



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

A report on

Gellifaelog Primary School

**Penydarren
Merthyr Tydfil
CF47 9TJ**

Date of inspection: November 2022

by

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

About Gellifaelog Primary School

Name of provider	Gellifaelog Primary School
Local authority	Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council
Language of the provider	English
Type of school	Primary
Religious character	
Number of pupils on roll	263
Pupils of statutory school age	183
Number in nursery classes	42
Percentage of pupils eligible for free school meals over a three-year average (The national percentage of pupils eligible for free school meals over a three-year average in Primary is 23.0%)	45.3%
Percentage of pupils identified as having additional learning needs (a) (The national percentage of pupils identified as having an additional learning need in Primary is 16.1%)	4.9%
Percentage of pupils who speak Welsh at home	0.0%
Percentage of pupils with English as an additional language	4.4%
Date of headteacher appointment	January 2022
Date of previous Estyn inspection (if applicable)	03/01/2014
Start date of inspection	28/11/2022

Data reported is sourced from the latest available Pupil Level Annual School Census. These figures may be slightly different to those observed during the inspection.

Further information is available from the Welsh Government My Local School website: mylocalschool.gov.wales

- a. The term 'additional learning needs' is being used to describe those pupils on the SEN/ALN register of the school.

Overview

Gellifaelog Primary School provides a welcoming, caring environment for its pupils. Staff work hard to support families and meet the needs of pupils. The provision for personal and social development is beneficial in helping pupils to understand how to stay safe and healthy. It provides opportunities to reflect on important values such as kindness and empathy. Staff promote respect for others and they model calm, reassuring and friendly approaches consistently well.

Members of the new senior leadership team have begun to make improvements to provision for pupils. They have a clear vision for the future of the school. In a short time, they have improved aspects of the learning environment and site security, arrangements for the teaching of reading and provision for pupils' well-being. A timetable to evaluate learning and provision in detail is now in place, although this has not had time to take effect. The school is yet to consult with all stakeholders to inform further improvements. New governors are supportive of the school leadership, but they do not fulfil their role as a 'critical friend'. Leadership across the school is not yet embedded enough to ensure that the teaching improves pupils' learning.

Provision for pupils with additional needs is well-planned. The co-ordinator involves parents, staff and outside agencies to ensure that planning for individual needs is effective. Many pupils with additional needs make good progress in developing their social skills and improving their well-being.

Pupils in leadership roles take their responsibilities seriously. They have helped to improve the school through devising new school rules and improving parking outside the school gates. They promote aspects of safety in school well. However, these groups have been established very recently and staff direct the work of the groups too much.

The curriculum is wide-ranging and it engages the majority of pupils who make appropriate progress in their literacy and numeracy skills. Changes to the curriculum are beginning to promote pupils' independence. However, opportunities for pupils to use a range of skills across the curriculum are too limited. Staff do not consider the impact that the curriculum and teaching have on pupils' learning and achievement well enough and they do not ensure that pupils develop their skills systematically to raise standards.

Recommendations

- R1 Develop an engaging curriculum, that builds pupils' knowledge, skills and understanding systematically and enables them to write, speak Welsh, and use their numeracy skills effectively in meaningful contexts
- R2 Raise teachers' expectations of what pupils should learn, know, and understand
- R3 Embed leadership at all levels to realise the school's priorities for improvement successfully

What happens next

In accordance with the Education Act 2005, HMCI is of the opinion that this school is in need of significant improvement. The school will draw up an action plan to show how it is going to address the recommendations. Estyn will monitor the school's progress about 12 months after the publication of this report.

Main evaluation

Learning

A majority of pupils enter school with skills at a stage of development below the level expected for their age. Many pupils make sound progress across the curriculum as they move through the school. This includes pupils with additional needs and those who are more able.

Many of the youngest pupils make appropriate progress in developing their listening skills from a low starting point. They learn to listen attentively to an adult and follow simple instructions. They begin to work in small groups effectively, listening to the teacher and the contributions of others. Many older pupils continue to make appropriate progress. They listen with sound understanding and reflect on what they hear, for example, when considering the motives of a character in a class story being read to them.

Many of the youngest pupils make good progress in reading. They learn the sounds of letters efficiently and apply these skills to their work. Many older pupils continue to make good progress and develop into confident readers. They name favourite authors and genres and can appreciate the author's intention. They recap a story accurately and infer emotion from the actions of a character, for example understanding the feelings behind a character being 'glued to her seat'. They understand how to use an index, glossary and blurb well.

