



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 R.C. Primary School  
Lea Road  
Wrexham  
LL13 7NA**

**Date of inspection: July 2019**

**by**

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

## About St Mary's R.C. Primary School

St Mary's R.C. Primary School is in Wrexham local authority. There are 395 pupils on roll aged from 3 to 11 years, including 42 who attend part-time in the nursery. The school organises pupils into 14 single-age classes and two nursery classes.

About 5% of pupils are eligible for free school meals, which is considerably below the national average of 18%. The school identifies about 8% of pupils as having additional learning needs. This is notably below the national average of 21%. The majority of pupils come from an ethnic minority background and around a half the pupils have English as an additional language. This is notably above the national average of 6%. A very few pupils speak Welsh at home.

Estyn does not inspect religious education or the religious content of collective worship when it is 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.

The headteacher took up her post in October 2016. The school's previous inspection was in February 2013.

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

St Mary's is a fully inclusive learning community where pupils from many cultures thrive harmoniously together. Promoting pupils' wellbeing is central to the school's philosophy and ethos. Staff and pupils create a very caring and supportive environment for all members of the school community to share and enjoy. This is evident in the life and work of the school, for instance in the exemplary behaviour of nearly all pupils.

Although many pupils arrive at the school with a very limited level of English language acquisition, nearly all pupils leave the school with standards at or above those normally found for their age. The progress that more able pupils make in English is well above expectations. Many pupils take an active role in a wide range of effective pupil voice groups. As a result, they develop outstanding leadership and communication skills and high levels of confidence.

The school's curriculum has many strengths. A notable feature is the involvement of pupils from upper key stage 2, as key partners in planning the curriculum. This has a significant, positive impact on their self-esteem and enthusiasm for learning. As a result of pupils making decisions about their own learning, nearly all develop into mature, ambitious, independent learners. The headteacher and senior leaders provide the school with exceptional leadership. This results in continuous improvements to pupils' wellbeing, progress and standards and in empowering staff to contribute fully to bringing about change that benefits pupils.

<b>Inspection area</b>	<b>Judgement</b>
<b>Standards</b>	<b>Excellent</b>
<b>Wellbeing and attitudes to learning</b>	<b>Excellent</b>
<b>Teaching and learning experiences</b>	<b>Good</b>
<b>Care, support and guidance</b>	<b>Good</b>
<b>Leadership and management</b>	<b>Excellent</b>

## **Recommendations**

R1 Address the health and safety issue that was raised during the inspection

## **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 implementing the new curriculum and involving all in school improvement for dissemination on Estyn's website.

## Main findings

### Standards: Excellent

During their time at school nearly all pupils, including those with additional learning needs, make very good progress overall. Nearly all pupils leave the school with standards at or above those expected for their age. The progress that more able pupils make is well above expectations.

Around a half of pupils start school with a very limited level of English language acquisition. These pupils quickly learn to communicate with their peers and adults. As they move through the school, nearly all pupils develop their vocabulary well. Increasingly, they listen attentively and engage in conversation confidently. By Year 6, most pupils have very well developed oracy skills. They are confident, thoughtful speakers. Most use well-developed sentences to respond fully to questions and give mature, sensible reasons for their answers. They engage well in debate and listen carefully to their peers' opinions, as well as offering their own views.

Many pupils learn the sounds that letters make during their time in the nursery class, although a few who are new to English take longer to begin to read. As they move through the foundation phase, most pupils make good progress with their reading. They quickly recognise the sounds that combinations of letters make, and begin to make sense of a simple text. A minority of pupils make rapid progress to become fluent readers by the end of Year 2. These pupils enjoy books and stories, for example they chuckle at the humour as they read. Across key stage 2, nearly all pupils become independent readers. They make use of their growing vocabulary to work out the meaning of unfamiliar words. By Year 6, they can skim and scan texts to find information quickly, and make sensible inferences. They use their reading skills highly effectively in a wide range of contexts, both in print and on screen.

