



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

**Report following monitoring
Level of follow-up: Significant Improvement**

**Ponthir Church in Wales School
School Close
Ponthir
Torfaen
NP18 1GA**

Date of visit: July 2019

by

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

Outcome of visit

Ponthir Church in Wales School is judged to have made sufficient progress in relation to the recommendations following the most recent core inspection.

As a result, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education and Training in Wales is removing the school from the list of schools requiring significant improvement.

Progress since the last inspection

R1 Improve curriculum planning and the quality of teaching to ensure that pupils receive appropriate challenges in their work and develop their skills systematically as they move through the school

The quality of teaching across the school has improved since the core inspection. The headteacher has provided good professional learning opportunities for teachers and learning support assistants. These include visits to other schools to observe good practice, attending professional development courses and working with advisers from the regional consortium's school improvement service. These opportunities have had a positive impact on pupil progress. For example, working closely with a local school has helped staff to improve the way that they teach reading and phonics to pupils. The headteacher holds regular pupil progress meetings with teachers and this has helped to raise teachers' expectations of what pupils can achieve. Throughout the school, there is a greater focus on learning and teachers have a better understanding of how to plan clear objectives and to help pupils to see how they can be successful. The headteacher monitors the quality of teaching carefully and provides effective feedback to individual staff on what they do well and what they need to do to improve.

Leaders and teachers have developed a coherent whole-school approach to curriculum planning. They have looked at the four core purposes of the new curriculum for Wales and blended these with their own school aims and values to create a bespoke curriculum for pupils.

Teachers have worked together to plan a four-year topic cycle for the whole school. These topics are broad and allow teachers to plan themes within each topic that are relevant and engaging for pupils of all ages. Teachers introduce new topics through an activity designed to engage and enthuse pupils. For example, during the Time Traveller topic, pupils throughout the school dressed as a character from history. Teachers finish topics with an activity that allows pupils to consolidate and reflect on their learning. Pupils often share these activities with parents, such as when foundation phase pupils invited their parents to a 1960s' party to share what they had found out about this period. Teachers reflect well on the effectiveness of these topics and adapt plans to ensure that they provide good opportunities for pupils' learning and skill development.

Teachers have used the foundation phase framework, the national curriculum for key stage 2 and the literacy and numeracy frameworks to plan a systematic skills progression through each of the topics that they have delivered this year. This ensures that the school's curriculum meets statutory requirements. It also helps teachers to match tasks and activities to pupils' skill levels and plan for pupils to use

and apply these skills in their work across the curriculum. The school has identified that as a result of weaker teaching in previous years, a few pupils in the foundation phase and lower key stage 2 have gaps in their literacy and numeracy skills. Leaders and teachers have taken steps to address this. For example, through the provision of additional phonics teaching for a few pupils in Year 3.

Teachers use real life contexts to plan tasks and activities and this helps pupils to see the purpose in their learning. For example, after learning about the number of people across the world without access to clean water, pupils in Years 5 and 6 investigate which materials are best to filter out impurities from dirty water. Teachers are beginning to involve pupils suitably in making decisions about what and how they learn. For example, pupils in Years 3 and 4 conducted a survey to find out which country most pupils would like to study this term and produced pie charts to show the results. In Years 5 and 6, individual pupils identify information that they would like to research such as why Kenyan people tend to be good at running or how the population of Egypt has changed over time. These experiences motivate and interest pupils and, as a result, nearly all pupils across the school engage well with their learning.

R2 Improve teaching in the foundation phase to ensure that it aligns with the principles of the foundation phase

After a slow start, the school has made effective progress towards this recommendation. Two teachers share responsibility for leading the foundation phase. They have clear roles and responsibilities for the foundation phase environment and improving pedagogical approaches.

Teachers have good opportunities to learn about the principles and pedagogy of the foundation phase. Teachers and learning support assistants have visited schools across the region to observe effective foundation phase practice and have attended training courses linked to their areas of responsibility. For example, a learning support assistant has trained to teach cookery skills to pupils. Teachers have incorporated cookery into the curriculum as a valuable learning experience across the foundation phase. Pupils learn about healthy eating and develop skills, such as measuring when weighing out ingredients for recipes.

Teachers have improved the balance between adult-directed tasks and independent learning activities. All classrooms in the foundation phase have areas where pupils work independently to consolidate and develop their skills. These include well-resourced reading, writing, role-play, information and communication technology (ICT) and numeracy areas. Teachers provide good opportunities for pupils to use these areas. However, there is not enough adult interaction with pupils when they are working independently, for example to question them to extend their thinking and develop their problem-solving skills. Staff are beginning to provide pupils with opportunities to make choices about their learning and have a say in what and how they learn. Pupils in Years 1 and 2 chose to focus on bees as part of their topic this term and have planned activities for the enhanced provision, including making a mathematics game.

