



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

A report on

**Alltwen Primary School
Alltwen Hill
Alltwen
Pontardawe
Swansea
SA8 3AB**

Date of inspection: October 2018

by

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

About Alltwen Primary School

Alltwen Primary School is in a small village near Pontardawe in the Swansea Valley, in Neath Port Talbot local authority.

The school provides education for 228 pupils from three to eleven years old, including 22 who attend the nursery class part-time. There are seven single-age classes, including the nursery, and one mixed-age class in the foundation phase. The school was last inspected in 2013. The headteacher took up his post in 2014 and the deputy headteacher was appointed in 2017.

Nearly all pupils are of White British heritage. A very few pupils speak English as an additional language. A very few pupils speak Welsh at home.

The three year average for pupils eligible for free school meals is around 17%. This figure has reduced over time and is now just below the Welsh average of 18%. The school has identified approximately 37% of pupils as having additional learning needs, which is well above the Welsh average of 21%. A very few pupils have a statement of special educational needs.

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

This is a school with pupils' wellbeing at its heart. It is a community school that works actively with parents to involve them in their child's education.

The school has made rapid improvements since its last inspection as a result of strong leadership and the improving quality of classroom practice. The recently formed senior leadership team works purposefully and effectively. Adults know and care for their pupils well, particularly those who may be vulnerable to underachievement.

Pupils at Alltwen make good progress, often from low starting points. Most pupils behave well and attend regularly. There is a new and exciting curriculum, which provides pupils with opportunities to learn about what interests them. As a result, most enjoy their learning very much.

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 the presentation of a minority of pupils' written work
- R2 Improve key stage 2 pupils' mental calculation skills
- R3 Share the best classroom practice across the school

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 engaging parents to support their children to develop effective reading skills and habits, for dissemination on Estyn's website.

Main findings

Standards: Good

A majority of pupils enter the school with skills below those usually found, especially in communication. Most make good progress during their time at Alltwen. By Year 6, many achieve standards at least in line with those expected for their age. Over time, girls and boys achieve equally well. Pupils with additional needs make strong progress from their individual starting points. Pupils eligible for free school meals make steady progress, although over time they do not achieve as well as their peers.

From low baselines, many pupils make strong progress in developing their oracy skills. In the nursery, pupils are keen to engage with visitors, for example gleefully showing inspectors that they have taken their photo on a tablet device. Around a half of pupils speak clearly, although a few find it difficult to articulate their needs. As they progress through the foundation phase, many pupils become confident communicators who speak enthusiastically about their work and topics that interest them. By Year 6, many pupils express their opinions clearly and give well-reasoned answers to questions. They are particularly polite and well-mannered when speaking to visitors. However, a few pupils do not develop their communication skills well enough. For example, they struggle to listen carefully or remember instructions.

Most pupils develop good reading skills. In the foundation phase, most pupils make accurate use of their knowledge of letter sounds to read words aloud. A minority use other clues, such as pictures or the context of the text, to help them to decode and understand a book. In key stage 2, many pupils read appropriate texts fluently and with expression. They enjoy discussing books and can predict what might happen next. By the end of Year 6, most pupils are confident, independent readers.

Many pupils develop their writing skills well. In the nursery class, they develop their mark making with increasing control, and by the reception class nearly all can hold a pencil correctly and begin to write. Across the foundation phase, many pupils write appropriately in a suitable range of simple genres, for example writing instructions to make fruit kebabs. By Year 6, more able pupils write successfully in a range of formal and informal genres, both in English lessons and increasingly in other areas of the curriculum. For example, they write a clear explanation of how a spider catches its prey, or to persuade their teachers that homework should be banned. Many punctuate accurately and vary their sentence structures for effect. A few use carefully chosen vocabulary, for example to flavour their poetry. However, a few pupils need regular reminders to use capital letters and full stops routinely, and support to structure their writing appropriately.