As with reading, a few pupils get off to a slow start in writing because they are learning a new language. However, across the foundation phase, many pupils make good progress in developing their writing skills. By Year 2, many pupils write well. For example, they write a diary entry as a knight visiting Harlech Castle, or an imaginative character description of Superworm. By Year 6, most pupils write very effectively and imaginatively. For example, they write a discursive text to debate how much screen time is too much, and send letters to try to persuade Burger King to stop using palm oil. In Year 6, most pupils have developed a neat joined written script and present their work neatly. However, across the school, the quality of pupils' handwriting and presentation is variable.

The majority of nursery pupils can count up to five objects and check with their learning partners the number of fruit in bags. By Year 2, nearly all pupils develop a very good understanding of the different areas of mathematics, such as measures, number and shape, and use these well independently. For example, pupils investigate temperature, read thermometers accurately and place daily temperatures in order. By Year 6, standards of mathematics are particularly high. Nearly all pupils apply their skills to a good standard and many produce exceptional work. They use a range of strategies effectively to solve complex, real life problems. For example, they use their skills efficiently to interrogate a 24-hour Wrexham bus timetable. They

calculate journey durations and use the timetable to solve problems. A very few more able pupils find the area of a circle or the volume of spheres. Nearly all pupils apply their numeracy skills very well in challenges across the curriculum and in practical real life contexts.

Most pupils in the foundation phase develop an extensive range of information and communications technology (ICT) skills and apply them confidently and independently across the areas of learning. For example, pupils in the nursery and reception classes develop valuable control skills when learning to programme the movement of a toy. Most develop creative and linguistic skills in beneficial ways. For example, they use apps to label plants that they have been observing or contribute to a video to re tell the story of the Gunpowder Plot. In key stage 2, pupils build very well on their previous ICT skills. Most upper key stage 2 pupils create a short video including a commentary and atmospheric music as part of their study of the novel 'Mortal Engines' using a green screen effectively. Many research information on cities across the world purposefully and use the information very skilfully to create and then interrogate the database. Their ability to use spreadsheets to model and solve problems based on the cost of setting up an animal sanctuary is developing appropriately. Many pupils use email very well in combination with their literacy skills, for example to write persuasive emails to a television company encouraging them to include an item about Santes Dwywnen.

Across the school, most pupils have positive attitudes to learning Welsh. Most develop a useful understanding of suitable Welsh words and phrases. They pronounce familiar words clearly. Most pupils have the confidence to speak Welsh outside of designated Welsh lessons. By the end of key stage 2, most pupils' oracy skills in Welsh are strong. They read simple Welsh texts well, recognising many common words and using their phonic skills appropriately. Pupils' writing skills develop well.

### **Wellbeing and attitudes to learning: Excellent**

With very few exceptions, pupils throughout the school show excellent attitudes to their learning. All pupils contribute to determining what they want to learn, as part of the innovative, personalised curriculum. This has a huge impact on pupils' self-esteem and enthusiasm for learning in nearly all classes. For example in Year 6, as part of their topic on the body, pupils used the school's online platform to tell their teachers that they wanted to learn about the heart. Having looked at an ox heart, pupils worked collaboratively, with sustained concentration to investigate the flow of liquids through tubes of varying diameters to replicate the flow of blood through arteries, veins and capillaries.

As a result of pupils making decisions about their own learning, nearly all are mature, ambitious, independent learners. They are not afraid to take risks and persevere to challenge themselves. For example, pupils use the flexible school day to decide how to organise their time in order to achieve a higher level.

Pupils are proud that their school is a multi-national, inclusive community. As a result, pupils from many cultures thrive harmoniously together. Many older pupils develop their understanding of their place and responsibility in the world effectively through networking with local, national and international schools. For example, Year

3 pupils have actively campaigned and investigated the demise of shops in Wrexham town centre, by carrying out retail research and interviewing local shopkeepers. Pupils in Year 6 have introduced a lacrosse club following discussions with an American school about how they use their leisure time.