Teachers have increased the use they make of the school's extensive outdoor areas. Pupils now use these well for both focused activities and independent learning in all

weathers. A learning support assistant, who has trained to develop pupils' skills through the forest schools approach, works with all foundation phase pupils over time. This is a relatively recent development and is already providing pupils with good opportunities to explore their natural environment and to apply their skills in this context. For example, pupils have measured and sorted leaves and twigs using standard and non-standard units and have taken photographs of an area of the school grounds in different seasons so that they can compare and contrast the changes that occur in nature over time.

R3 Raise standards of pupils' writing

Pupils' standards in writing have improved since the core inspection. Across the school, pupils write well regularly, both in their literacy lessons and across the curriculum.

In the foundation phase, most pupils write effectively in simple sentences, using a good range of vocabulary to express their ideas. They write in an appropriate range of genres, for example, invitations to their parents for a school event and explanations of the life cycle of a bee. The introduction of writing areas in the foundation phase classrooms has provided pupils' with improved opportunities to write independently about topics of their choice.

In key stage 2, pupils write well in a wide range of writing genres including poetry, autobiography and newspaper reports. Most pupils talk knowledgeably about the key features of different text types and they have a good awareness of techniques that engage the reader. Many older pupils have a good vocabulary and use this well in their writing, for example, using words such as apartheid and segregation appropriately. A few more able pupils use vocabulary well to create atmosphere and nuance in their writing.

Most pupils present their work well and many older pupils have a well-developed cursive handwriting style. Many pupils in the foundation phase form letters correctly. They spell high frequency words accurately and younger pupils make phonetically plausible choices when choosing letters to represent the sounds in words. Many pupils in key stage 2 spell an increasing range of words accurately. However, a minority of pupils do not use a suitable range of strategies to help them to spell correctly. The school has addressed this by introducing a wider range of strategies, such as recognising patterns in words.

Pupils across the school have improved their punctuation since the beginning of the school year. Most pupils use a good range of punctuation appropriate to their age and ability well in different forms of writing.

The school has introduced 'Free Write Friday' into the school curriculum. This is an opportunity for pupils to choose their writing activity. This writing is personal and there is no obligation to share it with other pupils or teachers. This activity is proving popular and many pupils write extensively for themselves. A few pupils have developed an interest in submitting entries to local writing competitions.

The introduction of effective self and peer assessment strategies has helped most older pupils to edit their own and their peers' writing well. This is helping many of these pupils to improve their writing effectively.

The language and literacy co-ordinator is effective in her role and has led whole school improvements in writing well. She has used her knowledge effectively to support the school with the development of different writing genres and has provided effective support to improve teachers' skills in this area, for example through training sessions and modelling lessons.

R4 Raise standards of pupils' Welsh

Pupils' skills and ability to use Welsh have improved since the core inspection. Many pupils use Welsh to greet visitors and a few older pupils use the language as a natural part of their classroom activities, for example using Welsh numbers and instructional words during science activities.

Pupils in the foundation phase ask and answer simple questions about themselves and the weather well. As they move into key stage two, pupils develop a more extensive vocabulary through speaking and reading Welsh. Younger pupils in key stage 2 read familiar texts well and with good understanding. Older pupils talk about what they like doing in school using a suitable range of vocabulary. They read fiction and non-fiction books aloud appropriately, but do not always understand fully what they are reading and make errors pronouncing words. Pupils across the school write regularly in Welsh. However, they cannot always recall the meaning of what they have written when asked to talk about it.

The school has placed a high priority on improving pupils' Welsh skills. The Welsh co-ordinator carried out an audit of staff skills in Welsh in the autumn term to identify the training needs of all teachers and learning support assistants. The school uses a comprehensive scheme of work for Welsh and this helps teachers to plan progressively to develop pupils' oral, reading and writing skills. Teachers provide vocabulary mats with common words and phrases to support pupils' speaking skills. In Years 5 and 6, teachers integrate opportunities to learn Welsh well into lessons. For example when making a wormery in science, pupils learn Welsh words and phrases that are specific to the activity.

Teachers have focused well on improving pupils' attitudes to learning Welsh. For example, many teachers incorporate Welsh into their teaching and all teachers have displays in their classroom that use the Welsh language. Members of the Criw Cymraeg are good role models for other pupils in using and developing Welsh skills. They hold weekly assemblies where they share the phrase of the week, reward pupils for using Welsh around the school and play games in Welsh in the playground with younger pupils.

R5 Improve pupils' ICT skills

The standard of pupils' ICT skills has improved across the school.

In the foundation phase, most pupils use technology well for a good range of purposes. For example, they use apps on tablet computers to help them to identify

different flowers. They use data handling programs effectively to produce pictograms and simple bar graphs about minibeasts. Many pupils use their ICT skills purposefully in their independent work, for example to practise and consolidate their understanding of money.