Most pupils practise their handwriting regularly. With support they form their letters and numbers correctly during these sessions and many develop a neat, joined script. However, too few pupils choose to present their everyday written work well.

In the foundation phase, most pupils make good progress in mathematics. In the reception class, nearly all pupils identify one more and one less than a given number accurately. Most pupils apply the mathematics they have learnt in lessons to solve real-life problems with confidence. For example, in Year 1 they use money to pay for items and work out the change correctly in the class shop.

Most pupils in key stage 2 make good progress in developing their mathematical, numeracy and problem-solving skills. For instance, older pupils apply their strong understanding of measurement and data handling to solve problems in science lessons. Many pupils explain their mathematical thinking accurately. For example, pupils in Year 5 explain how they calculated the amount of fencing and other materials required to build a perimeter fence for a Celtic roundhouse. However, a minority of pupils find it difficult to calculate mentally. This is because they do not know and recall simple number bonds and times tables, and instead rely on working out the answer, for example using their fingers.

Most pupils' ICT skills develop well. For example, in the foundation phase, most pupils use a range of applications confidently on tablet computers. In key stage 2, pupils use a range of communication programmes and search engines independently. By Year 6, many create and interrogate databases independently. They manipulate formulae within a spreadsheet, for instance to calculate the relative costs of a Celtic meal for differing group sizes.

Many pupils show a willingness to use Welsh. By Year 2, most pupils respond appropriately to simple questions and instructions, for example, when stating the colours of leaves in autumn. In key stage 2, most pupils use short phrases to talk about their interests and hobbies. However, they have a limited range of vocabulary. By Year 6, many read a simple text with understanding. A few write sentences independently in Welsh.

Wellbeing and attitudes to learning: Good

Pupils' wellbeing is a very strong aspect of the life of Alltwen School. Nearly all pupils feel safe, happy and secure in school. They are confident that the school responds to their concerns and that adults address the very rare cases of bullying effectively. Most pupils behave well and are respectful towards the staff, visitors and their fellow pupils. There is clear mutual trust and respect between pupils and staff. Strong relationships enable pupils to approach staff confidently should they need support.

Pupils' views play an increasingly prominent part in the school's work and make a valuable contribution towards decisions. The school council has a positive influence on school life. For example, they recently raised sufficient funds to purchase individual lockers for older pupils.

Older pupils develop a good level of maturity and understand responsibility. For example, the digital leaders support their fellow pupils in using ICT equipment within their classrooms. They promote a good understanding of the importance of making correct and wise decisions in relation to online safety. A small group of pupils share responsibility for the smooth running of the school's credit union community savings scheme.

Most pupils understand clearly the importance of eating healthily. Pupils engage well in clubs and extra-curricular physical activities during lunchtime and after-school sessions. They proudly support a range of charities, for example by providing Christmas shoeboxes for children in Romania. This has a positive effect on raising their awareness of others less fortunate than themselves.

Many pupils work together effectively and enthusiastically in pairs and groups. In their discussions, pupils generally respect other people's contributions and are considerate of different points of view. By the end of key stage 2, most pupils have a sound understanding of how to improve their work. Most pupils have a positive attitude towards their work and many persevere with their tasks even when they find it difficult. However, in a few lessons, a minority of pupils do not sustain their interest and motivation in their work.

Attendance rates at the school in recent years have improved notably, from a low starting point. Nearly all pupils and their parents understand the importance of regular attendance at school. Most pupils arrive on time in the mornings.

Teaching and learning experiences: Good

Across the school, effective teaching promotes pupils' good progress. Classrooms are stimulating places, and many teachers devise exciting activities to engage their pupils. Many teachers have high expectations of pupils' behaviour and efforts. They provide clear explanations so that pupils understand the tasks. Most have clear systems to manage their classes, for example to signal that everyone should stop and listen. As a result, relationships are positive and respectful, many classrooms are productive and orderly, and most pupils want to learn.

