



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 Aloysius Primary School
Cedar Way
Gurnos Estate
Merthyr Tydfil
CF47 9PA**

Date of inspection: June 2013

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

St Aloysius Roman Catholic Primary School is on the Gurnos estate in Merthyr Tydfil and caters for pupils from three to 11 years of age. The school serves a challenging area with around 30% of pupils entitled to free school meals. This is above local and national levels. Nearly all mainstream pupils come from the immediate surrounding area.

There are currently 175 pupils on roll, including 22 in the nursery class. There are six classes taught by six full-time and two part-time teachers. They are assisted by 10 full-time learning support staff.

The school has identified that around 25% of pupils have additional learning needs. This is similar to the local authority average. No pupils currently have a statement of special educational need. Around a quarter of pupils come from an ethnic minority background and about 15% of pupils receive support for English as an additional language. Very few pupils use Welsh as a first language. No pupils have been excluded for many years.

The headteacher was appointed in September 2010 and the deputy headteacher was appointed in September 2012.

The individual school budget per pupil for St Aloysius Roman Catholic Primary School in 2012-2013 means that the budget is £3,281 per pupil. The maximum per pupil in the primary schools in Merthyr Tydfil is £4,007 and the minimum is £3,165. St Aloysius Roman Catholic Primary School is 19th out of the 23 primary schools in Merthyr Tydfil in terms of its school budget per pupil.

Summary

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

Current performance

The school's current performance is good because:

- standards in mathematics and English are high, particularly in pupils' writing skills;
- most pupils make good progress from their starting points;
- pupils who need extra help with their learning make rapid progress; and
- most teaching is good and, in a very few cases, it is excellent.

Prospects for improvement

The school's prospects for improvement are good because:

- the school has a strong recent track record of raising standards;
- it has effective systems for self-evaluation;
- leaders and managers challenge underperformance well; and
- they monitor the school's progress against its targets effectively.

Recommendations

- R1 Raise standards of pupils' skills in numeracy and information and communication technology (ICT)
- R2 Raise levels of attendance
- R3 Improve the work of the school council to have a positive impact on the life of the school
- R4 Improve the consistency of the marking of pupils' work
- R5 Address shortcomings in the maintenance of the premises

What happens next?

The school will draw up an action plan which shows how it is going to address the recommendations. The local authority will monitor the school's progress.

Main findings

Key Question 1: How good are outcomes?

Good

Standards: Good

Almost all pupils enter the school with skills that are below those expected of pupils of a similar age, especially in their literacy and mathematical development. In lessons and over time, many pupils make a least good progress and a few do even better.

Most pupils listen well in lessons and are keen to contribute to discussions. A particularly strong feature of their speaking skills is their ability to use a wide and extensive vocabulary. Many present their ideas clearly and in a manner appropriate to the audience, for example when speaking to teachers or other pupils.

Most pupils in the Foundation Phase make rapid progress with their reading. Nursery pupils know the names and sounds of letters and use these skills to read new words successfully. By the end of the Year 2, many pupils read with fluency and accuracy in relation to their age and ability with more able pupils having very good reading skills. Nearly all enjoy reading and can talk about books and authors they like, use an index and contents page accurately, and have a sound understanding of the differences between fiction and non-fiction.

Younger pupils in key stage 2 read competently with expression and enjoyment. They talk readily about texts and use a range of strategies to gain meaning successfully. By the end of Year 6, many read accurately, although not widely. They can discuss appropriately their favourite authors. In lessons, many show a very clear understanding of how characters behave and react, for example when studying 'Romeo and Juliet'. Most use the internet effectively to find information, but few can use an index in a reference book successfully.

Many pupils write imaginatively and for a range of purposes and audiences to a high standard. They use punctuation accurately, generally spell well and present their work neatly with correctly formed handwriting. Older pupils write extended pieces of work that contain a varied and extensive vocabulary that engage the reader and sustain interest. In all classes, pupils use and develop these skills in other areas of learning very successfully.

