A report on

Gwaunfarren Primary School
Alexandra Avenue
Merthyr Tydfil
CF47 9AF

Date of inspection: May 2018

by

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

About Gwaunfarren Primary School

Gwaunfarren Primary School is in Merthyr Tydfil. There are 276 pupils on roll between the ages of 3 and 11 years, of whom 44 attend full-time in the nursery and 13 attend part-time. The school arranges its pupils into seven single-age and three mixed-age classes.

The three-year average of pupils eligible for free school meals is around 23%. This figure is slightly above the national average of 19%. At present, just above 15% of pupils at the school are eligible for free school meals. Nearly all pupils are of white British origin. A few pupils speak English as an additional language and no pupil comes from a home where Welsh is the first language.

The school identifies around 20% of pupils as having additional learning needs. This is slightly below the national average of 22%. A very few pupils at the school have a statement of special educational needs and a very few are in the care of by the local authority.

The headteacher took up her post in October 2012. Before this, she was the assistant headteacher. Estyn last inspected the school in December 2011.

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

Gwaunfarren Primary school is a happy, caring learning community. A forward-looking headteacher leads the school successfully, supported and challenged by a highly effective governing body.

Throughout the school, most pupils are eager to learn and they treat others with respect. They demonstrate positive attitudes to school and are beginning to guide their own learning well. They achieve good standards in many aspects of their work.

Staff know pupils well and consider their needs carefully. They provide pupils with engaging and interesting learning opportunities that help them to develop effective literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology (ICT) skills. Those pupils who need extra help receive thoughtful care and support.

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 Improve pupils' Welsh language skills

R2 Ensure that curriculum organisation contributes consistently to the ethos and principles of the foundation phase

R3 Ensure that foundation phase pupils are represented on pupil groups that influence to the life and work of the whole school

What happens next

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

Main findings

Standards: Good

Many pupils begin school with skills that are at or below those expected for their age. As they progress through the school, most develop their literacy and numeracy skills well. Most pupils with additional learning needs make effective progress towards their personal targets. Many pupils who are eligible for free school meals make effective progress from their starting points, although a few do not achieve as well as they could.

Throughout the school, most pupils speak confidently to adults and other pupils. Nearly all listen well and, by the end of key stage 2, many pupils have a useful vocabulary. They speak clearly, asking questions and responding sensitively to others' viewpoints.

In the foundation phase, most pupils make beneficial progress in developing their reading skills. Most develop a suitable understanding of the link between letters and sounds and use this to read age-appropriate texts successfully. By the end of key stage 2, most pupils read a range of texts from different genres confidently. Many demonstrate higher-order reading skills well. For example, they are able to infer meaning that is not explicit in the text thoughtfully, such as a character's reasons for their actions or the influence of preceding events that are not in the story.

As they progress through the foundation phase, many pupils develop their ability to write clearly and usefully in a suitable range of styles. They develop their ideas well in an interesting series of sentences, for example when explaining how to trap a troll. However, at the end of the phase, a minority do not write at length confidently. By the end of key stage 2, many pupils produce interesting pieces of writing for a broad range of purposes, for example writing letters and stories successfully. Many use interesting vocabulary to enliven their work creatively, for example describing fog as 'an abundance of endless pink haze'. However, a few pupils do not use punctuation and capital letters consistently well or spell accurately enough. Many pupils utilise their literacy skills effectively in other curriculum areas.

Most pupils develop their mathematical skills and understanding effectively. By the end of the foundation phase, many count, order and work with numbers up to 100 confidently. Many read scales accurately, such as those on thermometers, and use collected data to construct block graphs successfully. At the end of key stage 2, many pupils use and understand an effective range of mathematical concepts. They have a sound grasp of simple algebra, calculating the value of unknown quantities expressed as letters. Most pupils calculate the mean, median, mode and range of items accurately, such as items sold at the Christmas Fair. Throughout the school, most pupils use their numeracy skills well across the curriculum, for example when measuring and recording the temperature of different reactions in science.

As pupils move through the school, most pupils develop effective ICT skills. In the foundation phase, most use ICT in their daily learning activities confidently. For example, many pupils in lower foundation phase use the touch-screen on tablet computers to practise their letter and number formation usefully. By the end of key

stage 2, many pupils are developing a useful understanding of simple coding. Most create presentations well, for example to compare different well-known theme parks. They present their learning using word-processing software confidently and search the internet for images to improve their work successfully. Many pupils create simple spreadsheets suitably. For example, they input the takings from a cake sale appropriately and use this information to show their profit. However, few pupils understand well how to use key features of spreadsheets and databases, such as formulae to do calculations.