Many pupils make sound progress in developing their speaking skills in English from a low starting point. Many younger pupils respond to questions and discuss ideas in pairs. They express views and speak to adults confidently. Many older pupils express opinions clearly, giving reasons for their answers and taking good account of their audience. A few pupils make adequate progress in speaking Welsh in their early years in school so that, by Year 2, they can describe their feelings, the weather and what they are wearing in answer to questions. Many older pupils make insufficient progress in speaking Welsh. They struggle to recall basic sentence patterns and are not confident enough to hold a simple conversation with one another.

Many pupils make adequate progress in writing as they move through the school. Many have begun to understand the key features of writing genres by the time they reach Year 2, for example, they recount a story about a worried child. They are also beginning to use simple punctuation accurately. Many older pupils write accounts in the third person and write using the features of a narrative well, drafting their work as part of the writing process. However, the oldest pupils make only limited progress in using correct grammar and punctuation in their writing. They often repeat errors over an extended period of time.

A majority of younger pupils make adequate progress in developing skills in numeracy. They make the strongest progress in aspects of number work so that, by Year 4, they add and subtract two and three-digit numbers successfully. They begin to apply their skills in numeracy to practical situations, such as estimating weight in grams and then reading scales for an accurate measure. A majority of the oldest pupils make appropriate progress in number. They begin to apply their skills in

broader contexts, for example, marking out the wingspan of large birds in metres and centimetres. However, they rarely use their skills to solve mathematical problems that occur in real life.

From a low starting point, many younger pupils develop their digital skills well. They log on to a computer successfully using a username and password and access simple programs. They use art packages appropriately and include pictures in simple word processing. Many Year 5 and 6 pupils continue this good progress. They use media in relevant contexts, such as creating a green screen to make a video showing the internal organs of the body. They use spreadsheets, devise presentations, use QR codes and research information confidently, for example, when creating fact files on famous people.

Many pupils develop good physical skills. Most younger pupils build a tower with care and precision or complete jigsaws with dexterity. Many older pupils play ball games with increasing skill and accuracy.

Well-being and attitudes to learning

Nearly all pupils feel safe at school. They know that staff support them well and help them to stay safe. For example, younger pupils learn the importance of wearing helmets and knee pads when acting out riding a bicycle on the street. Older pupils know ways to protect themselves, when they use the internet or learn to cross the road in road safety sessions. Many pupils know that rules are helpful in keeping everyone safe from harm. Nearly all pupils know the importance of healthy eating and drinking. Many enjoy the fruit which the school provides daily at break time. Most pupils participate in opportunities for physical activity with enthusiasm.

Most pupils engage well with their learning tasks in school and many enjoy taking part in new experiences, such as trips and extra-curricular activities. They are beginning to develop as ethical, informed citizens who show respect towards others. Most are very polite to visitors in school. They enjoy showing them around the school or helping adults by taking messages or pointing out where to go.

Most pupils feel that adults in school listen to their views. For example, older pupils suggest activities to develop their learning when they undertake their independent activities in class. They appreciate opportunities to contribute to decisions about how and what they learn and say that they want more opportunities to do this.

Most pupils work well and many complete their work in the time they are given. Many persevere when solving a problem, for example, when older pupils build mini-shelters using natural materials. When doing practical tasks, many pupils collaborate well and keep going to achieve their goal. Most respond appropriately to feedback from their teachers or peers and try to improve their work with adult support.

In well-being sessions, many pupils show respect when listening to the views of others. A majority of pupils remain calm when others disagree with them or when a game doesn't go as they hoped. As they move through the school, many pupils show support for one other, for example, they help other pupils if they are stuck or explain if their peers are shy and hesitate to answer.

Most pupils behave well in lessons although a few find it difficult to manage distractions. When moving around the school during lunchtimes and breaktimes, a few pupils are sometimes too boisterous. On those occasions, the calm ethos in the school is compromised.

Teaching and learning experiences

Members of the new leadership team are beginning to develop the school's curriculum in line with the aims of the Curriculum for Wales. There are beneficial opportunities for pupils to develop as members of the community, and to participate in local events with other schools. Pupils make visits to places of cultural and historical interest, including Cyfarthfa Castle and St. Fagan's Museum. Pupils begin to develop their knowledge of the Welsh language. However, the provision for developing pupils' Welsh language skills is not yet well established. A minority of staff model the Welsh language well, but this is not consistent across the school. Staff invite visitors to school to enhance the opportunities for pupils to develop their knowledge and understanding of annual celebrations as well as their personal and social skills. Pupils learn about gratitude and respect for others, and in many classes, teachers plan appropriately for pupils to learn about diversity and equality in project work. The school helps pupils to develop a deeper understanding of disability and different cultures and beliefs.