The behaviour of nearly all pupils is an exemplary feature of the school. Pupils show mutual respect and courtesy consistently towards one another, adults and visitors. Nearly all pupils recognise their responsibility to working productively with their peers. On the very few instances when there are minor disputes on the playground, the trained peer mediators use their maturity and understanding to resolve issues. Nearly all pupils are extremely proud that bullying is a rare event in their school.

Most pupils develop particularly well as ethical and informed citizens. For example, older pupils contact multi-national companies independently to ask pertinent ecological questions. The well-established eco team work with governors and the local authority to devise a plan to install solar panels to generate electricity and save money. Year 6 pupils, supervised by governors, run a fortnightly credit union, to promote the benefits of regular saving. This also enables the pupils to apply their numeracy skills highly effectively. Nearly all pupils make use of their re-fillable water bottles to keep hydrated throughout the day. The pupils are very proud to have won a prestigious national award for their campaign against the use of single use plastic.

Many pupils take an active role in a wide range of effective pupil voice groups. For example, the school council takes responsibility for running a regular stationery store to raise funds to replenish ICT resources. They keep the governing body well informed of progress towards the school's improvement priorities from a pupil perspective. As a result, as they move through the school, many pupils develop outstanding leadership and communication skills and high levels of confidence.

Most pupils have positive attitudes and participate in a wide variety of physical activities, including external competitive events, for example the annual Catholic athletics meeting and a dance competition at the national Urdd eisteddfod. Nearly all pupils demonstrate good knowledge of how to be safe online. Digital leaders deliver assemblies promoting e-safety throughout the school for pupils, parents and governors.

The school's stimulating learning experiences and caring ethos ensure that most pupils attend school regularly. However, a very few pupils are persistently late.

### **Teaching and learning experiences: Good**

Arrangements to involve pupils in planning the curriculum are an outstanding feature of the school's work, particularly in upper key stage 2. Pupils suggest what they would like to study and devise questions for themselves, within the different areas of the new curriculum for Wales.

Teachers encourage pupils to work individually, in pairs or as part of a group, to develop their thinking and problem-solving skills successfully in a range of different situations. As a result, classrooms are a hive of purposeful activity where nearly all pupils are consistently on task and produce a range of high quality work across the curriculum. For example, in response to an item on the television about the effects of

using palm oil in products, pupils based their work on answering the question 'will orang-utans be extinct by my 21st birthday'. They researched the internet for current information and wrote a persuasive email to various national companies encouraging them to look at their use of palm oil. One large national company responded to the email and pupils followed this up with a telephone conversation to learn more regarding the company's policy on using palm oil. Through these valuable experiences, pupils gain important life skills that prepare them well for the next step in their education.

Teachers makes worthwhile use of the local area to enrich the curriculum. The whole school focus on sustainability is a strength and pupils regularly visit local shops to encourage recycling and to lessen their dependency on plastic. Teachers and pupils plan well to provide real life learning experiences for pupils in order to enrich the curriculum. This includes a wide range of extra-curricular activities and visits. For example, recent visits by the police and forensic scientists enhanced pupils' enjoyment and understanding of their topic on crime.

Most teachers foster a safe learning environment their classroom, in which mutual respect between pupils and teachers is wholly evident. This contributes successfully towards creating an environment in which pupils readily accept the responsibility to work hard, do their best and feel free to try without fear of making a mistake. As a result, pupils are very willing to learn from their mistakes and give purposeful responses, both orally and in writing, to useful feedback from teachers. In the few examples where teaching is not as successful, teachers do not have high enough expectations of what their pupils can achieve independently. For example, on occasions they over direct pupils' learning.