Many teachers plan and structure their lessons thoughtfully to match the wide range of needs within each class. For example, one teacher skilfully organised the pupils into carefully selected groups, to involve everyone in aspects of designing a fast-moving parachute. However, on the few occasions where the learning does not match pupils' needs well enough, pupils become restless and lose concentration.

Across the school, adults are good role models for the pupils. For example, in the foundation phase, a teaching assistant carefully modelled a conversation where daddy bear expressed his concern about his missing porridge, before asking the pupils to act out the role. Many adults are skilled at directing well-chosen questions that challenge individual pupils to think carefully.

Recently, teachers have begun to provide feedback to pupils through worthwhile learning conversations. These opportunities are effective and efficient in helping pupils to discuss and explore how to improve their work. However, teachers' written comments do not always identify clearly how pupils could improve their learning.

There are many instances where teachers' feedback identifies that pupils' work is untidy and, across the school, teachers often set targets for pupils to use neat handwriting. Nevertheless a minority of teachers continue to accept work that is not presented well enough, by pupils who could do better.

Teachers have worked hard to improve the learning environment within the constraints of an ageing school building and a growing number of pupils on roll. The principles of the foundation phase have been established suitably, although pupils in Years 1 and 2 do not have ready access to use the outdoors independently. Nevertheless, teachers succeed in making classrooms welcoming and exciting places to learn.

There are well-planned opportunities to develop pupil's oracy and reading skills in a wide range of contexts across the curriculum. Teachers make appropriate provision for pupils to practise their writing skills in other areas of learning, for example comparing the lives of rich and poor children in Victorian times. There are carefully-thought-through opportunities to develop pupils' ICT skills and Welsh language skills effectively. However, until very recently, teachers' planning has not provided enough well-planned opportunities for pupils to develop their numeracy skills to a high enough level in other subjects, such as science and geography.

This term the school has re-invigorated its curriculum, and re-organised the subjects into exciting topics. Teachers have mapped out the skills and knowledge that pupils need, and their planning for the new curriculum is thorough and detailed. Teachers plan learning experiences collaboratively between the classes to meet pupils' needs and interests and ensure that pupils develop their skills progressively and systematically. At the beginning of each topic, teachers provide valuable opportunities for pupils to suggest ideas about what they would like to learn.

There are many trips and visits, which enrich pupils' learning effectively and help them to appreciate the culture and heritage of Wales. There is a useful annual entrepreneurial week, which makes a valuable contribution to developing pupils' understanding of product development, manufacture and retail.

Care, support and guidance: Good

The headteacher has established an inclusive and caring ethos that permeates the daily life of the school. This has improved pupils' wellbeing very effectively.

School leaders track and monitor pupils' progress purposefully as they move through the school. They use this information to identify any pupils who are not making the progress they should, and provide worthwhile support to bring them back on track. For example in reading, skilled teaching assistants deliver helpful intervention programmes to ensure that nearly all of these pupils catch up with their peers. They also provide a valuable range of wellbeing interventions. Adults are particularly diligent in monitoring pupils whose circumstances may make them vulnerable to underachievement, for example young carers or pupils who are looked after by the local authority.

The headteacher has forged a very strong professional relationship with parents and carers, who are regular, welcome visitors to school. Many parents value the termly 'question and answer' sessions and the curriculum information evenings, for example about keeping safe online. In addition, the school hosts parent support groups, which provide beneficial life skills coaching and an opportunity for parents to network with each other.

A particularly noteworthy partnership with parents is a reading intervention project. Parents attend the 'cwtsh café' each week, during school time, for refreshments and to read with their child. A well-trained teaching assistant provides support for parents, who in turn learn how to support and encourage their child's reading skills. The school makes the electronic reading texts available to families at home, to read together. As a result, these pupils make rapid progress in their reading, and carers and pupils enjoy working together during the school day.