Staff support pupils' mental health and well-being effectively through activities such as circle time, well-being sessions and assemblies. The school also promotes pupils' physical health well, for example through a "Healthy Heroes" topic. There are regular physical development sessions which encourage pupils to enjoy taking exercise. In the majority of classes, teachers provide stimulating lessons that engage most pupils effectively, in their classrooms and outside. Around half of classes make beneficial use of the school's extensive outdoor environment, for example, when younger pupils grow their own pumpkins and older pupils choose to develop activities using the playground. Nearly all staff manage pupils' behaviour successfully in lessons. They model respectful relationships very well. In well-being sessions, they focus on friendship, the school's values and empathy for others. Teaching assistants provide effective support, promoting positive behaviour and enabling many pupils to make appropriate progress with their learning tasks. A nurture classroom provides valuable opportunities for pupils to develop their skills and well-being through practical activities such as making snacks and playing games.

The majority of staff have appropriate expectations for their pupils' learning. They provide suitable, relevant resources and have sufficient subject knowledge. However, teachers do not focus carefully enough on what pupils are actually learning. In many tasks there is insufficient challenge. Activities are directed too much by teachers, and the over-use of worksheets prevents pupils from working with enough independence. Opportunities for pupils to plan, produce and evaluate their own work are limited. The curriculum does not develop pupils' creative skills progressively.

Many teachers monitor the pupils' work carefully during lessons. They intervene purposefully to support pupils and correct any misconceptions. In many classes, teachers give good verbal feedback as pupils are working. Pupils gain a clear idea of what they need to do to improve. In a minority of classes, teachers provide good opportunities for pupils to assess their own work and for other pupils to comment on

it. As a result, pupils in these classes are clear about what they have to do to produce a successful piece of work. The school has recently introduced worthwhile opportunities for pupils to learn independently. For example, older pupils have started to influence how they develop their own skills and choose the ways in which they want to learn. However, this is at an early stage of development. Staff do not focus clearly enough on how pupils will make progress in the activities which pupils plan for themselves.

The school enables pupils to develop appropriate skills in writing and in numeracy but provides limited opportunities for pupils to apply these skills in real life situations. Provision to develop pupils' reading skills is effective. Revised processes for teaching reading have impacted on pupils' progress in developing their reading skills successfully. Daily story time sessions and a visit to the local library promote reading for pleasure very well.

Care, support and guidance

The school provides a supportive and encouraging environment for pupils. On arrival, there are daily routines that help pupils to settle well. These include well-being sessions to start the day where pupils can discuss their feelings, think about important values and listen to others. Pupils learn to empathise and support each other in these sessions. Similarly, daily class story sessions provide an opportunity to end the day in a relaxed, enjoyable activity together.

Most staff nurture and encourage pupils, adjusting their approaches to ensure that nearly all pupils can make the most of the opportunities the school provides. They understand that every pupil is individual and they respond according to the needs of each child. They provide calm, reassuring and positive role models for pupils.

The school supports pupils with additional needs very effectively. The additional needs co-ordinator (ALNCO) seeks the views of staff, parents, pupils and outside agencies to ensure that she is well-informed about what works well for individual pupils. She ensures that staff and parents understand how the school decides on support for additional needs. For example, she has devised beneficial information leaflets which explain new additional needs systems to parents. Nearly all staff gather information to help meet their pupils' needs diligently.

Members of staff work well with families and outside agencies, including health services, the educational psychologist and local schools. Pupils' individual development plans are clear and helpful. Staff ensure that these plans are monitored and reviewed regularly to evaluate progress. Many pupils with additional needs settle well when they join the school and make good progress in their social and learning skills.

The school has agreed on a set of values which teachers promote effectively in acts of collective worship and in well-being sessions. The school has begun to provide opportunities for pupils to take on leadership roles. For example, members of the pupil school council decide upon a simple set of school rules based on the school's values. They promote the new rules in assemblies and by making posters. Pupil leadership groups are beginning to make a difference to aspects of school life.

However, staff often lead these groups and direct the pupils too much, for example by making the notes and action plans themselves, rather than letting pupils do this.