In their books and lessons, many pupils show good standards in mathematics. In particular, they use their mathematical knowledge well to solve increasingly difficult problems. They do not use their numeracy skills well enough in other subjects, such as science or geography.

Many pupils use their ICT skills well for a range of purposes, including word processing, forming databases, conducting internet research or making presentations. Their ability to use ICT for control, modelling or simple programming is underdeveloped.

Most pupils have good standards of Welsh language skills. Pupils build on their skills well as they progress through the school. By the end of Foundation Phase, pupils talk confidently with adults using appropriate sentence patterns. Pupils in key stage 2 read Welsh with good pronunciation and understanding and older pupils write short pieces of text for a variety of purposes. However, pupils do not use their skills outside of Welsh lessons well.

Pupils who receive free school meals perform similarly to other pupils. Boys as a group generally do less well than girls, but this trend was reversed in 2012. Nearly all pupils who receive extra help with their learning do well and make rapid progress. Pupils who have support for English as an additional language achieve well.

In 2012, results in the end of Foundation Phase assessments placed the school in the upper 50% of similar schools for pupils' personal and social development and for mathematical development. It was in the lower 50% of similar schools for the Foundation Phase indicator and in the bottom 25% for language and communication. More able pupils achieved well with results placing the school in the top 25% of similar schools for pupils' personal and social development and for mathematical development and in the top 50% for language and communication.

For the expected outcome 5, pupils' performance is slightly above the family average for the Foundation Phase indicator, well above for mathematical development and personal and social development, but slightly below for language and communication. For the higher outcome 6, pupils perform better than the family average for all indicators, especially in their personal and social development.

In 2012, and regularly for the last three years, key stage 2 outcomes for the expected level 4 or above placed the school in the bottom 25% of similar schools.

Outcomes for more able pupils placed the school in the upper 50% of similar schools for English, but in the lower 50% for mathematics and science. Comparisons over the last three years place a majority of outcomes in the lower 50% of those for similar schools.

At the expected level 4, pupils generally achieve below the average for the family. However, there was an overall improvement in all areas in 2012. Results over the last four years have risen slightly in English and for the core subject indicator, but have fallen in mathematics and science. At the higher level 5, outcomes are better than the family average for English, where the trend is upwards, but below in mathematics and science where trends show little overall improvement.

Wellbeing: Adequate

Nearly all pupils know what it means to be fit and healthy. In most cases, they feel safe in school and nearly all enjoy their learning. Most pupils behave well, but a few pupils in a minority of classes disturb other pupils' learning or disrupt their play. Little bullying occurs and staff deal with occasional incidences promptly. Most pupils are friendly, polite and courteous.

Many pupils work well independently and in groups. They are involved in setting their own targets to improve their learning successfully, but only a minority of pupils regularly contribute to planning what they learn. Their problem-solving skills are developing well.

Many older pupils are involved with the community through, for example, singing with the school choir or fundraising activities. Older pupils take responsibility successfully as a 'playground mediator', 'house captain' or as a member of the 'eco committee'. The school council raises funds for outside bodies, but has had little impact on the life and work of the school.

Pupils' attendance, at around 93%, is falling, and the school's overall attendance rate in 2012 placed it in the lower 50% of similar schools after three years in the top 25%. Most pupils are punctual.

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

The school provides a good range of learning experiences that meet the needs of all of its pupils. Teachers plan the curriculum around a range of interesting themes and topics successfully. These meet the requirements of the Foundation Phase and the National Curriculum appropriately. Teachers work together well to give similar experiences for pupils of the same age in different classes. However, in key stage 2, the amount of teaching time does not meet Welsh Government recommendations.

Provision for pupils' literacy is very good and gives them many chances to write for a variety of purposes and in a wide range of subjects. The school's provision for ICT varies too much between classes and provision for numeracy is limited overall.

There is a good range of extra-curricular activities both after school and during the lunch hour, particularly in key stage 2, which many pupils attend. These have a positive impact on pupils' standards and wellbeing.

