing with complaints and feel comfortable approaching the school with suggestions, questions or problems.

Nearly all those who responded think the school provides a good range of activities including trips and visits.

A very few of those who responded do not feel well informed about their child's progress or think that their child is not as well prepared for moving on to their next school as they could be.

Appendix 3

The inspection team

Liz Miles	Reporting Inspector
Stella Gruffydd	Team Inspector
Ivory Petherick	Lay Inspector
Tracey French	Peer Inspector
Mr Gareth Roden (Headteacher)	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' (FPR) refers to the year group of pupils in a primary school who reach the age of five during the academic year. FPYear 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	FPR	FPY1	FPY2	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:

Foundation Phase	Reception, 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

Glossary of terms – Primary

National Curriculum

Expected National Curriculum levels

- By the end of the key stage 1, at the age of seven, learners are expected to reach level 2 and the more able to reach level 3.
- By the end of the key stage 2, at the age of eleven, learners are expected to reach level 4 and the more able to reach level 5.

Core subject indicator in all key stages

The core subject indicator relates to the expected performance in English or Welsh first language, mathematics and science, the core subjects of the National Curriculum. Learners must gain at least the expected level in either English or Welsh first language together with mathematics and science to gain the core subject indicator.

All-Wales Core Data sets

Schools and local authorities may refer to performance relative to their family of schools. These families of schools have been created to enable schools to compare their performance to that of similar schools across Wales. Families include schools with similar proportions of pupils entitled to free school meals, living in 20% most deprived areas of Wales, having special education needs at school action plus or statemented and with English as an additional language acquisition less than competent.