A report on

**Rhydri Primary School
Rhydri
Caerphilly
CF83 3DF**

Date of inspection: February 2019

by

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

About Rhydri Primary School

Rhydri Primary School is in the rural village of Rudry in Caerphilly local authority. There are currently 89 pupils between 3 and 11 years old on roll, including 12 part-time nursery age pupils. They are divided into four mixed age classes.

The average proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals over the last three years is around 3%. This is well below the national average of 18%. The school identifies that around 20% of pupils have additional learning needs, which is similar to the national average. No pupil speaks Welsh at home, and there are very few pupils from an ethnic minority background.

The school currently works in close partnership with a local junior school with the intention of establishing a more formal federation. The governing bodies of Bedwas Junior and Rhydri Primary schools, together with Caerphilly local authority, propose to establish the federation of Bedwas Junior and Rhydri Primary schools. If the proposal is accepted, the federation will come into effect on 1 September, 2019.

The school was last inspected in September, 2013. The headteacher was appointed in September, 2017.

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

A particular strength of the school is the warm, caring and nurturing learning environment that it provides for pupils. This contributes significantly to pupils' strong levels of wellbeing and their attitudes to learning, and helps them grow into caring, considerate and polite individuals.

Most pupils make at least good progress from their starting points, especially in their literacy skills. This is a result of good teaching overall and the strong and effective working relationships between staff and pupils. Teachers develop learning experiences that build effectively on pupils' current knowledge. This helps to develop and maintain pupils' positive attitudes to learning.

Leaders know what the school needs to do to improve. They have developed staff's leadership skills and shared responsibilities well, and this enables the whole school team to work towards achieving its aims.

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 consistency in the application of the principles and practices of the foundation phase

R2 Provide more opportunities for pupils to develop and apply their ICT skills

R3 Improve pupils' independent learning skills and increase the effectiveness of pupil voice groups in influencing the life and work of the school

What happens next

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

Main findings

Standards: Good

Most pupils enter the school with language, numeracy and social skills that are at least those expected for pupils of their age. As they move through the school, most pupils, including those with additional learning needs, make good and often very good progress from their starting points.

Most pupils have very well developed speaking and listening skills. Nearly all pupils listen well to staff and to each other. Most speak confidently and persuasively about their experiences, and express their ideas and opinions clearly. They ask relevant questions to find out specific information, for example about the Vikings.

Across the school, most pupils make outstanding progress in their reading. They read with enthusiasm, good expression and intonation, and infer and deduce the content of texts well. In the foundation phase, most pupils make rapid early progress in learning to read. They develop an understanding of the relationship between letters and sounds quickly and apply these skills effectively to read unfamiliar words. They discuss their favourite authors willingly and knowledgably. In key stage 2, most pupils are fluent readers and show a good understanding of the texts they read. By the end of the key stage, many are confident readers who apply a range of reading strategies very effectively. For example, many skim read text about animals quickly to glean the main messages. They gather information from a range of sources successfully and use it to present their findings in a variety of interesting ways.

Throughout the school, pupils write effectively for a range of different audiences and purposes. In the foundation phase, most pupils make good progress from early mark-making to writing meaningful sequences of sentences. Many pupils use a variety of sentence starters, for example 'finally', 'next', and 'eventually', and use interesting vocabulary, such as 'gracefully', 'magical' and 'interested', to enrich their writing. They spell age-appropriate words correctly and punctuation is generally accurate. In key stage 2, most pupils use their writing skills well across the curriculum. For example, older pupils select relevant information from a range of sources to come to a conclusion about the most reliable information to use when creating a news report on how earthquakes affect the lives of people in Japan. In lower key stage 2, most pupils use persuasive language effectively when writing a letter to help raise money for good causes and when creating a pamphlet to entice visitors to the city of St. David's.

Most pupils make satisfactory progress in developing basic communication skills in Welsh. Most foundation phase pupils recall a few words in Welsh, such as colours, numbers and types of weather. Many understand and respond to simple commands appropriately. They enjoy learning new Welsh phrases and are enthusiastic to practise them with their peers, for example by asking and answering 'beth wyt ti'n hoffi?' to identify what foods they like. In key stage 2, pupils build on this steady start and begin to use a wider range of language patterns in their speaking, reading and writing activities. For example, Year 6 pupils use a bank of words and phrases to describe themselves and their interests.

Most pupils develop a good understanding of the different areas of mathematics, including measure, number, shape and data, and generally apply their numeracy skills adequately to other areas of the curriculum. In the foundation phase, many pupils apply their numeracy skills in a few areas across the curriculum, for example when collating their favourite planets in a bar graph or when measuring the height of penguins in their topic on Antarctica. Most lower key stage 2 pupils use their numeracy skills appropriately to solve a range of problems and challenges, such as when investigating if taller people have bigger feet. By the end of key stage 2, most use their data handling skills well to analyse the results of their science investigations, for example to plot a precise line graph about the distance a sycamore seed travels.

