



Arolygiaeth Ei Mawrhydi dros Addysg a Hyfforddiant yng Nghymru
Her Majesty's Inspectorate for Education and Training in Wales

A report on

**Darran Park Primary School
Brook Street
Ferndale
RCT
CF43 4LE**

Date of inspection: September 2017

by

**Estyn, Her Majesty's Inspectorate for Education
and Training in Wales**

About Darran Park Primary School

Darran Park Primary School is in Ferndale in the Rhondda Cynon Taff local authority. The school caters for pupils from three to eleven years of age. The school has 340 pupils taught in 12 mainstream classes, three of which are mixed age. There is also a local authority learning support class for up to eight foundation phase pupils.

Approximately 22% of pupils are eligible for free school meals, which is around the national average. The school has identified 32% of pupils as having additional learning needs. This is well above the national average. Nearly all pupils come from English speaking homes. A very few pupils have English as an additional language.

The school was last inspected in February 2011. The headteacher took up his appointment in September 2011.

The school is currently a pioneer school and is working with the Welsh Government and other schools to take forward developments relating to the curriculum.

Further information is available from the Welsh Government My Local School website at the link below.
<http://mylocalschool.wales.gov.uk/Schools/SchoolSearch?lang=en>

Summary

Darran Park is a thriving school community where all pupils are valued. Most members of staff have high expectations for pupils' behaviour and the standards that they are capable of achieving. By the time that they leave the school, most pupils have made good progress in improving their literacy and numeracy skills. Standards of information and communication technology (ICT) across the school are excellent, with most pupils developing as confident digital learners. The headteacher and leadership team provide the school with a clear sense of direction. They encourage staff to be innovative and provide pupils with an extensive range of opportunities to take on additional responsibilities. The school works effectively with families and with schools from Wales and other countries.

Inspection area	Judgement
Standards	Good
Wellbeing and attitudes to learning	Good
Teaching and learning experiences	Good
Care, support and guidance	Good
Leadership and management	Good

Recommendations

- R1 Ensure that teachers in the foundation phase provide more able pupils with greater challenge
- R2 Improve the consistency of teachers' feedback to ensure that all pupils have a clear idea on how to improve their work
- R3 Improve standards of pupils' Welsh oracy outside of Welsh lessons

What happens next

The school will draw up an action plan to address the recommendations from the inspection.

Estyn will invite the school to prepare a case study on its work in relation to ICT for dissemination on Estyn's website.

Main findings

Standards: Good

Most pupils enter the school with skills at least at the expected level, with a minority above the expected level. In the foundation phase, more able pupils do not always make the progress of which they are capable in improving their literacy and numeracy skills. However, all groups of learners, including those with additional learning needs, make good progress by the time they leave the school.

Most pupils in the foundation phase develop strong skills in literacy. By the end of the foundation phase, most pupils speak confidently and enjoy discussing their work with others. Most pupils read with understanding and talk about the authors and stories they have read with confidence. They write short pieces independently and make sensible attempts at spelling unfamiliar words. For example, they write imaginative fantasy stories and funny nonsense poems. However, pupils do not write at the same level in other areas of the curriculum as they do their literacy lessons.

In key stage 2, many pupils make rapid progress in developing their literacy skills. Many pupils speak with great confidence and expression to a range of audiences. Many pupils become confident, fluent readers. Many older pupils locate information quickly in books and demonstrate a secure understanding of different texts. As they move through the school, many pupils produce writing of good quality. They make adventurous choices of vocabulary and nearly all write at length with good accuracy in spelling and punctuation. They write for a wide range of purposes linked to their topics. As part of their history topic, pupils write authentic diary entries from the trenches in the First World War using strong descriptions, such as 'Mouldy old food and appalling body odour from men who haven't washed in two weeks'. By the end of key stage 2, many pupils have developed neat joined handwriting and present their work carefully.