There is a wide range of valuable provision to meet the needs of pupils who have additional needs. The coordinator has a clear strategic approach. She tracks and monitors the additional provision rigorously, and ensures that all pupils have suitable, accessible individual education plans, which are reviewed regularly. Skilled teaching assistants provide high quality care and support to ensure that pupils with a range of additional needs integrate seamlessly into the daily life of the school.

There are strong systems to help pupils develop a sense of responsibility. For instance, the head boy and head girl take a lead in welcoming visitors, and assist with the smooth running of the school. These role models earn the respect of other pupils, and younger pupils aspire to fulfil the roles themselves, in time. Teachers appoint pupils as class 'experts' to help with the delivery of the curriculum.

The positive sense of community within the school and the locality encourages all pupils to develop the values of loyalty, responsibility and a feeling of belonging. However, pupils' understanding of the role they can play as active citizens in the wider world is less well developed.

A beneficial partnership with the local secondary school ensures a smooth transition for pupils at the end of Year 6. There are worthwhile and effective systems to promote good attendance, which have been effective in ensuring that, over recent time, nearly all pupils attend school regularly. Safeguarding meets requirements and gives no cause for concern.

There are powerful opportunities for all pupils to develop their spiritual, moral, social and cultural awareness. For instance, lighting a candle signifies the beginning of the special time for the daily act of collective worship. All pupils have the opportunity to learn a musical instrument, and take part in Christmas concerts and celebrations.

The school provides a wide range of sporting activities, which help pupils to undertake regular exercise. The school makes appropriate arrangements to promote healthy eating and drinking. There are a good range of after-school clubs and activities that are open to all pupils.

Leadership and management: Good

The headteacher is a well-motivated leader who provides a clear, shared and strategic vision for the school. This focuses on ensuring the wellbeing of pupils and staff in a supportive and positive learning environment. The headteacher is well supported by the deputy headteacher and a recently established senior leadership team.

There have been notable improvements since the last inspection. The headteacher distributes leadership well and all teaching staff have specific areas of responsibility for aspects of the school's development, based on their skills and interests. Leaders have introduced many strategies which have had a positive impact on the school's provision over the past year. For example, they have introduced a new, bespoke curriculum, which has been successful in engaging the interest of nearly all pupils.

The governing body is proactive and supports the school's work well. Governors have a sound understanding of the school's performance data and its strengths and

areas for development. Governors show determination and tenacity in challenging and supporting the school to bring about necessary improvement. They are well informed and play an active role in the ongoing self- evaluation process across the school. For example, they hold 'be a pupil' sessions where they listen to learners and feed pupils' views back to senior leaders. Governors are financially very prudent. Since the last inspection they have successfully implemented an ambitious plan to eliminate a substantial financial deficit.

There are appropriate systems to identify the school's strengths and areas for improvement. Senior leaders and governors use a very wide range of evidence to inform self-evaluation accurately. The school's development plan identifies suitable areas for improvement and sets out relevant and measurable actions clearly. Leaders have recently sharpened the focus of their monitoring activities, to evaluate more accurately the precise impact of actions to support school improvements.

The school has robust performance management systems in place for all staff and relevant training supports this process well. A strong feature of the school's work is its success in providing many professional learning opportunities for staff. The school is keen to learn from others, as well as sharing its own good practice. For example, leaders worked together with staff and pupils from another local school, to explore the most efficient and effective ways to give pupils feedback about their work. As a result, teachers now make good use of learning conversations, which provide pupils with immediate oral feedback, in place of lengthy written dialogues.

Despite the deficit financial situation, the school has worked hard to improve the range of resources available to pupils. The headteacher is skilful in securing significant additional grant funding to improve standards and provision, for example from local businesses. The pupil development grant supports pupils eligible for free school meals well in providing individual support, for instance through the nurture provision. This has a positive impact on developing pupils' wellbeing.

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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