Many pupils demonstrate suitable skills in ICT. For example, foundation phase pupils create a storyboard animation about a rocket trip to the moon and make simple presentations about how people lived in Australia when Captain Cook arrived. In key stage 2, younger pupils use search engines competently to locate information on the internet, and a minority of older pupils use formulas successfully in their spreadsheets, such as when calculating the population of countries across the world. Most key stage 2 pupils use a word processing package competently to present their written work, for example to create a newspaper report about the Second World War, or to write a formal letter. However, overall, across the school, many pupils' ICT skills are underdeveloped.

Wellbeing and attitudes to learning: Good

A very strong feature of the school is the respect and courtesy that pupils show each other, adults and visitors. Nearly all pupils behave exceptionally well in lessons and around the school and their ability to sustain concentration and to avoid distractions is good. They show high levels of care and consideration for each other and collaborate well, for example when working in pairs or groups, and when helping each other to succeed in tasks.

From an early age, most pupils take pride in their work and show very positive attitudes towards their learning. They are well motivated, keen to try new things and eager to show what they have learned. A majority of older pupils deepen their understanding of their current topic, by asking and answering pertinent questions, for example about which bones in the body can give a clue to someone's height. Most pupils are increasing their understanding of how to improve their work and know what to do if they face difficulties. In many classes, pupils are beginning to have a greater input into what, and how, they learn. However, the majority rely too much on adults to direct them in their learning. As a result, pupils' ability to work independently is at an early stage of development.

Many pupils are aware of the importance of maintaining a sustainable local environment and are proud of keeping the school garden tidy and of keeping bees and other wildlife within their locality. A minority of pupils take on additional responsibilities enthusiastically, for example, they support classmates in their roles as house captains. However, the roles of more formal pupil voice groups, such as the school council, are underdeveloped and have limited impact on school life.

Most pupils know the importance of taking regular exercise and of keeping healthy, including making appropriate choices about what to eat and drink. A few pupils take advantage of the school's range of extra-curricular activities, such as after-school gymnastics.

Teaching and learning experiences: Good

Throughout the school, there are strong and effective working relationships between staff and pupils. Teachers and learning support assistants work effectively as a team and they treat pupils with kindness and consideration. They know the pupils well and have high expectations of their behaviour and achievement. As a result, classrooms are calm and respectful learning environments.

Most teachers plan learning that builds well on what pupils have already learnt and they take good account of their interests. They provide sound learning objectives for each task that focus well on developing pupils' literacy and numeracy skills. Generally, most lessons move at a brisk pace and teachers use probing questions successfully to develop pupils' thinking skills and to extend their understanding. On a very few occasions, teaching is less effective because pupils are over-directed, and this hinders their ability to think and work independently.

Across the school, nearly all teachers provide pupils with regular and purposeful verbal and written feedback. There are appropriate procedures in place to provide opportunities for pupils to evaluate their own work and that of others. Consequently, pupils develop a firm understanding of what they have achieved and what they need to do to improve their work.

All staff reflect on their practice well and collaborate purposefully when planning. Teachers are starting to take a more flexible approach to the curriculum to engage pupils more actively and allow them to use their good literacy and numeracy skills in creative ways. Teachers plan topics following discussions with pupils about what they already know and what they would like to find out. This ensures that pupils' learning experiences build on their current knowledge effectively. For example, a key stage 2 class took an interest in Indonesia and learnt about the impact of natural disasters on the country. However, the rigidity of some of the planning restricts pupils' ability to apply their skills and explore concepts independently. The provision for developing pupils' ICT skills is at an early stage of development.

Where the planning in the foundation phase is good, it provides a balance between tasks led by the teacher and opportunities for pupils to apply and develop their skills through play. There is a well-resourced outdoor classroom with a good balance of activities that develop pupils' literacy skills, such as a polar themed small world area. As a result, pupils access experiences that help them to develop their speaking and listening skills well. However, this practice is not consistent across the whole of the foundation phase. Consequently, a minority of pupils do not have enough opportunities to practice, embed and extend their skills through first-hand experiences or follow their own interests meaningfully.

The school provides worthwhile opportunities for pupils to develop their Welsh language skills. Teachers use Welsh to give pupils instructions and provide a range of formal teaching activities to develop their grasp of the language. As a result,

pupils make suitable progress in their Welsh language skills. The school organises a joint Eisteddfod with a local junior school and conducts worthwhile assemblies about Welsh culture and about the life of St David. This contributes to pupils' understanding of Welsh culture and language successfully.