Many pupils make adequate progress in developing their Welsh language skills. By Year 2, they use familiar phrases suitably, for example asking each other how they feel. They respond appropriately to basic instructions and questions from staff and other pupils. However, by the end of key stage 2, many pupils have made limited progress. They can hold simple discussions with others, such as discussing their likes and dislikes, but few extend sentences confidently or pronounce everyday words and phrases accurately. Across the school, many pupils read and understand simple Welsh words suitably. With support, most pupils write simple sentences in Welsh, following set sentence patterns correctly. However, overall, many pupils' Welsh skills are underdeveloped.

Wellbeing and attitudes to learning: Good

Nearly all pupils feel happy and safe in school and are confident that they can talk to adults and their friends if they are worried or upset. Most pupils understand well how to stay safe and have a well-developed knowledge of e-safety. For example, foundation phase pupils talk confidently about the dangers of giving out their name or address when linked to the internet. Most pupils understand usefully the need to eat and drink healthily and to take regular exercise. For example, they speak enthusiastically about the benefits of taking part in their daily mile run and how this helps them to stay fit.

Nearly all pupils behave well in classes, during break times and at lunch times. They are polite and show respect for each other and adults. Nearly all pupils are enthusiastic about their leaning and have positive attitudes to their work. Most are ready to learn at the start of the lessons and move purposefully between tasks and learning areas. Many foundation phase pupils work well independently and co-operate happily during their activities, for example when working with their classmates to sort pictures of healthy and unhealthy foods. Most pupils listen to the views of others and share their ideas readily, for example when deciding on the week's independent 'missions'. They persevere and concentrate for extended periods when engaged in a range of learning activities. As a result, most complete tasks successfully.

Many pupils demonstrate competent leadership skills through a wide range of pupil groups, such as the school council, digital leaders and e-cadets. They understand the importance of these responsibilities and describe usefully the changes that they have made, for example to introduce beneficial recycling initiatives. However, these groups are limited to pupils from key stage 2 and, as a result, foundation phase pupils do not have a suitable enough influence over the life and work of the school.

Teaching and learning experiences: Good

The quality of teaching at the school is good. Nearly all teachers plan engaging learning activities that motivate most pupils successfully. They develop beneficial working relationships with nearly all pupils. As a result, most are confident to contribute in class and take part in learning activities happily. Most teachers question pupils skilfully. They use questioning techniques well to help pupils understand new concepts and to develop their knowledge and skills effectively.

During lessons, most teachers monitor pupils' learning carefully. They offer supportive feedback and address pupils' misconceptions sensitively. This enables most pupils to make effective progress in most learning activities. Nearly all teachers provide appropriate opportunities for pupils to evaluate their own and other pupils' learning. This helps pupils to understand what they are doing well and how they could improve. In many cases, pupils take note of this feedback and that provided by teachers on their work. Where they do this consistently, it helps them improve their work well.

The planned curriculum in the foundation phase generally engages most pupils effectively. Teachers plan interesting learning experiences indoors and outdoors. For example, as part of their work on fairgrounds, pupils throw pompoms at coconuts labelled with interesting words to improve their word recognition. This develops their reading and language skills imaginatively. Throughout the foundation phase, teachers plan an effective beneficial balance of teacher-led and independent learning activities. This allows pupils a suitable control over their learning. However, throughout the phase, overly long phonics sessions reduce pupils' independence and enthusiasm. In a few classes, a lack of adult interaction means that a minority of pupils do not always benefit well enough from carefully planned and interesting continuous and enhanced learning opportunities.

In key stage 2, interesting learning topics engage nearly all pupils well and ensure that they benefit from a broad, balanced curriculum. The introduction of weekly independent learning 'missions', designed by pupils and teachers, helps pupils to develop independence and investigative skills well. For example, pupils create a new beginning to 'George's Marvellous Medicine', produce interesting artwork linked to characters in the text and investigate carefully the volume of ingredients in the potion described in the story.

Curriculum planning supports purposeful opportunities for pupils to consolidate and develop their literacy and numeracy skills across the curriculum. Nearly all teachers plan effective opportunities for pupils to develop these skills. For example, many pupils in Year 6 improve their measuring skills usefully in science when weighing different-sized cargoes to go in a toy boat and timing how long it will take to sail across a water tray. They develop effective research and literacy skills through their topic work, for example when studying and recording the history of rollercoasters. Most teachers plan useful opportunities for pupils to develop their ICT skills. For example, foundation phase pupils use a programme confidently to create pictograms of data they have collected about fruit.

The school's long-term planning for Welsh gives teachers a useful structure through which to develop pupils' language skills systematically. In lessons, a majority of

teachers model the Welsh language appropriately, for example when giving simple instructions. They plan for short daily Welsh sessions in most classes and these allow pupils to practise a few simple phrases regularly. However, most teachers do not encourage pupils to use the language consistently enough. As a result, most do not consolidate their learning strongly or develop confidence when using the language. The curriculum provides plenty of interesting opportunities for pupils to learn about the culture and history of the local area and Wales. For example, visits to local places of interest, such as Cyfarthfa Castle, allow pupils to gain first-hand knowledge and experience of their local area and its history.