While pupils are completing their work, staff monitor the activities regularly and give individuals timely feedback on how to improve their work further. Teachers provide beneficial opportunities for pupils to consider their own performance, and refine it where necessary, as they work through their tasks. As a result, many pupils produce numerous pieces of work that are of a high standard. Adults intervene in learning at appropriate points to provide support but do not interfere in learning unnecessarily. This promote pupils' independence successfully. For example, in the foundation phase staff will stand back while pupils work out how to move a programmable toy. On other occasions they model how to cut fruit with a very sharp knife before giving the pupils confidence to replicate this giving them a sense of achievement.

Staff have a strong awareness of the principles of the foundation phase and include pupils well in planning activities and challenges. They offer an effective balance of activities that are implemented under the guidance of staff, and other opportunities where pupils are free to choose what to do and work independently in the learning areas. Nearly all teachers provide interesting and imaginative opportunities that extend pupils' skills knowledge and understanding and engage them in their work very effectively. For example, a visit to the classes by a Welsh pirate 'Barti Ddu' provided rich opportunities to develop pupils' literacy, numeracy and ICT skills. Teachers plan carefully to ensure that pupils develop their literacy, numeracy and ICT skills progressively over time. As a result of careful planning and high expectations, pupils apply theses skills consistently well to support and extend their learning. Generally, many teachers make good use of the outdoor learning area to develop rich learning experiences.

Overall, staff promote the Welsh language well and use incidental Welsh fairly regularly. The school promotes the Welsh dimension successfully through a range of interesting curricular activities, which include numerous opportunities to study the work of Welsh artists and musicians. Teachers also make good use of local history to make pupils aware of the local events. For example, Year 6 pupils studied the impact of the plague on Wrexham in the 16th century.

### **Care, support and guidance: Good**

Across the school, adults know their pupils well and provide them with high quality care, support and guidance. The highly effective and constructive working relationships between pupils and teachers is a particularly strong feature. This contributes successfully to pupils' very positive attitudes towards their work.

The provision for pupils with additional needs is highly effective and the co-ordinator ensures that this is delivered effectively and consistently across the school. The school identifies pupils with additional learning needs at an early stage and meets their needs successfully. All pupils with special needs have a useful individual education plan with comprehensive and measurable targets and an effective person centred plan provides additional valuable information. Arrangements to review these plans are beneficial. They involve pupils, teachers and parents. As a result, pupils achieve well in their literacy and numeracy skills and emotional wellbeing, making consistent progress over time. Due to the school's inclusive approach, pupils with English as an additional language make very strong progress.

The school provides effective individual support for the few pupils with emotional and behavioural needs. For example, staff use emotional wellbeing programmes positively to support pupils working through thoughts, feelings or developing social skills. These interventions provide pupils with useful strategies to help improve wellbeing, behaviour and social skills. This enables the pupils to engage positively in all aspects of school life.

The school has developed a system to track and monitor pupils' progress. Staff make highly effective use of information to identify the needs of all pupils and specific groups of pupils and provide for them. This has a very positive impact on pupils' progress. Staff make highly effective use of diagnostic tools. For example, leaders carefully analyse pupils' performance in reading tests to identify and address shortcomings in provision and performance. This has had a positive impact on the reading skills at the school.

Provision for pupils' wellbeing is central to the ethos of the school. The school has suitable arrangements for promoting healthy eating and drinking and successfully helps pupils to develop skills, knowledge and understanding to make worthwhile healthy lifestyle choices. Wellbeing days provide valuable opportunities for pupils to experience a range of beneficial activities such as meditation and yoga. Work with external agencies and thoughtful provision throughout the school ensure that nearly all pupils are very aware of the need to keep safe online.

Pupil voice is a particular strength of the school. Teachers provide very worthwhile opportunities for pupils to take a wide range of responsibilities through effective school committees, such as the school council, criw Cymraeg, digital leaders and the

eco committee. The work of these committees has a positive impact on the pupils' wellbeing and is highly effective in supporting pupils to become ethical citizens. For example, the governors provide regular opportunities for pupil voice groups to update them on the pupils' perceptions of the school and progress in bringing about improvements.

