



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 Illtyds R.C.Primary School
Rocky Road
Dowlais
Merthyr Tydfil
CF48 3BT**

Date of inspection: February 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 Illtyd's Roman Catholic Voluntary Aided Primary School is in Dowlais, Merthyr Tydfil and serves the catholic and other denomination christian communities in Dowlais, Pant, Penydarren, Galon Uchaf and the Gurnos Estate. A small number of pupils live outside the area and travel from Tredegar and Aberdare. The school states that its catchment contains both advantaged and disadvantaged areas.

Eleven per cent of pupils are entitled to free school meals, which is significantly below the local authority average and below the average for Wales. The school caters for pupils between three and 11 years and there are currently 170 pupils on roll. Nearly all classes are mixed age. Thirty-one per cent of pupils have additional learning needs. None of the pupils comes from homes where Welsh is the main language and 36% of pupils receive support with English as an additional language. Pupils' attainment when they start school is lower than the local authority average.

The current headteacher was appointed in January 2012. The school was last inspected in February 2008.

The individual school budget per pupil for St Illtyd's R.C.Primary School in 2012-2013 means that the budget is £3,405 per pupil. The maximum per pupil in the primary schools in Merthyr Tydfil is £4,007 and the minimum is £3,165. St Illtyd's R.C.Primary School is 12th 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	Excellent

Current performance

The school's current performance is good because

- standards are good because the quality of teaching and learning support is good overall;
- pupils' wellbeing is good;
- pupils' development of Welsh skills is good;
- intervention programmes are having a positive effect on pupils' standards in literacy and numeracy;
- the use of the new tracking system has resulted in better differentiated support for learners;
- assessment for learning strategies help pupils make good progress;
- achievement throughout the school has improved considerably in recent months; and
- many pupils make good progress from low starting points especially pupils who have English additional learning needs.

Prospects for improvement

Prospects for improvement are excellent because:

- of the rapid transformation of the culture, expectation of standards and morale of the whole school community school since the appointment of the new headteacher;
- there are very strong systems in place for evaluating, monitoring and planning for improvement;
- the school empowers staff to lead improvements effectively;
- it has clear priorities and challenging targets for improvement; and
- the school has secured improvements in teaching and learning.

Recommendations

- R1 Improve pupils' attainment in English by the end of key stage 2
- R2 Strengthen the pupils' writing skills across the curriculum
- R3 Improve attendance
- R4 Further develop pupils' awareness of education for sustainable development and multiculturalism

What happens next?

The school will draw up an action plan that shows how it is going to address the recommendations. Estyn will invite the school to prepare a written case study, describing the excellent practice identified during the inspection.

Main findings

Key Question 1: How good are outcomes?	Good
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Standards: Good

On entry to the school, baseline assessment shows that the majority of pupils have knowledge, understanding and skills that are below or well below average.

Throughout the school, pupils work has substantially improved in recent months, as evidenced by the scrutiny of their work. Overall, most pupils make good progress as they move through the school, with most achieving estimated or higher than estimated outcomes in comparison to prior attainment.

By the end of the Foundation Phase, most pupils have literacy and numeracy skills that are suitable for their age and many continue to make good progress throughout key stage 2. Pupils' progress in acquiring their English skills, especially reading and writing, is a strength of the school.

Many pupils have good speaking and listening skills. In the Foundation Phase, pupils listen to and answer questions appropriately. In key stage 2, most pupils speak with confidence, using extended sentences and a good range of vocabulary. Many pupils in key stage 2, listen carefully to adults and to each other before giving thoughtful answers.

Many pupils make good progress in developing their reading skills from a low starting point. In the Foundation Phase, pupils have a good range of strategies for reading new words and most have a good knowledge of individual letter sounds. In key stage 2, many pupils are good readers. Most pupils can read fluently and understand what they have read. Older pupils in key stage 2 enjoy reading, know what type of books they prefer to read and can explain their choices.

At the end of the Foundation Phase, many pupils can write simple sentences and present their thoughts using appropriate spelling and punctuation. In key stage 2, pupils write for a suitable range of purposes and they understand how to improve their work. Generally, in work in English, pupils produce work of a very high standard with good quality presentation. However, most pupils in key stage 2 do not extend their writing enough in other subjects.

Many pupils enjoy learning Welsh. Pupils make a good start in learning Welsh in the Foundation Phase and have a good knowledge of words and simple sentence patterns. Many pupils build well on these skills in key stage 2 and speak Welsh on a regular basis in a variety of contexts. By the end of key stage 2, more able pupils can understand Welsh reasonably well, but a few pupils lack confidence in speaking Welsh beyond simple set patterns.

