



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

**A report on**

**Fochriw Primary School  
Pontlottyn Road  
Fochriw  
Bargoed  
CF81 9LL**

**Date of inspection: March 2020**

**by**

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

## About Fochriw Primary School

Fochriw Primary School is in the village of Fochriw in Caerphilly local authority. There are 104 pupils on roll aged 4 to 11 years. The school has four mixed-age classes.

The average percentage for pupils eligible for free school meals over the last three years is around 33%, which is well above the Welsh average of 18%. The school identifies around 32% of pupils as having special educational needs, which is well above the Welsh average of 21%. Nearly all pupils are of white British ethnicity and come from homes where English is the main language. No pupils speak Welsh at home.

The school's last inspection was in February 2013. The headteacher took up her post in December 2015.

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

Fochriw Primary School is a caring school where leaders have a highly ambitious vision for the support and development of pupil wellbeing. This permeates the work of the school as a community and a learning organisation. Staff are attentive to their pupils needs, and this is evident in the notably high-quality relationships that exist between staff and pupils.

The school provides good opportunities for pupils to develop their leadership roles and to become active citizens of their community and Wales. Pupils understand the need to live healthy lifestyles and embrace the opportunities they have.

Pupils make good progress as they move through the school. The majority begin school with skills below the expected level, yet many leave having reached their age-related expectations. As such, many pupils embrace the opportunities they have so they can become life-long learners.

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

## **Recommendations**

- R1 Improve the robustness and accuracy of self-evaluation
- R2 Tighten procedures for the assessment and tracking of pupil progress
- R3 Provide pupils with opportunities to develop their independent skills
- R4 Improve pupils Welsh language skills

## **What happens next**

### ***Not in follow-up***

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

## Main findings

### Standards: Good

The majority of pupils enter the school with skills below the level expected for their age. As they move through the school, most make good progress in improving their literacy, numeracy and information, communication and technology (ICT) skills. Most pupils with additional learning needs make at least the expected progress from their individual starting points.

Many pupils in the foundation phase speak with increasing clarity and listen well to others. They enjoy talking to adults about their work. For example, pupils in reception talk about the need to wash germs off their hands, while pupils in Year 2 describe with detail the dinosaur egg they have created. In key stage 2, many pupils continue to build these skills suitably. For example, in Year 4 they talk confidently about their school while in Year 6 they recall vividly a visit to Cadbury World as part of their topic work. Many pupils take turns respectfully and listen when others speak, accepting that people have different viewpoints.

In the foundation phase, the majority of pupils develop early reading skills appropriately. By Year 2, they apply these to the simple books they read well and are confident when discussing the content of the story. By Year 4, many pupils are more confident when reading and have developed a range of skills to help them read more complex texts. Many pupils in Year 6 confidently read novels, such as Hitler's Daughter, and talk about the characters in some detail, making inferences about their behaviour from the text.

Many pupils in the foundation phase develop their writing skills systematically. From their early attempts at writing, they develop increasingly neat styles. By Year 2 the majority of pupils write for a wide-range of purposes, such as recalling the story of Harry and the Bucketful of Dinosaurs, using a series of correctly punctuated sentences. Many pupils in Year 6 write for longer periods, for instance writing newspaper accounts and diary entries imagining they are the Roman author, Pliny, watching Mount Vesuvius erupt over Pompeii.

In the foundation phase, many pupils develop secure number skills. In nursery, around half of pupils count flowers to ten when making potions, while many pupils in Year 2 read, write and order numbers to 100 and describe ten more and ten less than a number. The majority of Year 2 pupils learn to tell the time to the quarter of the hour. In lower key stage 2, many pupils add and subtract using a range of strategies and work confidently with numbers beyond 100. By Year 6, many calculate with numbers to a million accurately and plot co-ordinates using four quadrants. They read negative numbers as minus temperatures and explore the symmetry of shapes. Many pupils are beginning to use their mathematical skills to solve problems, and apply this when comparing shops for the best deals.

Across the school nearly all pupils use ICT for a range of purposes. In the foundation phase, many pupils are beginning to use a digital learning platform to create pictograms. They use early programming skills to control the basic movement of toy robots. In key stage 2, many pupils use ICT effectively to research topics and to

organise and present information. In upper key stage 2 many pupils create databases, for example, to organise information about different dog breeds. Many pupils use their skills to programme devices to move or to produce visual displays or sound.