Care, support and guidance: Good

The school is a calm and nurturing community that places a strong emphasis on pupils' wellbeing and happiness. Staff know pupils and their families very well and respond skilfully to their emotional and social needs. Pupils know that their teachers will help them work through any problems they may have. Older pupils follow the good role model set by the staff by looking after other pupils with genuine and unprompted care and consideration. This is a strength of the school community and contributes to a warm, caring and nurturing learning environment. Staff and pupils go the extra mile to welcome all to the school. As a result, pupils with a range of challenging needs have moved to the school, adopted this ethos and have quickly become happy and engaged learners.

The school has very good relationships with parents and the local community. The school shares a good range of information with parents though the school website, regular newsletters and annual reports. Parents value the information they receive and are confident that communication with the school works both ways and that the school will listen to what they have to say. This contributes positively to pupils' wellbeing, for example when teachers adjust homework to meet the needs of individual pupils.

The school's processes of tracking pupils' progress and attainment are effective. Teachers use the information appropriately to ensure nearly all pupils make good progress from their starting points. They identify pupils with additional learning needs swiftly. Teachers engage effectively with external agencies, such as the educational psychologist and speech and language therapist, and use advice well to create supportive individual education plans for identified pupils. These plans ensure that pupils have achievable targets and tailored in-class support to help nearly all make good progress.

Opportunities for pupils to learn how to make good lifestyle choices are appropriate. For example, the school ensures that pupils know how to eat healthily, and provides worthwhile lessons about on-line safety. Activities such as attending the 'crucial crew' event, at which they learn about substance misuse and personal safety, support pupils' personal development successfully.

The school has developed its wildlife garden and recently harvested its first batch of honey from the school beehive. This contributes to the pupils' experience and understanding of how to care for their local environment successfully. There is an appropriate range of visits that support curriculum topics well. For example, trips to the Roman Legion museum enhance pupils' learning about the Romans successfully, and workshops with the Royal College of Music and Drama and visits to Rhondda Heritage park support pupils' personal, social and cultural development effectively.

The school encourages pupils to take on a range of responsibilities, such as by being school councillors, house captains, IT monitors and sports mentors. Pupils take

these roles seriously, for example older pupils teach younger pupils football skills contentiously. However, the formal committees, such as the school council, have met infrequently and the school has not enabled pupils to take enough responsibility to make a significant impact on wider school issues.

Collective worship is of good quality. This, along with religious education lessons, ensures older pupils can reflect on religious beliefs and how people should be treated. The school promotes a good understanding of right and wrong and as a result nearly all pupils treat each other with mutual care and respect.

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

Leadership and management: Good

The headteacher provides effective strategic leadership with a focus on raising standards and improving provision. He communicates his vision sensitively and has taken time and commitment to encourage positive change at the school. Leaders' expectations are high.

Leadership responsibilities are distributed thoughtfully, and this is particularly effective in developing the staff's leadership skills in many areas of school life. A good example of this is the appointment of phase leaders who encourage the positive ethos and wellbeing in the school. Staff with specific leadership responsibilities discharge their roles efficiently. Staff meetings are used as a platform for specific leaders to provide feedback or inform other staff about aspects of their particular area of expertise and for staff to question them on areas of which they are unsure.

A weekly session of shared planning ensures that staff have good support from positive discussions and reflective analysis with colleagues about, for example, pupil progress. This collaboration increases the skills of staff and enables them to share good practice in the school and with the junior school with which it is working. The school is part of an active cluster network, which enables staff to work regularly with colleagues in different settings to celebrate achievements, highlight good practice and identify areas for improvement.

Performance management is a useful process that enables staff and leaders to have beneficial professional discussions. A direct result of this is that senior staff now take the lead on important aspects of the school's work. This has enabled the school to work towards its aims more quickly and effectively.

The process of self-evaluation is well established. Leaders make good use of the information provided by parents, pupils, governors and staff to identify broad areas for improvement. They use a suitable range of first-hand evidence, including lesson observations, the analysis of data and the scrutiny of pupils' work, to support their findings.

The school's ability to plan effectively for improvement has raised standards in many areas. For example, a focus on developing pupils' literacy has led to improvements in their oracy, reading and writing skills, and has resulted in better outcomes for

nearly all pupils. The school improvement plan has a purposeful number of strategic priorities, each led by a member of the senior leadership team. Each priority has clear actions, costings and timescales for development. Overall, the school has a good track record of meeting its priorities.

The governing body is effective and discharges its functions well. Governors understand the school's context, its strengths and priorities for improvement. Senior leaders keep governors well informed about the standards that pupils achieve. This enables governors to hold the school to account successfully.

Generally, the school uses its resources efficiently. Leaders make good use of the experience and expertise of teaching and support staff. A wide range of good quality resources supports the delivery of the curriculum well, although the resources for developing pupils' ICT skills are limited. The school has maintained its current staffing structure and this enables it to meet the needs of its pupils' wellbeing and learning successfully. The school currently has a deficit budget, but plans are in place to resolve this situation.

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.