



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

A report on

**St Mary's C in W Voluntary Aided School
Intermediate Road
Brynmawr
Blaenau Gwent
NP23 4SF**

Date of inspection: March 2019

by

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

About St Mary's C in W Voluntary Aided School

St Mary's Church in Wales Voluntary Aided School is in Brynmawr in the Blaenau Gwent local authority. There are 237 pupils on roll in eight single-age classes. This includes 36 part-time pupils in the school's nursery class.

The three-year average for pupils eligible for free school meals is around 12%. This figure is below the Welsh average of 18%. Nearly all pupils come from homes where English is the first language.

The school has identified that approximately 12% of pupils have additional educational needs. This is below the Welsh national average of 21%.

Estyn last inspected the school in June 2013. The headteacher took up post in April 2013.

Estyn does not inspect religious education or the religious content of collective worship when inspecting a school with a religious character. Instead, the governing body is required by law to arrange for religious education and collective worship to be inspected separately.

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

School leaders at all levels support a culture that nurtures pupils' understanding of important values, develops most of their key learning skills successfully and promotes a strong sense of community. Leaders and managers work well together and share well-established goals and aspirations.

The quality of teaching and learning experiences ensures that most pupils develop strong literacy and numeracy skills. By the end of key stage 2, they use these skills particularly well across the curriculum, especially in science. Pupils have positive attitudes to learning and, as they mature, many become skilled in reflecting on and improving their learning. They develop their resilience well and are keen to learn from their mistakes.

The school provides a high standard of care, support and guidance for its pupils and engages well with parents and the wider community to enhance this aspect of its work. Innovative developments, such as the creation of an intergenerational choir, support pupils purposefully in their development as informed and caring citizens.

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 quality of provision in the foundation phase
- R2 Refine self-evaluation processes so they focus more precisely on judging the impact that the provision makes to pupils' progress and learning behaviours
- R3 Share best practice in teaching to help ensure that all teaching is of a consistently high standard

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 in relation to community intergenerational work for dissemination on Estyn's website.

Main findings

Standards: Good

Most pupils, including those with additional learning needs, make at least good progress as they move through the school. By the end of key stage 2, many pupils use their literacy and numeracy skills very well across the curriculum, especially in science. In the foundation phase, pupils develop strong literacy and numeracy skills, but they do not develop well enough as independent or creative learners.

Across the school, most pupils listen well to adults and to each other. Pupils in the foundation phase speak confidently. For example, reception pupils retell the story of the gingerbread man enthusiastically and use well-chosen adjectives to describe a fox as 'sneaky' and 'sly'. In key stage 2, most pupils' speaking skills are good. They make effective contributions to class debates. For instance, during discussions about climate change, pupils explain articulately their knowledge of factors that influence global warming.

Most pupils in the foundation phase make strong progress in reading. By Year 2, they read clearly with confidence and understanding. They use suitable strategies to read words that they find challenging and make sensible predictions for what might happen next in stories. In key stage 2, most pupils apply their reading skills well to support their learning, for instance to solve problems in mathematics. Most pupils read with appropriate fluency from suitably challenging texts. More able pupils use their thinking skills well while reading, for example to explain why an author has described the dome of a temple as being 'as delicate as an eggshell'.

Across the school, most pupils write successfully for a range of purposes in English lessons and in other areas of learning. Most pupils in reception class develop their early writing skills well. They write legibly to create letters to post at the post office. By Year 2, most pupils create lists of events and recipes appropriately as part of their topic work. They develop a sound understanding of story structure and vocabulary from traditional tales. A few more able pupils use this knowledge very well to write independently. By the end of key stage 2, most pupils present their work well in a neat and consistent style. They use capital letters and full stops accurately and spell common words correctly. They understand the features of different text types and make effective use of success criteria to reflect upon and improve their written work as part of a drafting process. More able pupils make sophisticated vocabulary choices to engage the reader. Most pupils use their writing skills very well in their work across the curriculum, for example older pupils write detailed newspaper articles on the coronation of Queen Victoria.