Most pupils across the school have positive attitudes to learning Welsh. Many pupils in the foundation phase make good progress in developing their oral skills. For instance, by Year 2, they use a suitable range of familiar greetings and phrases correctly. As pupils move through the school, many continue to make appropriate progress and use an increasingly wide vocabulary. Most pupils respond positively to instructions and display a good understanding of Welsh used by teachers in Welsh lessons. By Year 6, many communicate effectively in writing, for example when writing about their favourite trip. More able pupils write accurately, such as when giving their views on a poem. However, most pupils do not make consistently good progress in developing their Welsh speaking and reading skills as they move through the school.

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

Nearly all pupils feel safe, valued and secure in school and most know whom to talk to if they need help. They appreciate how adults help them, such as when they have problem, and can access a quiet space where they know support is available. Nearly all pupils understand how to stay safe online.

Many pupils behave well in lessons, when moving around the school and in the outside areas at playtime. Most pupils interact well together and show courtesy and respect for their peers and adults. A few pupils who struggle to regulate their emotions know where they can get help from a trusted adult and feel this is beneficial for them in improving their wellbeing. Many pupils sustain their concentration well in lessons and demonstrate enjoyment and engagement in their learning. For example, Year 4 pupils work effectively together to plan a problem into their story and discuss at length strategies on how they can improve their work. Across key stage 2, nearly all pupils feel well supported by staff and that they are making good progress in school. Many pupils are keen to talk to visitors to tell them about their experiences at school and what they are learning. Pupils in Year 6 talk about challenges they have overcome to complete their work to a standard they are proud of. Many pupils work hard on their project work and as such they are beginning to develop important skills, such as resilience and perseverance. However, too often they are reliant on an adult to help them.

Many pupils develop leadership skills in their work as part of pupil groups such as the school council and digital leaders. These leadership roles are beginning to have an encouraging influence on the school. Nearly all pupils understand the importance of these responsibilities and proudly describe the changes that they have already made. For example, members of the Criw Cymraeg have recently introduced strategies to encourage more pupils to speak in Welsh to each other. Representatives from the pupil voice groups confidently inform leaders and governors of their experiences of school through their involvement in learning walks. The Heddlu Bach group of mini police are a proactive pupil voice group at the school. They are proud to have shared their practice across South East Wales, for example, they have been supporting other schools to implement the programme. The work of the pupil voice groups has had a positive impact on leading developments in other pupils' health and wellbeing.

The various pupil voice groups promote an awareness of children's rights valuably and highlight the importance of having a healthy lifestyle, to which most pupils respond positively. As such, they co-operate well together to run the school's fruit tuck shop and most pupils choose to take part in a daily mile. They understand the importance of enjoyment of life and so take part in a small range of extra-curricular activities such as craft, coding and folk dancing. Pupils know the benefits of socialising together whilst sharing a meal. As such they work together to create seating plans in the dining hall to get the maximum benefit from socialising with their friends. As a result of this, pupils have a good understanding of the need to keep healthy and nearly all pupils appreciate the importance of attending school regularly and punctually.

### **Teaching and learning experiences: Adequate and needs improvement**

The successful working relationships that exist between staff and pupils are a strength of the school. As such, staff know their pupils well and are sensitive to their needs. Their interactions reflect the high value they place on nurturing pupils' wellbeing and progress. Teachers are strong language role models and have a good subject knowledge. Across the school, nearly all teachers ask a wide range of purposeful questions to encourage pupils to think more deeply about their learning. For example, in the nursery and reception class, effective prompting enables pupils to consider further which solutions melt ice. In lower key stage 2, teachers encourage pupils to think deeply about fairness as part of their thinking circle.

Lessons generally build well on pupils' previous learning and make effective links across subjects. Staff have suitably high expectations about pupil's behaviour and encourage them to show respect, care and consideration for others. Across the school, teachers plan tasks that are well suited to pupils' starting points. However, occasionally, the activities that teachers plan do not challenge pupils sufficiently and on a few occasions teachers talk for too long and over direct pupil tasks. As a result, there are missed opportunities for independent learning. Pupils are beginning to have a say in what they learn through suggesting activities and ideas they would like to explore, such as the topic of myths and legends. However, opportunities to make choices about, and to take responsibility for, their own learning are limited.

The school provides a broad and balanced curriculum that meets the needs of all pupils. The school engages well with a range of partners to enrich the curriculum, for example working alongside an engineering company as part of a 'future engineers' project. This important work helps to address gender imbalances in the world of work. The school actively seeks out opportunities to link with the local community well and as a result pupils develop a good sense of belonging to their locality.

In the foundation phase teachers provide an appealing learning environment with many opportunities for children to explore and learn. They plan exciting experiences which interest and motivate children well, for example when hunting for items in the forest school garden. However, aspects of foundation phase philosophy are underdeveloped, for example, there are missed opportunities for pupils to learn through play and independent exploration as there is often too much focus on simple tasks, such as colouring.