In the foundation phase, most pupils improve their numeracy skills well. In reception, they work confidently with numbers up to 10. By Year 2, many pupils make good progress in working with larger numbers. Most pupils use their numeracy skills skilfully in other areas of learning. For example, they use their knowledge of weight to calculate the sugar content of drinks accurately.

In key stage 2, most pupils develop a secure understanding of number. Most use their number skills well to enable them to solve a wide range of problems. For example, in Year 4, pupils calculate the length of television programmes by subtracting time accurately and choose Christmas decorations for the class using a given budget correctly. By the end of Year 6, many pupils use their numeracy skills confidently to support their learning in a range of subjects.

Across the school, most pupils develop excellent skills in ICT and use them effectively to support their learning in other subjects. In the foundation phase, pupils embed a range of useful skills quickly. For example, Year 1 pupils record information on favourite cereal bars using a database accurately. In key stage 2, most pupils improve their knowledge of a wide range of ICT applications exceptionally well. For example, they regularly work collaboratively online using an extensive range of skills.

Pupils in Year 6 use modelling software very confidently to create detailed virtual worlds linked to their locally themed topic on 'Pits and Ponies'. The school's 'digital leaders' play a leading role in supporting other pupils and by showcasing and celebrating the school's work to a wide range of audiences across the country.

In the foundation phase, most pupils develop positive attitudes towards speaking Welsh and use basic vocabulary accurately. They write in short sentences and read very simple texts accurately. Most pupils in key stage 2 have suitable oracy skills. As pupils move through key stage 2, many pupils develop sound writing skills. By Year 6, they write for a wide range of purposes using known vocabulary. Many pupils apply their Welsh writing skills well in other areas of the curriculum. Many pupils read with accurate punctuation and fluency, but their understanding of what they have read is less secure. Throughout the school, pupils do not use their Welsh oracy skills often enough outside of Welsh lessons.

Wellbeing and attitudes to learning: Good

Nearly all pupils behave well in lessons and around the school. Year 6 pupils carry out their leadership roles diligently to reinforce expected standards of behaviour and conduct. Most pupils co-operate well with each other when working in pairs and groups. Nearly all pupils are caring and treat each other and adults with respect. Pupils in the learning resource base respond positively to frequent inclusion within mainstream activities and to the nurturing environment created for them by staff. Nearly all pupils who receive additional support to improve their social and life skills make good progress.

Pupils have a secure awareness of how to stay safe, including when using the internet. Older pupils help other pupils to develop a thorough understanding of online safety through their regular presentations to the whole school.

Many pupils undertake leadership roles effectively. A particularly strong feature is the role of the digital leaders. They share their skills and expertise across the school as well as delivering highly successful presentations to outside agencies. Members of the school council recently devised an effective colour coded route system in the school. This has had a positive impact on improving pupil conduct when moving around the building.

Nearly all pupils have a positive attitude towards learning and show persistence when faced with challenges. For example, pupils in the foundation phase work with determination to create a witch's wand. Most pupils develop highly effective independent skills. In key stage 2, many pupils demonstrate high levels of perseverance when solving complex numeracy problems.

Many pupils in the foundation phase contribute ideas to learning opportunities regularly. For example, they chose to create hats for a wizard and shield for a knight as part of their topic work. Pupils in key stage 2 have fewer opportunities to contribute to how and what they learn.

Most pupils have a clear understanding of how to stay healthy and enjoy participating in a wide range of sporting activities both in school and in the local community. They are developing appropriately as ethically informed citizens and have a strong sense of fairness and tolerance. For example, pupils visit a local care home to serve refreshments to residents in an interesting intergenerational initiative.

Teaching and learning experiences: Good

Overall teaching is good. Nearly all teachers and support staff have very positive relationships with pupils and manage their behaviour well. Most teachers have high expectations of the standards that pupils can achieve. They plan stimulating lessons that challenge pupils successfully. Nearly all teachers ensure that pupils understand the focus of the lesson and support pupils well to achieve their goals. Enthusiastic support staff provide pupils with a high level of support, both in the classrooms and in small groups indoors and outside. Nearly all teachers and support staff use a wide range of probing questions to extend pupils' learning effectively. In the foundation phase, teachers do not always provide pupils with sufficient opportunities to develop their writing skills independently in other areas of the curriculum.