In the foundation phase, most pupils make suitable progress in developing their Welsh language skills. They understand and respond to basic phrases as part of class routines. For example, pupils discuss the weather during 'helpwr heddiw' sessions using appropriate sentence patterns and vocabulary. By the end of key stage 2, many pupils use the Welsh language purposefully with increasing confidence. They give extended answers to questions about their families and interests and use their Welsh language writing skills well, for example to write an extended letter in the role of an evacuee during the Second World War. The quality of their written work in Welsh is good.

Most pupils make very good progress in developing their numeracy skills and apply these well in real-life contexts to solve problems. By the end of Year 2, most pupils have a very good knowledge of basic number facts and apply these well. They understand place value well and halve or double two-digit numbers successfully. They apply their reasoning skills well to calculate the cost of making different types of pancakes. In key stage 2, most pupils apply their skills extensively and to a good standard. For example, pupils calculate ticket revenue from a pop concert accurately and draw conclusions from data following science experiments

In the foundation phase, most pupils use information and communication technology (ICT) skills appropriately to support their learning. They program floor toys successfully, collaborate with friends to edit pieces of work and learn how to store and share information. In key stage 2, most pupils understand the implications of positive and negative online behaviour. They understand that users can manipulate digital images to present a false picture. Many pupils use software successfully, for instance to design a bedroom. They create and analyse databases appropriately, for example within topic work on planets.

Wellbeing and attitudes to learning: Good

Nearly all pupils feel safe and valued. They have a strong sense of belonging to their school community. They are confident that adults and other pupils will help them if they have a problem. Pupils understand how to stay safe, including when using the internet.

Nearly all pupils behave well in lessons and around the school. They are polite, caring and tolerant of others' needs and demonstrate high levels of respect towards everyone in school. Pupils are supportive of each other and demonstrate high standards of care. For example, a group of older pupils takes responsibility each day for playing with pupils who find social interaction a challenge during breaks. The positive interaction and collaboration among pupils is a strength of the school.

Pupils are very proud of their intergenerational choir. Residents of a local care home and around a fifth of pupils from the school have joined to form a choir. This highly successful project has contributed well to pupils' sense of worth and achievement.

Most pupils make a range of appropriate healthy lifestyle choices, including eating and drinking healthily and taking regular exercise. The 'Cryw Cymraeg' runs a popular weekly fruit tuck shop that encourages pupils to eat fruit and to practise their Welsh.

The role of pupils in decision-making is developing appropriately. Pupil leadership groups are becoming increasingly confident to suggest changes and initiatives. For example, the play leaders group developed following an individual pupil's concern that some pupils were nervous to join other children at playtime.

Nearly all pupils enjoy their learning. They are eager to share their experiences and demonstrate obvious pride in their work. They are enthusiastic in lessons and when doing pair or group work.

Across the foundation phase, pupils settle to tasks well. However, in free choice tasks and in outdoor learning activities, pupils do not generally sustain their interest as well as they do during structured tasks indoors.

In key stage 2, most pupils concentrate well and are persistent when presented with challenging work. As they move through the school, many pupils become skilled in reflecting and improving on their learning. They are resilient and keen to learn from their mistakes. For example, when pupils in Year 5 realised that they had not created a fair test for an experiment, they worked together well to adapt it and displayed strong thinking and problem-solving skills.

Teaching and learning experiences: Good

The quality of teaching and learning experiences ensures that most pupils make good progress and achieve well by the time they leave the school, particularly in the development of their literacy, numeracy and ICT skills.

Teachers use strategies and resources successfully to develop pupils' literacy, numeracy and ICT skills as they move through the school. For example, approaches to nurture pupils' understanding of number and their use of story vocabulary are effective in the foundation phase. In key stage 2, pupils have many valuable opportunities to develop their skills further in interesting real-life contexts. For example, many Year 6 pupils apply their reading, writing, numeracy and ICT skills particularly well during science work about a forensic investigation. Within this work, teachers challenge pupils to gather, analyse and interpret information to draw conclusions and then to present their findings in detailed written reports. This work is extremely effective in challenging pupils to use a range of skills to achieve a goal and supports their progress well. Valuable enrichment activities, such as a visit to Aerospace in Filton, enhance the school's provision very well. These experiences teach pupils about the relevance of their science, technology and mathematics work to the world around them.