The school has good provision to develop pupils' Welsh language skills. It promotes pupils' understanding of the history and culture of Wales successfully through, for example, a study of a local artist and visits to Caerleon and St Fagan's.

Provision for pupils to learn about sustainable development is appropriate. They have good opportunities to learn about world events and global citizenship through work on the media, their study of Africa, and, in particular, rainforests.

Teaching: Good

Most teaching is good and, in a very few lessons, it is excellent. It is best where teachers have very high expectations of all pupils and provide challenging activities that excite and engage them.

In most lessons, teachers have good working relationships with pupils, manage behaviour well and use good questioning techniques. They plan lessons well,

building successfully on what pupils already know, and they manage support staff effectively. Support staff make a good contribution to pupils' learning. Lessons have a good pace and keep pupils on task.

In a few lessons, teachers do not expect enough of pupils and fail to keep them sufficiently interested in their learning. This slows the progress of pupils.

Teachers mark pupils' work regularly, provide appropriate oral feedback to them and give them good encouragement about what they do well. In a minority of classes teachers give pupils clear targets of what they need to do to improve their work and encourage pupils to take note of this feedback.

The school tracks pupils' performance thoroughly in order to identify trends in the performance of individual pupils' performance. Teachers use the information well to support the planning of pupils' next steps in their learning, and to identify pupils in need of extra help with their work. Moderation of the end-of-key-stage assessments is secure.

Reports keep parents well informed of their children's achievement and progress.

Care, support and guidance: Good

Pupils have good opportunities to learn about health and nutrition and how to maintain a healthy lifestyle. The school's provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is beneficial to pupils' wellbeing. Teachers manage pupils' behaviour well and the school's introduction of peer mentors has supported this. Although attendance rates are below those of similar schools, the school is actively working with parents to improve these. However, this has had limited impact thus far.

The school works well with a range of outside agencies, such as the education welfare service, the police, education psychologists and behavioural support. These are helping to improve pupils' behaviour and their standards of achievement.

The school's arrangements to support pupils with additional learning needs are very good. These pupils achieve well as a result of a robust system of early identification, intervention strategies of high quality, effective tracking and monitoring, and the contributions of well-trained support staff.

The school's arrangements for safeguarding pupils meet requirements and give no cause for concern.

Learning environment: Adequate

Staff work together successfully to provide a Christian ethos that values, supports and respects all pupils regardless of their background. All pupils receive equal access to the curriculum and staff encourage pupils to participate fully in the life and work of the school.

Classrooms in general are bright and stimulating for pupils with attractive displays that value pupils' work. However, several areas of the building are not maintained well, present hazards to pupils and compromise their wellbeing. These were brought to the attention of the governing body and the local authority at the time of the inspection.

How good are leadership and management?	Good
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Leadership: Adequate

The headteacher and deputy headteacher have established successfully a shared vision for the school, which they communicate effectively to all staff. The senior leadership team meets regularly to discuss the school's progress and to identify areas in need of further development in standards and curriculum provision, and to challenge underperformance. Subject leaders fulfil their roles diligently and have a good understanding of their responsibilities. Leaders rigorously analyse data and subject leaders' monitoring reports in termly meetings.

All staff have relevant and up-to-date job descriptions. Senior leaders organise performance management for teachers and support staff well. They use the outcomes to set suitable targets for the whole school in relation to pupil progress and individual staff development and training.

The governing body is very supportive and understands its role well. Many governors have received appropriate training and this has enabled them to become more effective in analysing data and acting as critical friends of the school. Governors have a very good understanding of how pupils' performance compares with that of pupils in similar schools.

The school has made good progress in addressing many national priorities, such as improving pupils' oracy and reading skills, developing pupils' Welsh language skills and addressing the under-achievement of pupils through the 'Vulnerable Learning Initiative'.

School leaders do not manage consistently or effectively the maintenance of all school premises. This has a negative impact on pupils' wellbeing.