Most teachers provide pupils with accurate feedback about their work in both written and oral form. In the majority of classes, teachers give pupils a clear and consistent indication of what they have done well and where they need to improve. However, the quality and effectiveness of this advice on improving pupils' work vary. The school has recently introduced a new system of setting pupils ongoing targets for improvement, but this work is still at an early stage of development.

Teachers use a whole school, thematic approach to learning that engages all pupils well by making learning relevant and interesting for them. Most teachers provide pupils with a wide range of experiences that enhance their learning successfully. Opportunities for pupils to make regular visits to local places of interest, such as Big Pit and Swansea Museum support the school's curriculum well and enrich pupils' learning experiences effectively.

Many teachers plan successfully for the development of pupils' literacy, numeracy and ICT skills across the curriculum. They provide pupils with effective opportunities to apply their literacy and numeracy skills in other subjects. For example, pupils in Year 3 write diary extracts of an astronaut travelling through space.

The school is a Welsh Government pioneer school, helping to shape the new curriculum. It is making very good progress, in particular in developing the digital competence framework. Teachers provide pupils with many imaginative, high quality opportunities to apply their ICT skills across all areas of learning. For example, pupils use a digital modelling package to design a statue to represent Wales in the twenty first century.

Pupils have suitable chances to develop their Welsh language skills. Teachers plan a comprehensive programme of work that focuses well on developing pupils' language patterns progressively. However, there are limited opportunities for pupils to develop their Welsh skills in other situations during the school day.

The school is implementing foundation phase principles effectively, particularly in nursery and reception classes. Teachers regularly plan interesting activities outside, both within the school grounds and within the local community. These opportunities enhance pupils' learning well. However, in a minority of foundation phase classes, learning activities do not always challenge the most able pupils well enough.

The school promotes Welsh traditions and culture well. Pupils learn about famous Welsh people including Dame Tanni Grey Thompson. They study the works of famous artists such as Kyffin Williams and learn about the heritage and culture of their local community, for example by studying the history of miners and mining.

Care, support and guidance: Good

The school has effective and well-organised systems for tracking pupils' progress. Teachers use this information successfully to identify pupils who need additional support in literacy or numeracy. They make beneficial use of assessment outcomes in core subjects and areas of learning to plan next learning steps for pupils successfully.

The school's provision for pupils with additional learning needs is effective. Staff plan, deliver and monitor a wide range of support programmes that meet the needs of different groups of pupils successfully. Regular reviews of individual pupils' progress and detailed assessment information ensure that most make good progress towards their individual learning goals.

The school is very successful in supporting parents to ensure the best possible outcomes for their children. The highly effective family engagement officer arranges informative curriculum workshops and enjoyable after school clubs for parents and their children. For example, a reading club develops parents' understanding of how they can support their children to improve their reading skills. This supportive partnership has a very positive impact on improving pupils' participation and enjoyment of learning as well as on improving attendance, achievement and wellbeing.

The school's provision to encourage pupils to be physically and mentally healthy is effective. Staff provide pupils with an extensive range of interesting extra-curricular clubs. These include rugby, dance and science technology. The school has appropriate arrangements to promote healthy eating and drinking. As a result, most pupils have a good understanding of the effect of lifestyle choices on their health. For example, a school focus on the "right of being healthy" has led to a reduction in pupils eating unhealthy foods at lunchtimes.

Staff focus well on developing pupils' attitudes to fairness, respect and understanding of others. Teachers in the learning resource base provide pupils with regular opportunities for inclusion in mainstream activities. The school organises relevant activities to raise pupils' awareness of online safety successfully. The school's procedures for safeguarding pupils give no cause for concern.