Provision to develop pupils' Welsh language skills is appropriate and helps pupils to develop their speaking, reading and writing skills suitably over time. Teachers plan activities that encourage older pupils to apply these skills well in other curriculum subjects, for example to write letters in Welsh to their parents in the role of a child evacuated to Wales during the Second World War. In the foundation phase, teachers use strategies, such as 'helpwr heddiw', successfully to introduce pupils to the Welsh language and to develop their skills. Across the school, provision to develop pupils' ICT skills is developing well. Teachers take good account of the digital competence framework when planning activities.

The curriculum in key stage 2 is broad and balanced. In addition to learning and applying skills, pupils have regular opportunities to engage in physical activity and to experience art and culture. For example, in work about Welsh culture and heritage, pupils have opportunities to study artwork by Martyn Evans, to produce digital booklets about 'Wonderful Wales' and to participate in Eisteddfod competitions.

In the foundation phase, the curriculum is appropriate. The strong focus on developing pupils' skills is beneficial. Teachers make good use of 'hooks' to engage pupils in topic work. For example, pupils enjoy working out which member of staff has pushed Humpty Dumpty off the wall. However, opportunities for pupils to learn

independently or to engage with experiences that encourage independent, creative responses are limited overall. Adults tend to direct pupils' learning too much, for example by making choices for them about the resources or colours they should choose and how they should use them. Consequently, pupils become too reliant on adult support to make decisions. Opportunities for pupils to learn in the outdoors are at an early stage of development.

Teachers generally use assessment for learning strategies well to support pupils' progress. This is particularly successful in supporting key stage 2 pupils to achieve good standards in their written work. It enables pupils to understand how to be successful in tasks and to reflect objectively on the quality of their work. In the foundation phase, teachers use suitable strategies to monitor the progress and engagement of learners. For instance, they use whiteboards to monitor pupils' understanding within mathematics sessions.

Across the school, teachers use assessment information appropriately to inform their teaching. This leads to high expectations and challenging provision for more able learners, for example during additional numeracy sessions. Teachers make suitable adaptations to tasks and to levels of support for other pupils. This ensures that activities generally match pupils' needs well. In a few classes, teachers use questioning particularly well to challenge and to develop pupils' thinking, for example during work about climate change. However, occasionally, teachers do not make the best use of available teaching time and the pace of learning is too slow. For instance, pupils spend considerable amounts of time sitting on carpets listening, waiting for their turn or watching others engaged in activities. Teachers' marking and verbal feedback are useful and support pupils to progress appropriately.

Care, support and guidance: Good

Overall, the school's provision for pupils' spiritual, social, moral and cultural development is highly beneficial. The strong and consistent focus on promoting key values pervades all aspects of school life. These values include friendship, trust, courage, compassion and responsibility. Pupils have very regular opportunities to explore specific values in lessons and in assemblies. The values feature in newsletters and social media communications with parents. Pupils reflect carefully on why these values and attributes are important and necessary. For example, pupils explain the importance of curiosity by giving the example of Steve Jobs and his contribution to technology. This approach has a positive impact on the personal and social development of pupils and the quality of relationships within the school.

There is a valuable strategic approach to planning for pupils' wellbeing. This ensures that provision covers pupils' physical, cognitive, emotional, social, economic and spiritual development. The school plans purposefully for how it will support these aspects of pupils' development at whole school, group and individual level.

The school makes a valuable contribution to its local community especially through its partnership with a local care home. Residents of the home and around a fifth of pupils have joined to form an intergenerational choir, which practices every week at the care home. The choir performs regularly, including at Remembrance and Christmas services as well as at a number of local day care centres. This highly successful project has contributed well to pupils' personal development, pride in their school and their understanding of what community means.