Improving quality: Good

The school's self-evaluation processes use a suitable range of first-hand evidence and they focus particularly well on evaluating standards. This evidence includes very careful analysis of the performance data of pupils, observations of lessons, scrutiny of pupils' work and feedback from pupils and parents. Lesson observations focus closely on evaluating the quality of teaching and the standards pupils achieve.

The school development plan focuses well on priorities identified in the self-evaluation process, particularly in relation to teaching and learning. The plan includes challenging targets and measurable success criteria. A programme is in place for staff and governors to monitor progress in implementing the plan each term.

Previous development plans have had a positive impact on raising standards in pupils' speaking, reading and writing.

The school has made good use of networks with other schools to improve its provision for literacy, mathematics and the progress of vulnerable learners.

Partnership working: Good

The school has effective links with a range of agencies that make a positive contribution to improving outcomes for pupils. Parents value the good range of communication provided by the school. Those who support pupils in the Foundation Phase in the 'come and read club' have had a positive effect on raising standards in reading. The school has worked well with parents to help them to help their child learn, for example by sending support materials home with mathematics games. Parents value this support, which has helped to generate greater dialogue between school and parents and has led to improved standards.

There are good induction arrangements with local pre-school playgroups. There is a very detailed cluster transition policy and plan for pupils at the end of key stage 2. This includes joint curriculum planning to support continuity in teaching and learning methods from primary to secondary education.

Links with the community police officer and the priest from the local church enhance pupils' spiritual moral and social development well.

Resource management: Good

Leaders and managers have identified spending clearly to reduce the school's large surplus budget. There are enough qualified teaching and support staff, who are deployed appropriately throughout the school. In a few cases, teachers' weak knowledge of numeracy impacts negatively on pupils' understanding. There are good arrangements for teachers' preparation, planning and assessment time.

Good use is made of a range of grants. These support the priorities identified in the school improvement plan successfully. Recent spending on reading materials and employing learning support staff is having a positive impact on raising pupils' standards in reading and writing. Although resources are well matched to pupils' needs, not all are of a good quality or maintained well.

In view of the standards achieved and the progress made by most pupils, the school provides good value for money.

Appendix 1

Commentary on performance data

In 2012, results assessments at the end of the Foundation Phase placed the school in the upper 50% of similar schools for pupils' personal and social development and mathematical development. It was in the lower 50% of similar schools for the Foundation Phase indicator (the percentage of pupils who achieve the expected outcome 5 or better in mathematical development, language and communication and in personal and social development in combination), but in the bottom 25% for language and communication. More able pupils achieved well and results placed it in the top 25% of similar schools for pupils' personal and social development and mathematical development, and in the top 50% for language and communication.

For the expected outcome 5, pupils performed slightly above its family average for the Foundation Phase indicator, well above for mathematical development and personal and social development, but slightly below for language and communication. For the higher outcome 6, pupils performed better than the family average for all indicators, especially in their personal and social development.

In 2012, results in the assessments at the end of key stage 2 placed the school in the bottom 25% of similar schools for English, mathematics, science and the core subject indicator (the percentage of pupils who achieve the expected level 4 for English, mathematics and science in combination). Results for the last three years have regularly placed the school in the bottom 25% of similar schools.

Outcomes for more able pupils placed the school in the upper 50% of similar schools for English, but in the lower 50% for mathematics and science. Over the last three years, a majority of outcomes have been in the lower 50% of those for similar schools.

At the expected level 4, pupils generally achieve below the average for the family. Although there was an overall improvement in all areas in 2012, results over the last four years have risen slightly in English and for the core subject indicator, but have fallen in mathematics and science. At the higher level 5, outcomes are better than the family average for English, where the trend is upwards, but below in mathematics and science, where trends show little overall improvement.

Appendix 2

Stakeholder satisfaction report

Responses to parent/carer questionnaire

Thirty-one parents or carers responded to the questionnaire.