In 2012, the school's performance was good at the end of the Foundation Phase. The proportion of pupils who attained outcome 5 (the expected level) in literacy, numeracy and personal and social development was above the family average. In

relation to schools with a similar proportion of pupils with free school meals, the school's performance places it in the lower 50% for achievement in these three areas of learning.

At the end of key stage 2 in 2012, pupil performance in English, mathematics and science combined fell below the average for similar schools in the family and placed the school in the lowest 25% of similar schools. However, in recent years there has been an improving trend for attainment at the expected level 4 for all subjects combined. In recent years pupils have tended to perform above the family average for mathematics but below or close to the family average for English.

Pupils with English as an additional language generally make very good progress and a good proportion attain higher than expected outcomes at the end of both key stages. Most pupils with additional learning needs make the expected progress for their age and ability and a few pupils make better than expected progress.

Wellbeing: Good

Pupils' wellbeing is a strength of the school.

Nearly all pupils feel safe in school and demonstrate a good understanding of the importance of developing a healthy lifestyle. Pupils are highly confident that teachers will deal within any instances of bullying, promptly and effectively.

Attendance, at 92.8% in the last academic year, is on an upward trend, but still below that of similar schools in Wales. Nearly all pupils arrive punctually in the mornings.

Nearly all pupils display good social skills, being considerate and courteous around the school and in the playground. They care about each other, with peer mediators supporting any children who may feel isolated well. Pupils are clear on the standards of behaviour expected of them.

Nearly all pupils are enthusiastic and well-motivated learners. They show high levels of enjoyment and enthusiasm in what they do and are keen to do well. Nearly all pupils listen intently and discuss their activities with interest and understanding.

Members of the school council are actively involved in making decisions and represent the views of other pupils well. They have been involved in many developments, including improvements to the lunchtime menu, developing a safer school environment, and developing a code of conduct and a health and safety policy.

Key Question 2: How good is provision?

Good

Learning experiences: Good

The school provides a rich curriculum that meets the needs of pupils, including those with additional needs or for whom English is not their first language. Staff plan together to ensure that learning experiences build on pupils' knowledge, skills and understanding progressively. Teachers' planning to develop pupils' skills is detailed. Pupils' learning experiences are purposeful and often linked to problem solving.

The curriculum uses real life experiences effectively. The money awareness programme, for instance, raises pupils' awareness of the sensible use of funding. Pupils benefit from a range of extra-curricular activities, such as street dance, football, rugby, and art.

Pupils benefit from taking part in groups for learning support programmes to improve their reading skills. These activities, together with an engaging language intervention programme, support effectively the teaching of reading, writing and spelling through games and comic characters.

Staff at the school provide a range of opportunities for pupils to speak and to listen to Welsh being spoken. Careful planning ensures that pupils build on their vocabulary as they move through the school. Signs and displays throughout the school celebrate Welsh culture well. Pupils have suitable opportunities to study Welsh artists, saints and their locality.

The school acts sustainably in key areas of 'reuse, reduce and recycle'. The eco committee shows a good understanding of the principles involved in education for sustainable development and global citizenship, but this is not fully embedded across the curriculum for all pupils.

Teaching: Good

Teaching is consistently good throughout the school. Teachers have very good subject knowledge and high expectations of all pupils. In nearly all lessons, teachers work at a good pace and set the appropriate level of challenge for different groups of pupils. In a few lessons where teaching is excellent, teachers question pupils according to their ability. This is a notable feature.

Staff have very good relationships with the pupils and there is a respectful and purposeful atmosphere in classes. This has a positive impact on pupils' attitude to learning and behaviour. An effective range of teaching approaches engages most pupils successfully. For example, through probing questioning, there are good opportunities for pupils to think for themselves and talk about previous work.

The school uses assessment data particularly well to inform planning, track progress and set targets for improvement. Staff have recently adopted new methods of assessing pupils and this is proving to be more accurate and useful. As a result, teachers plan carefully so that work is more suitable for different types of learners.

Assessment for learning is a strength within the school with consistently good questioning to check for understanding. There are good opportunities for pupils to assess their own work and for them to help improve each other's work. Purposeful hints help pupils to understand what they need to do to improve. Reports to parents are informative and encourage parents to talk about progress with their child. This has a positive impact on pupils' wellbeing and their attitudes to learning.

Care, support and guidance: Good

The secure and supportive ethos of the school provides pupils with a clear understanding of rules, procedures and expectations. It enables pupils to flourish

and makes a significant contribution to their progress. The school has a wide range of effective initiatives to promote pupils' health and wellbeing and their understanding of related issues. Very successful themed weeks operate within the curriculum, focusing on resolving conflict, solving problems and developing co-operation.

Pupils' spiritual development is highly developed because of an all-pervading catholic ethos throughout the school. Pupils' moral, social and cultural development is of a high standard due to the personal and social education scheme reinforced, by the example set by staff.