Across the school, staff work effectively with less able pupils to deliver a wide range of interventions to help these pupils reach the expected level in their basic skills. This is particularly effective in the foundation phase. Most teachers provide verbal feedback during lessons well. However, written comments in pupils' books are not always effective and there are insufficient opportunities for pupils to respond to these comments.

Teachers across the school deliver worthwhile and interesting opportunities for pupils to develop their literacy skills across the curriculum through many purposeful lessons and activities. For example, pupils in key stage two produce creative writing based on their visit to Newport Transporter Bridge. However, the opportunities for pupils to develop their numeracy skills to the same high standards as literacy are not as well developed. Pupils have appropriate opportunities to develop their digital skills across the school. Teachers plan appropriately for the progression of skills in ICT and work successfully with partners at a local secondary school to support the development of programming skills.

The school has worked purposefully to raise the profile of the heritage and culture of Wales, especially in relation to their locality. For example, pupils in upper key stage 2 talk enthusiastically about their knowledge of the lost village of Penybanc. In addition to this they learn Welsh folk songs and sing them passionately. However, the opportunities for pupils to develop their Welsh language skills independently, outside of Welsh lessons, are limited. Pupils are beginning to learn about other cultures, for example, they have raised money for other countries through making worry dolls and have learnt about fair trade.

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

The school places an appropriately high priority on pupil wellbeing. It has effective arrangements for providing emotional support for pupils. This important work stems from the assessment of all pupils at the start of the school year. The early identification of pupils who require additional support ensures that they gain confidence and achieve to the best of their ability. The school tracks pupil wellbeing systematically and creates 'pen portraits' of individual pupils to ensure that carefully targeted support is offered to vulnerable learners. Staff are well trained in strategies and approaches that encourage positive behaviour. However, this is not always consistent in its approach across the school. As a result, in a minority of lessons, a few pupils engage in low level disruptive behaviour.

The school has developed a system for tracking pupils' progress in their literacy, numeracy and digital skills. Teachers use this information to plan for the next steps in learning and to identify pupils who will benefit from additional support. However, the processes in place to monitor fully the progress pupils make towards their targets or to consider rates of progress for different groups of learners are too informal.

Provision for pupils who require additional support is strong. There is a suitable range of assessment strategies to identify carefully individual needs. Effective liaison with pre-school providers ensures that beneficial intervention programmes are in place early on, often linking with partner agencies. Teachers and support staff write helpful individual plans for children with special educational needs and share them with parents who review them with teachers regularly. Appropriately trained staff

members deliver a well-considered range of support programmes. There are suitable links with specialist support services, for example speech and language therapists and community paediatricians. As a result, pupils with special educational needs make good progress against their individual targets and from their starting points.

Strategies for promoting a healthy living are strong feature of the work of the school. A range of agencies develop pupils' awareness of staying healthy and safe, for example, hand-washing workshops and working with the police. The school has a number of initiatives in place to promote healthy living, for example, through weekly relaxation sessions. The school helps pupils understand discrimination and bullying and there are appropriate strategies in place to deal with any issues that arise.

Pupil voice groups are developing within the school and are beginning to impact on school life. The school council successfully raises money for the school for the benefit of all pupils. The 'change makers' group contributes to the development of worthwhile weekly activities, such as clubs, and daily exercise opportunities to support pupil wellbeing. There are notable opportunities for pupil groups to be involved in the community. For example, the digital leaders support digital learning for older people in the community. This important work develops pupils' understanding of community cohesion and the benefits from helping others.

The school is developing its opportunities for pupils to influence and take responsibility for their own learning. For example, pupils suggest and debate possible topics for the coming term and then vote which topic they will investigate. As a result of this recent change, pupils engage well in learning about the topics. However, opportunities for children to take responsibility for their day-to-day learning and to make independent choices within lessons are less well developed.

The school's partnership with parents is evolving. The very recently appointed part-time family liaison officer is already beginning to have a positive impact on pupils and their families. For example, a range of initiatives have begun to engage parents in school life, such as a reading café for pupils to enjoy sharing books with their parents. In addition to this relaxation sessions for parents have been set up. The active 'Friends of Fochriw' group supports the school well with fund-raising and providing valuable community events. A range of beneficial communication methods, including good use of social media, keep parents informed about their children's learning. Parents receive useful information about their child's progress in an annual report.

The school promotes pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development well. Members of staff place a high priority on promoting positive values during the daily life of the school. Highly effective links with the local church provide opportunities for pupils to explore spirituality. The school develops pupils' cultural development through a suitable range of cultural activities, events and visits, such as a residential trip to Abernant. Pupils have opportunities to sing Welsh songs and participate regularly in worthwhile drama activities.