Teachers gather a comprehensive range of information about pupils' strengths and areas for development in relation to their skills, progress and wellbeing. They make suitable use of this information to track and monitor pupils' progress. This allows staff to identify learning targets, to plan provision and to provide appropriate support for individuals and groups of pupils. This includes those with additional learning needs. This support includes beneficial intervention programmes for literacy, mathematics and emotional literacy. Teachers create useful individual education plans for pupils who need them. They ensure that these pupils make suitable progress in relation to their abilities and the targets in their plans.

Staff make frequent and effective use of social media to update parents and other partners about the school's work. This includes information about pupils' learning, for instance during the 'Big Garden Bird Watch' in January. This, and the weekly newsletter, keeps parents well informed and encourages them to support their children's learning. School reports, parents' evening and the recently introduced pupil reviews keep parents well informed. The involvement of pupils in creating the reviews is a useful strategy. As a result, older pupils in particular, speak knowledgably about their strengths and about what they need to do to improve as learners.

The school's provision encourages pupils to make healthy lifestyle choices. Staff ensure that pupils learn about the importance of healthy food and exercise in lessons. The learning environment supports pupils to be physically active. For instance, in play areas, pupils have access to table tennis tables, climbing walls and frames, football goals and a pirate ship. Staff inform parents well about menu choices and reinforce the messages about healthy eating and drinking. The school has appropriate arrangements to promote healthy eating and drinking.

There are range of pupil voice groups, such as the Senedd, Digital Council and Criw Cymraeg. A number of these groups and the activities they undertake are relatively new and so have yet to make a significant impact on the school community. Opportunities for pupils to direct their own learning and influence topics and themes are infrequent in the foundation phase, but developing appropriately within topic work in key stage 2.

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

Leadership and management: Good

The headteacher has established a culture that focuses on nurturing key values in pupils, developing their key skills and promoting a sense of belonging to the school and its community. He provides effective strategic leadership that supports continuous improvement.

Senior leaders undertake their roles effectively and facilitate school improvement well, particularly in relation to the quality of provision to develop pupils' literacy, numeracy and ICT skills. They lead whole-school initiatives successfully, for instance to improve provision for pupils' wellbeing. Overall, the work of leaders has a positive impact on pupils' progress by the end of key stage 2. However, the school's leadership has been less successful in developing foundation phase pedagogy. This limits pupils' progression as independent and creative learners during this phase of their education.

Leaders at all levels undertake an extensive range of monitoring activity, including the purposeful analysis of data, lesson monitoring and work scrutiny. They also gather the views of staff, governors, parents and pupils regularly. Overall, these processes are effective and enable leaders to identify opportunities for improvement, for instance to include pupils in the termly progress review process. However, the school's evaluation does not always focus well enough on judging the degree to which the provision improves the development of pupils' skills or their learning behaviours. In a very few instances, leaders apply extensive processes to evaluate aspects of the school's work that do not need such detailed attention.

Leaders are building a culture of professional learning through suitable development activities. For example, a system of monitoring where three teachers evaluate each other's lessons is improving professional dialogue about teaching. Performance management objectives focus purposefully on whole-school requirements and the professional needs of all the staff. For example, teaching assistants receive valuable training to support pupils to develop their speech and language skills.

The governing body has a sound knowledge of the day-to-day working of the school. Governors offer an appropriate level of challenge and support to the school's leadership team. They contribute appropriately to the school's self-evaluation and improvement processes, for example by undertaking learning walks, and they keep progress against improvement priorities under careful review.

The school uses its resources well. The accommodation provides a welcoming environment with spacious and well-decorated classrooms and communal areas. It is an attractive and stimulating place for pupils to learn and they have access to plenty of resources of good quality, including books and ICT equipment. Governors and leaders monitor spending regularly to ensure that the school uses its finances effectively to raise standards and to improve the quality of provision. They allocate the budget appropriately to address school priorities for improvement and to make suitable use of the pupil development grant to improve the progress and wellbeing of vulnerable pupils.

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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