The school works effectively with a range of external agencies to provide help, support and guidance to staff, pupils, parents and carers. Work with the local police has been particularly beneficial in raising pupils understanding of local community expectations. The school's arrangements for safeguarding pupils meet requirements and give no cause for concern.

Provision for pupils with additional learning needs is good. Staff identify pupils' needs promptly and organise and oversee any necessary support effectively. Individual educational plans are comprehensive and set out suitable targets for improvement. The school provides interesting extension activities for more able pupils. Support staff work closely with teachers to provide a good range of additional programmes for individuals and groups of learners. These have had a positive impact on raising targeted pupils' standards, particularly in reading.

Learning environment: Good

The school is characterised by a calm, purposeful atmosphere, in which pupils and staff are included and valued. The ethos of the school and the curriculum encourages pupils to develop tolerance, respect and understanding. Pupils have equal opportunity to access all areas of the curriculum. The school provides a fully inclusive environment and diversity is celebrated well within the personal and social education programme, collective worship and wider school activities.

The school building is maintained well and meets the needs of its pupils effectively. Classrooms are of sufficient size and furniture is of a high standard. Additional areas, such as the worship and prayer room, also enhance the pupils' learning, spiritual and social experiences. Displays across the school celebrate pupils' achievements and support their learning well. The outdoor play areas provide pupils with plenty of opportunities for exercise. The use of the outdoors in the Foundation Phase is good.

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

St Illtyd's school has rapidly improved pupils' standards and wellbeing since the appointment of the current headteacher. She provides inspirational leadership by empowering staff to improve the quality of pupils' literacy and numeracy skills. The school has a clear sense of purpose and its effective plans and ambitious targets for improvement focus keenly on challenging all pupils to succeed.

Staff are effective leaders and make a difference, for example in improving pupils' Welsh skills and acquisition of English as an additional language. Senior managers and other staff work very effectively as a team. An outstanding example of this is the inclusion solution circle, which makes teaching assistants accountable for targeted pupils' progress. This has impacted very positively in a short time on the standards these pupils achieve in reading.

The school implements highly effective activities to improve the standard of pupils' work in reading, writing and mathematics. The sharp contrast in what pupils can achieve in writing now, in comparison to 12 months ago, is an outstanding example of how leaders within the school have transformed expectations. They ensure that all staff share the vision for change. Leaders have introduced highly effective new approaches to planning the curriculum, have transformed assessment for learning, and monitor pupils' progress regularly and precisely. These changes have led to considerable improvements in the standards pupils achieve in a short period of time.

The arrangements for performance management ensure challenge and support for all staff to reach high standards. The school's leadership on creating a consistent approach to improving pupils' reading and writing is outstanding as it has resulted in high quality writing and very good progress in reading for pupils of all ages.

The governing body has a wide and relevant range of skills and they know the school very well. As a result, governors challenge senior managers effectively. Together with the headteacher, they have been very effective in bringing about a wide range of improvements such as improving health and safety and ensuring that the school has an effective system for tracking pupils' progress.

The school addresses national and local priorities well with a strong commitment to ensuring that no child is disadvantaged.

Improving quality: Excellent

The core principle of the school's strategy for quality improvement is that every pupil should reach their full potential and that no child is allowed to fail. To achieve this, the school has established exemplary arrangements for self-evaluation and quality improvement. The school monitors teachers' planning, lesson delivery and pupils' work extensively and as a result has made considerable improvements in achievement in all year groups. The school takes good account of pupils' views.

The headteacher has transformed provision as a result of self-review and this has made a positive difference to pupils. There are numerous examples of the effectiveness of this approach. For example, the school is now safer for pupils, planning allows pupils to make faster progress and there is tailored support for pupils with additional learning needs and high levels of challenge for the more able. The school knows itself extremely well and has implemented change successfully and sustainably. The rate of improvement is exemplary.

Staff work very well together to bring about improvements in pupils' achievements, for example, financial awareness, problem solving and data handling. In addition, many staff work well with other schools in the local authority and within the regional

cluster of catholic schools. One example of the effectiveness of this work is the establishment of a common curriculum in key stage 2 science across the cluster of catholic schools in the region. As a result, pupils' investigational skills in science have improved considerably.

The newly introduced tracking system ensures that all staff have a very good understanding of performance data and use it well. If pupils' progress is not as good as it should be, the school uses a highly effective range of intervention strategies to help pupils reach the standards of achievement of which they are capable. For example, support with reading and the allocation of a personal mentor to each child within the school.

Partnership working: Good

The school has effective working relationships with a wide range of partners. These bring many benefits to the school. Parents play a very important role in the life of the school and are highly supportive of the changes made by the current headteacher. The school is building strong relationships with all parents. Leaders and managers have also forged an effective partnership with the local authority particularly in respect of safeguarding and attendance. As a result, there are clearer procedures in place for keeping pupils safe and there is an improving rate of attendance.