Care, support and guidance: Good

The school tracks pupils' progress in learning and wellbeing robustly. Senior leaders and teachers use this information well to identify and monitor the progress of groups of learners, including those with additional learning needs and those who are more able. Teachers use this information to plan learning in line with pupils' needs appropriately. As a result, most pupils make consistent and systematic progress as they move through the school.

Support staff deliver a range of effective intervention programmes that meet the needs of identified pupils and specific groups successfully. For example, the language support programmes ensure that pupils who need help with developing their speaking skills make rapid progress. Staff places a strong emphasis on pupils' wellbeing and implement a range of effective strategies, when needed.

The school has appropriate arrangements in place for promoting healthy eating and drinking, such as a fruit tuck shop and a healthy lunch box initiative. Staff promote the benefits of a healthy lifestyle effectively. They provide regular opportunities for physical exercise, including the daily mile run and other useful extra-curricular activities, such as keep-fit club. As a result, most pupils have a strong understanding of the importance of living healthily and of exercising regularly. The school's procedures for safeguarding pupils meet requirements and give no cause for concern.

There are suitable opportunities for pupils to take on responsibilities within the school. Older pupils have a direct effect on improving school life by participating in different roles, such as play-leaders and junior road safety officers. Members of the eco-committee play an active role in encouraging classes to recycle and save energy. However, these roles are limited to pupils in key stage 2.

Initiatives, such as the values education programme, support pupils' understanding of moral and social issues well, for example those relating to equality, diversity and respect for others. Staff promote a 'value of the week', such as tolerance or peace. They develop this theme throughout the week, such as in assemblies and classroom activities, and reward pupils for displaying these important attributes.

The school supports the development of pupils' spiritual and moral development well. Leaders have developed a comprehensive termly programme of themed activities, based around key religious festivals, feasts and special days. To support this, pupils have regular opportunities to pray and reflect during collective worship and consider these key messages. Leaders promote the development of pupils' social and cultural

skills well through taught themes and carefully organised events and performances. For example, pupils recently participated enthusiastically in a community project called 'Lost and found' to celebrate the cultural and musical history of Merthyr Tydfil.

Leadership and management: Good

The headteacher has established a clear vision for the school. As a result, the school's strategic objectives, plans and policies focus well on the progress and wellbeing of pupils. Senior leaders promote high professional values and develop an effective, engaged team of teachers and support staff. Staff at all levels have clear job descriptions, feel valued and work effectively as a team to ensure that they support most pupils to achieve well. As a result, the whole team contributes positively to school improvement and provides a motivating learning environment for pupils and staff.

The governing body is highly effective in fulfilling its duties and has contributed successfully to driving forward continuous improvement since the last inspection. It has a clear strategic plan for its work, which dovetails well with the school's strategic plans and ensures that governors play an effective role in self-evaluation and improvement planning. There is a good balance between support and challenge in the way the governing body discharges its duties and holds leaders to account.

The school's self-evaluation process is generally robust and benefits from the consideration of a wide range of first-hand evidence. It includes a useful evaluation of progress in addressing the priorities from the previous year's development plan. Leaders have put in place a rigorous timetable of evaluation activities, which they follow conscientiously to ensure that monitoring is comprehensive and spread sensibly across the year. Staff at all levels take an active part in these processes and senior leaders summarise usefully the outcomes of monitoring activities in the annual self-evaluation report. This report contains a suitably detailed account of the school's strengths and identifies most of the areas that need improvement. However, it is not as evaluative as it could be and does not identify a few areas that need improvement, such as pupils' Welsh skills. The quality of improvement planning is effective and stems appropriately from the outcomes of the school's self-evaluation procedures. It contains relevant and measurable actions for improvement, and realistic timescales. Leaders support the priorities in the school development plan well by allocating appropriate resources to it. This has led to successful improvement in key areas, such as in the provision for literacy, numeracy and ICT.

There is a strong culture and ethos of professional learning among staff. This links well to the priorities in the school development plan and the relevant objectives from the performance management of staff. Staff share good practice with each other regularly. They work collaboratively with other local schools to develop their understanding and improve provision in key areas, such as developing digital learning and improving pupils' contribution to what and how they learn.

Leaders manage resources well and ensure that staff use the indoor and outdoor environments effectively. The school generally has enough staff to meet the needs of most learners. However, leaders have recently extended the provision for nursery pupils to allow them to attend on a full-time basis. This has resulted in classes sharing the existing support staff and has improved the provision for nursery pupils.

However, it has led to reduced adult interaction in a few classes in the foundation phase.

The headteacher and governors monitor the budget robustly and ensure that there is an acceptable surplus at the end of each year. Leaders generally make effective use of the pupil development grant and ensure that it has a positive effect on many of the pupils eligible to receive it.

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.

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