Nearly all pupils in key stage 2 show a good understanding of a wide range of ICT applications. They use these well in their work across the curriculum. Pupils in Year 5 and 6 create interesting reports in the style of television news programmes about the race riots in Soweto in the 1970s. Pupils in Years 3 and 4 use internet search engines effectively. They research the prices of items needed to create a Japanese garden within a given budget from different shops. Most pupils across the key stage use Hwb independently, for example to help them to classify amphibians as part of a science project. Many pupils are developing good skills in coding. For example, a group of pupils developed a successful game by programming robots to 'sumo wrestle'.

The digital leaders group, formed from pupils across key stage 2, support ICT well throughout the school. These pupils have a good understanding of a wide range of ICT applications. They have carried out a survey of all the pupils to help them to understand how best to support them. As a result, the group has identified the need for all pupils to know how to log on to Hwb independently. Pupils support staff well to develop their understanding of computer programs. For example, they have helped learning support assistants' to use specific apps on tablet computers.

The ICT leader has supported improvements in ICT well. He has conducted a thorough analysis of the school's ICT curriculum, staff and pupil skills and its hardware and software needs. He has addressed the immediate priorities well and has developed a long-term plan for the renewal of equipment. He has used the knowledge gained from professional development opportunities effectively to support staff through demonstrations and team teaching.

R6 Develop the school's leadership capacity at all levels to address important priorities for improvement

Since taking up her post in September 2018, the headteacher has developed a strong vision for school improvement. She has allocated roles and responsibilities effectively, taking good account of the strengths of individual teachers and learning support assistants. Nearly all staff members have a leadership role and this has helped to ensure that they have a shared responsibility for addressing the recommendations from the core inspection and bringing about improvements for the pupils at the school.

The headteacher has a clear focus on improving teaching and learning. She has developed a collaborative culture within the school and an ethos in which teachers feel confident in her ability to manage change effectively. She has worked well with individual members of staff to identify their strengths and areas for development and to support them to improve their teaching. She has dealt robustly and sensitively with underperformance in the quality of teaching. All staff have regular professional learning opportunities that link well to their individual needs and their areas of responsibility.

The headteacher has established good links with schools within the locality and across the region. Staff have formed good professional relationships with teachers from these schools and they meet regularly to observe and discuss effective practice. This work has had a positive impact on pupil progress including their phonic and reading skills development. There are effective systems for staff to share their new knowledge and the skills, for example in staff meetings. Senior leaders have established a robust performance management process for staff. Objectives set for individual members of staff link well to school improvement priorities and this has helped the school to make good progress against the recommendations from the core inspection.

In collaboration with the challenge adviser, the headteacher has worked purposefully with leaders to develop their skills in monitoring and evaluating pupil progress and the impact of newly implemented provision. The introduction of monitoring activities such as regular learning walks, lesson observations and scrutiny of books has helped to provide teachers with a better understanding of what pupils do well and what they need to improve. As a result of these activities, staff have identified pupils who are more able as well as those who need support through interventions. This means that they are better able to plan learning experiences that meet the needs of all learners more effectively.

Governors bring a good range of skills and experience and use these well to support the school. The new chair of the governing body provides effective leadership and the governing body's ability to provide pertinent challenge to the school leadership has improved. Governors have applied robust processes to ensure that they appoint high quality senior leaders. They have taken good account of the views of pupils when recruiting the headteacher and the incoming deputy headteacher.

R7 Improve pupils' independent learning skills

Nearly all pupils have positive attitudes towards learning. They engage effectively with tasks and sustain their concentration well when working with adults, in small groups and independently. Pupils collaborate well, for example sharing roles well to complete tasks, such as when producing a television news report about the Soweto uprising.

Teachers have improved the opportunities that they provide for pupils to use their literacy and numeracy skills across the curriculum. This has enabled pupils to consolidate and refine these skills so that they can use them independently in purposeful contexts. For example, pupils in Year 3 and 4 use their number skills to work out the difference in cost between the ingredients needed to prepare sushi from two different supermarkets.

Teachers and pupils in all classes identify aspects of pupils' work that need improvement. These are recorded on target cards that pupils use to help them when working independently. In many classes, these targets are specific and relevant to pupils' individual needs. For example, in the reception class one pupil has a target about recognising half past the hour and in Year 5 a pupil has a target to include more similes in descriptive writing. However, on occasions teachers provide targets for pupils that are too generic or not specific enough for a pupil to be able to achieve in the short term.

The school has purchased good quality resources that support purposeful learning for pupils, including tablet and laptop computers. This improved access to technology has enabled pupils to improve their research and enquiry skills and to work independently more often without depending on resources provided by the teacher.

© Crown Copyright 2019: This report may be re-used free of charge in any format or medium provided that it is re-used accurately and not used in a misleading context. The material must be acknowledged as Crown copyright and the title of the report specified