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

## **Leadership and management: Good**

The headteacher provides purposeful strategic direction to the school's work. She sets a positive tone for creating a safe space for pupils to aspire and thrive. The headteacher is well-supported by the newly appointed acting deputy headteacher. Overall, leaders focus on developing pupil's wellbeing and skills suitably. They ensure that pupils have appropriate opportunities to experience positions of responsibility, such as becoming part of the school's 'Heddlu Bach' team of mini police. As a result, the wellbeing of many pupils is improved, and they many pupils develop their skills to at least the expected level by the time they leave the school.

The school's vision permeates all of its work. Likewise, its mission statement of 'be respectful, be responsible, be safe' is understood by nearly all pupils at the school. The headteacher is fully committed to promoting staff wellbeing and this has remained a focus during recent turbulent times at the school resulting from significant changes to staffing. She has recently distributed leadership responsibilities by creating 'learning teams' linked to the different areas of learning. In these teams, staff work well to begin to consider how they might apply the new curriculum for Wales in their school. Leaders also ensure there are a range of leadership opportunities for pupils, such as the school council, who have successfully promoted the value of good attendance at school. Their work has contributed to sustaining higher levels of attendance over time.

Overall, leaders understand the majority of the school's strengths and areas for development well. Over time, they gather first-hand information on the quality of the work of the school through worthwhile activities, such as learning walks and the scrutiny of pupils' work. The school has previously made sustained improvements in the areas it has targeted for development, such as strengthening safeguarding and security systems. However, due to the recent instability in staffing and leadership roles, self-evaluation activities have not been sufficiently robust and the leaders have not identified all of the most important areas for improvement, such as consistency in the quality of teaching and learning across the school.

The arrangements for the performance management of teachers and support staff are beneficial as they appropriately balance accountability for pupils' standards with professional learning. Leaders ensure that all members of staff have appropriate opportunities to participate in professional learning activities within the school and beyond. For example, by working effectively with the other school the headteacher has responsibility for to support the newly-appointed leader of special educational needs to improve the provision for these pupils across the school. Teachers have frequent opportunities to network with colleagues with similar leadership roles across the regional consortium to develop the school's curriculum.

Leaders respond positively and swiftly to national and local priorities. The school places an appropriate emphasis on working towards developing its provision for the new curriculum for Wales and collaborates well with other schools. For example, it is a regional consortium lead network school for science and technology. As such, leaders support other schools in the development of their curriculum.

The work of the governing body is a strength of the school as they are well-informed and supportive of the school as a community. Governors contribute very positively to the life and work of the school. They are regular visitors and support many events, such as working alongside pupils and their parents during science workshops led by experts visiting the school. They conduct regular learning walks and as such have a sound first-hand knowledge of the school. They are critical friends and hold the school to account with a good balance of support and challenge.

Leaders manage the school's resources well. They work well with partners, such as, a charitable science trust, to identify and access additional funding to improve opportunities for pupils. For example, leaders manage the school's budget efficiently to prioritise spending to match the school's improvement objectives. Their prudent financial management has helped to reverse the school's historic budget deficit. The school uses the pupil development grant appropriately to fund a suitable range of intervention programmes to support pupils eligible for free school meals, for example to support the development of pupils' early language skills.

## Evidence base of the report

Before an inspection, inspectors:

- analyse the outcomes from the parent and pupil questionnaires and consider the views of teachers and the governing body through their questionnaire responses

During an inspection, inspectors normally:

- hold a meeting with parents to hear their views on the school and its effectiveness
- meet the headteacher, governors, senior and middle leaders (where appropriate) and individual teachers to evaluate the impact of the school's work
- meet pupils to discuss their work, to listen to them read and to gain their views about various aspects of their school
- meet groups of pupils in leadership roles, such as representatives from the school council and eco-committee
- visit a broad sample of classes, including learning support groups and undertake a variety of learning walks to observe pupils learning and to see staff teaching in a range of settings, including classrooms, support groups and in outdoor areas
- where appropriate, visit the specialist resource base within the school to see pupils' learning
- observe and speak to pupils at lunch and break times and at a sample of after-school clubs, where appropriate
- attend assemblies and daily acts of collective worship
- look closely at the school's self-evaluation processes
- consider the school's improvement plan and look at evidence to show how well the school has taken forward planned improvements
- scrutinise a range of school documents, including information on pupil assessment and progress, records of meetings of staff and the governing body, information on pupils' wellbeing, including the safeguarding of pupils, and records of staff training and professional development

After the on-site inspection and before the publication of the report, Estyn:

- review the findings of the inspection alongside the supporting evidence from the inspection team in order to validate, moderate and ensure the quality of the inspection

## 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:

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