The school is an inclusive community where all pupils are valued and treated equally. There are beneficial opportunities to develop pupils' social and personal skills. Staff encourage pupils to play an important role in the local community. For example, older pupils meet with pensioners to talk to them about using computers safely.

The school provides pupils with extensive opportunities to perform and present to different audiences, including showcasing their creative skills. For example, pupils competed in art and recital competitions at the recent locally held Urdd Eisteddfodau.

Staff plan a broad range of opportunities to develop pupils' awareness of different cultures. These include beneficial links with a school in Uganda that enable pupils to communicate with each other using the internet. The school's links with Mexico and Budapest provide pupils with exciting additional learning opportunities.

Leadership and management: Good

The school provides a very happy and caring environment. There is an emphasis on respect for all pupils and staff. The headteacher has developed a strong culture of teamwork and collaboration within the school, which has raised expectations for pupils' achievements and staff development. He shares the school's values and aims effectively with the whole school community.

Senior leaders have clearly defined roles and time to work with staff and pupils on the school's identified priorities for improvement. Plans for development are clear, with realistic timescales for completion. All staff understand their role in bringing about school improvement. They help to evaluate the school's strengths and opportunities to improve. The leadership team values their opinions and their ideas have resulted in better outcomes for pupils and families. For example, support staff suggested establishing the popular 'Baby Bugs' club. This engages parents and toddlers in school life and helps them settle well into nursery. In addition, this initiative helps to build a shared understanding of how parents and school can support each child's progress.

Leaders have improved the school building so that it promotes independent learning effectively and provides stimulating experiences for all pupils. For example, recent improvements to play areas promote physical activity and pupils' social development well. The school has many attractive and well-resourced areas, both inside and outdoors. These include the 'discovery den' as well as inviting spaces in which pupils can read.

A wide range of very effective partnerships have helped to improve learning experiences for pupils. The school has worked with other schools in the local authority successfully to develop an innovative project focused on the impact of the coal industry on different local communities. The school takes part in an extensive range of learning networks to enhance the curriculum and improve pupils' digital skills. These have had a positive impact on the standards that pupils achieve across all areas of learning. For example, pupils have widened their knowledge of other countries by taking part in an initiative to communicate digitally with schools in Wales and around the world.

The school makes effective use of the pupil development grant to improve outcomes for pupils and families. Partnership working with parents is a strength of the school. There are many popular activities to enable parents and grandparents to engage in school life, such as the 'Men Behaving Dadly' group.

Support staff provide effective pastoral and learning support. They contribute enthusiastically to the experiences of pupils in lessons, through extra-curricular provision and in meeting the particular needs of groups of pupils. All staff, including the caretaker, play a full part in moving the school forward.

Governors are supportive and positive about the school's impact on pupils' life chances and aspirations. They visit the school regularly and engage with the parent council to evaluate the work of the school. The headteacher provides them with comprehensive information, which helps them to contribute to financial planning and identifying areas for improvement. However, their role in challenging the school leadership is at an early stage of development.

There are appropriate performance management arrangements for all staff. Leaders identify suitable training and development opportunities linked to individual and whole school objectives. Leaders provide staff with regular opportunities to share their practice both within the school and through links with other schools and organisations.

Leaders keep the curriculum under regular review to improve learning experiences and the standards pupils achieve. The school evaluates all of its work in detail and regularly seeks the views of pupils, parents, staff and governors. However, the school's judgement of its own work is sometimes too generous, in particular about the quality of teaching. Where leaders have identified shortcomings, they empower staff to address them through a successful coaching model provided by other members of staff.

Copies of the report

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

Estyn evaluates a provider's effectiveness using a four-point judgement scale:

Excellent	Very strong, sustained performance and practice
Good	Strong features, although minor aspects may require improvement
Adequate and needs improvement	Strengths outweigh weaknesses, but important aspects require improvement
Unsatisfactory and needs urgent improvement	Important weaknesses 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:

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