The strong partnership with the local catholic secondary school and other feeder catholic primary schools ensures that pupils' transition to the next phase of education is smooth. Pupils in Years 5 and 6 have good opportunities to visit the secondary school, take part in lessons and work on transition projects. Pupils gain many benefits from the school's partnerships with sporting and voluntary organisations. These assist the school to develop effectively pupils' sporting skills through good outdoor learning opportunities.

Resource management: Good

There is a good supply of teachers and teaching assistants who are deployed effectively to meet the needs of learners. The careful use of staff in key areas such as the development of reading and writing has resulted in better pupil performance.

The school has good arrangements for developing the skills of its staff, mainly through a well-designed programme of in-house activities that match the priorities of the school. Any additional skill development needs are identified through performance management and are met through carefully chosen external provision.

The school manages its finances well. Spending matches well to current priorities. Managers have appropriate arrangements for monitoring and controlling expenditure. Governors have a good oversight of budgetary management.

The standards achieved by pupils are good and improving. In view of the progress made and the effective leadership and management as well as the strengths in provision, the school provides good value for money to its pupils.

Appendix 1

Commentary on performance data

Current pupil performance at the expected outcome 5 in the Foundation Phase, in literacy, numeracy and personal and social development, places the school in the lower 50% of schools with a similar proportion of free school meals. The school's performance for the Foundation Phase indicator is above average for schools in the family and above the national average for all schools in Wales. Pupils' outcomes in language, literacy and communication skills are slightly below average for other schools in the same family. Pupil outcomes in mathematical development and personal and social development, wellbeing and cultural diversity are above the average within the family of schools.

In key stage 2, the proportion of pupils achieving the expected outcome in English, mathematics and science combined is below the family of schools' average and the national average. However, until 2012, there had been an improving trend in this indicator. Pupil performance at the expected level shows a variable trend in each of the core subjects. In comparison to schools with similar proportion of free school meals, the school performs in the lowest 25% for all core subjects in combination. Outcomes in English and science place the school in the lowest 25% of similar schools. Outcomes in mathematics in 2012 place the school in the lower 50% of similar schools.

More able pupils' performance in language, literacy and communication skills as well as personal and social development, wellbeing and cultural diversity, in the Foundation Phase is above the family average and above the national average. In key stage 2, the proportion of more able pupils achieving higher than expected outcomes is above the family average and national average for mathematics, but below these averages in English and science.

Girls tend to outperform boys at the expected level in key stage 2, but in 2012, boys' performed better than girls did. At the higher than expected level in key stage 2 the gap in performance between boys and girls is wider than the family average and girls do better than the boys at this level.

Pupils entitled to free school meals currently attain as well as other pupils. The gap in performance between these two groups has narrowed during recent years. Most pupils with English as an additional language achieve well.

Appendix 2

Stakeholder satisfaction report

Learner questionnaires

Fifty-three pupils in key stage 2 completed the questionnaire

Nearly all pupils:

- feel safe in school;
- believe that teachers and other adults in the school help them learn and make progress;
- think that the school deals well with bullying;
- believe that the school provides chances for regular exercise and teaches them how to be healthy; and
- feel that they are doing well at school.

Most pupils:

- think that homework helps them understand and improve their work at school;
- say that they have enough books, equipment and computers to do their work;
- believe that other children behave themselves in class; and
- say that other children behave themselves in at play and lunch times.

A few pupils say that they do not know whom to turn to if they are worried or upset.

Overall responses from the pupils are more positive than the benchmarks for responses for all primary schools in Wales.

Parent questionnaires

Eighty parents/carers completed the questionnaires.

All or nearly all parents/carers feel that:

- they are satisfied with the school;
- their child likes school;
- that their child makes good progress;
- staff expect their child to do their best;
- staff treat pupils fairly and with respect;
- pupils are safe in the school;
- they can approach the school with problems, suggestions or questions;
- the school helps their child become more mature and to take on more responsibility; and
- the school is well run.

Most parents/carers feel that:

- their child was helped to settle in well when they started in school;
- pupils behave well in the school;
- teaching is good;
- homework builds on what their child learns in school;
- their child is encouraged to be healthy and to take regular exercise;
- their child receives appropriate additional support;
- they are kept well informed about their child's progress;
- they understand the procedure for dealing with complaints; and
- their child is prepared for moving onto the next school.

A few parents do not believe that there is a good range of activities, including trips and visits.

Parents' views are generally more positive than the benchmarks for responses from all primary schools inspected in Wales.

Appendix 3

The inspection team

Helen Morgan-Rees	Reporting Inspector
Eleanor Davies	Team Inspector
Edward Tipper	Lay Inspector
Fraser Darlington	Peer Inspector
Karen Evans	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.