The school's provision develops pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural attitudes effectively. Teachers work with pupils to support them to reflect on important issues in their lives, to develop key values such as respect and to place a high value on the differences and similarities between people from different cultures. The caring ethos of the school enables nearly all pupils to identify 'right and wrong'. Classroom discussions support pupils to become active and conscientious citizens who develop the skills to lead important initiatives in their community.

Teachers promote pupils' social, cultural and creative development well through opportunities to performance in concerts and take part in competitions and creative projects. The school is highly creative in helping pupils understand issues relating to equality and diversity. This develops the values of tolerance and respect through pupils' active participation in activities such as Show Racism the Red Card.

Safeguarding meets requirements and gives no cause for concern. However, issues regarding the security of the school site perimeter were brought to leaders' attention.

### **Leadership and management: Excellent**

The headteacher has established a very clear vision and ethos for the school that permeates all aspects of its work. The senior leadership team work collaboratively, with energy and determination. They have extremely high aspirations for their pupils, stemming from a strong moral purpose and professional commitment. They are not afraid to make brave decisions in securing effective changes, for example to their approach to curriculum planning where they feel that this is in the pupils' best interests. This has resulted in strong and sustained improvements to pupils' wellbeing, progress and standards.

All members of the staff team understand their well-defined roles and responsibilities clearly, and take pride in their work. A highly effective example of this is the way in which staff are organised into teams that take responsibility for driving each of the school improvement priorities. This exemplary joint working empowers all staff to contribute extensively. This approach is highly influential on the school's work. For example, it has led to the creation of the school's innovative new curriculum, which successfully engages the enthusiasm and imagination of pupils and staff. Improvements to the way in which teachers deliver mathematics teaching have resulted in notable improvements to pupils' outcomes in mathematics across the school over time, particularly for more able pupils.

In addition, pupil voice groups devise their own school improvement plan that runs in parallel with the improvement priorities. For instance, they have created a reward system linked to pupils' 'learning powers', as part of the priority to improve assessment for learning.

There is a structured programme to monitor, evaluate and review the school's work. Leaders monitor diligently and identify promptly the few occasions where teachers' practice needs improvement. Their monitoring informs an accurate overall picture of the school's strengths, and identifies opportunities for improvement. As a result of this culture of ongoing self-evaluation and reflection, leaders identify and implement pertinent actions that lead to improvement. They deliver national priorities, such as curriculum reform, thoughtfully and creatively.

Leaders facilitate highly effective professional learning that supports school improvement. They make highly effective use of the expertise within the school, for instance to improve the consistency of classroom practice, or to deliver worthwhile and well-chosen improvements to staff understanding of a range of additional needs, such as mental health. Teachers visit other schools in order to learn from good practice. They have the confidence to evaluate for themselves which ideas are most likely to be successful for the pupils at St Mary's. Where appropriate, leaders invite experts to train staff in new initiatives and to support ongoing professional development.

The governing body are well organised and proactive in their role. They provide a clear strategic direction to the school's work, providing both challenge and support to the school's leaders. They undertake visits to the school that equip them with a valuable first-hand understanding of the many recent improvements, to enable them to ask relevant questions to evaluate the impact of changes.

Governors have worked relentlessly to improve the challenging school site, to create the best possible learning environment within the constraints of the school buildings. In addition, they have taken difficult staffing and spending decisions, in order to manage the school budget highly efficiently. The school uses the pupil development grant effectively to mitigate the impact of poverty on pupils of differing abilities.

## Copies of the report

Copies of this report are available from the school and from the Estyn website ([www.estyn.gov.wales](http://www.estyn.gov.wales))

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

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

Publication Section

Estyn

Anchor Court, Keen Road

Cardiff

CF24 5JW or by email to [publications@estyn.gov.wales](mailto:publications@estyn.gov.wales)

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