Most parents are satisfied with the school and think that:

- their child likes school and is making good progress;
- teaching is good;
- staff expect their child to work hard and do their best;
- pupils have appropriate additional support if necessary;
- their child is well prepared for moving on to high school;
- the school helps their child to be more mature and take on responsibility;
- the school helps children to settle in well;
- they are well informed; and
- there is a good range of trips or visits.

A few parents or carers do not believe that:

- their child is safe in school; or
- staff treat all pupils equally and with respect.

A minority do not agree that:

- pupils behave well in school; or
- the school is well run.

In many cases, the parents' responses are broadly similar to those of other primary schools across Wales. Those relating to children's safety and respect are slightly more negative. The responses concerning behaviour or the running of the school are significantly more negative.

Response to pupils' questionnaire

Sixty-four pupils responded to the questionnaire.

Most pupils think that:

- they feel safe in school;
- the school teaches them how to be healthy;
- they know whom to talk to if worried or upset;
- there are enough chances to get regular exercise;
- teachers help them to make progress;
- they know whom to ask if they find their work difficult;
- they are doing well in school; and

- there are enough books and equipment available for them to do their work.

Almost half of the pupils had concerns about pupils' behaviour in lessons and a minority were concerned about behaviour at breaktimes and lunchtimes.

The views of pupils are similar to most pupils in other primary schools in Wales except in relation to those on behaviour which are considerably more negative.

Appendix 3

The inspection team

Richard Hawkley	Reporting Inspector
Buddug Mai Bates	Team Inspector
Rhiannon Mary Boardman	Lay Inspector
Elwyn Waters	Peer Inspector
Sarah Valencia	School Nominee

Copies of the report

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

Year groups, the Foundation Phase 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 local authorities.

The following table sets out the age ranges relevant to each year group. For example, Year 1 refers to the group of pupils who reach the age of six and Year 13 is the year group who reach the age of 18 during the academic year.

Primary phase:

Year	N	R	Y1	Y2	Y3	Y4	Y5	Y6
Ages	3-4	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 Foundation Phase and key stages cover the following year groups:

Foundation Phase	Nursery, 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

Foundation Phase indicator (FPI)

Progress in learning through the Foundation Phase is indicated by outcomes (from outcome 1 to outcome 6).

The Foundation Phase indicator (FPI) relates to the expected performance in three areas of learning in the Foundation Phase:

- literacy, language and communication in English or Welsh first language;
- mathematical development; and
- personal and social development, wellbeing and cultural diversity.

By the end of the Foundation Phase, at the age of seven, pupils are expected to reach outcome 5 and the more able to reach outcome 6.

Pupils must achieve the expected outcome (outcome 5) in the three areas above to gain the Foundation Phase indicator.

The core subject indicator (CSI)

Progress in learning through key stage 2 is indicated by levels (level 1 to level 5).

The core subject indicator in key stage 2 relates to the expected performance in the core subjects of the National Curriculum:

- English or Welsh first language;
- mathematics; and
- science.

By the end of the key stage 2, at the age of 11, pupils are expected to reach level 4 and more able pupils to reach level 5.

Pupils must gain at least the expected level (level 4) in the three core subjects to gain the core subject indicator.

All-Wales Core Data sets

Inspection reports may refer to a school's performance relative to a family of schools or to schools with a broadly similar proportion of pupils entitled to free school meals.

In relation to free school meals, schools are placed into one of five bands according to the three-year trend in the proportion of pupils entitled to free school meals in the school. The school's performance is then placed into quartiles (from the top 25% to the bottom 25%) in relation to how well it is doing compared with other schools in the same free school meal band.

The Welsh Government created the families of schools (typically a group of 11 schools) to enable schools to compare their performance with that of similar schools across Wales. The composition of the families draws on a number of factors. These include the proportion of pupils entitled to free school meals and the proportion living in the 20% most deprived areas of Wales. They also draw on the proportion of pupils with special education needs at school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs, and pupils with English as an additional language.