There are good opportunities for pupils to develop their understanding of health and safety. For example, pupils who are digital leaders promote online safety after attending a conference to learn about it themselves. The Junior Road Safety Officers devised a competition for all pupils to design parking notices, which have been made and placed outside the school gates. Pupils say this has helped to encourage safer parking around the school.

School leaders promote safeguarding well and take action to improve the culture of safety and well-being around school. They have made recent improvements to the security of the site. The school's safeguarding arrangements meet requirements and give no cause for concern. The school uses a range of strategies to promote the importance of good attendance at school. The family support worker helps pupils and parents conscientiously, signposting parents to other agencies where appropriate.

Staff encourage pupils to contribute to the community. For example, older pupils take harvest donations to Merthyr food bank or attend the high school to commemorate Remembrance Day with pupils from other local schools.

Younger pupils have useful opportunities to learn about their local area through walks to look at features of the environment. The school holds its own Eisteddfod on St. David's Day and older pupils compete in the Eisteddfod for local schools. However, pupils' wider understanding of Welsh culture and identity is underdeveloped.

The school is an inclusive community and pupils learn to respect diversity. They hear stories in collective worship, which help them to empathise and understand disability. They learn to welcome everyone in school and to respect difference, through celebrating Black History month or playing games to understand fairness for everyone, whatever their ability.

Many pupils across the school attend the variety of extra-curricular clubs on offer, including opportunities for all pupils to play football. Many play in sports tournaments and are proud to represent their school. In craft club, pupils make Christmas decorations to sell at the Christmas fayre.

The school helps pupils to distinguish between right and wrong. There are regular, strong anti-bullying messages. The school has very recently introduced pupils to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child to support their work on treating everyone with respect. Provision to support and promote positive behaviour in lessons has been beneficial, although this has not improved movement around the school during break and lunchtimes well enough yet.

Leadership and management

The recently appointed headteacher has high aspirations for what he wants the school to be like in the future and has fully embraced the strong school values. He inspires a committed team of teachers and support staff who are effective in ensuring a high standard of care for every pupil in the school. Leaders promote staff well-being

effectively. They model and promote professional values and behaviours that contribute positively to school improvement.

The headteacher has led a number of significant improvements in a short space of time, ably assisted by senior leaders. He considers the longer-term needs of pupils in improvement planning as well as immediate priorities. For example, he prioritised finance to ensure that energy costs in the longer-term can be reduced using solar panels. The headteacher also quickly involved some of the staff in monitoring activities to evaluate priorities for improvement in the short-term.

Leaders have clear roles and responsibilities. The newly appointed deputy headteacher has been effective in leading improvements in the teaching of a reading and writing programme that is already raising standards in reading. The additional needs co-ordinator is particularly effective in managing the provision for pupils with additional learning needs, so that they have access to all the learning experiences undertaken in school. Leaders across the school plan for improvement in their area of responsibility, but this is still at an early stage of development.

Governors support the school well and have good oversight of its finances. They have a good understanding of the strengths and areas of development for the school and fulfil their statutory obligations appropriately. However, they make a very limited contribution to setting the school's strategic priorities and obtain little first-hand experience to enable them to act as a 'critical friend'. The governing body is aware of this and has suitable plans in place to rectify the situation. Governors ensure that the school has appropriate arrangements to promote healthy eating and drinking.

Self-evaluation and improvement processes are at an early stage of development. A timetable for a cycle of activities over the year is now in place and has begun recently. Where self-evaluation processes occur, they maintain a clear focus on the impact of provision on pupil progress and well-being. For example, an analysis of pupils' personal and social skills was followed up with the introduction of a valuable session at the start of the school day for pupils to deal with their emotions and become calm.

Prior to the new monitoring cycle, school development processes have not taken full account of the views of parents, pupils, staff and governors. Despite this, the new priorities cover the most important aspects of the school that require improvement. New processes are thorough and detailed with specific, realistic timescales and they identify appropriate staff who are responsible for securing improvement. Leaders support improvement priorities by allocating financial resources and staff time and by using specific grants appropriately. This includes the appropriate allocation of the pupil development grant.

Due to the number of changes in leadership in the last two years, the school has not been able to build up a track record of making and sustaining improvements. Leaders now have clear structures and procedures to bring about school improvement, but these changes are not yet sufficiently embedded to have had a significant impact.

Leaders are beginning to create a positive culture and ethos to support the professional learning of all staff. Professional learning to help staff develop and implement the Curriculum for Wales is still at an early stage. Leaders meet

purposefully with those from local schools with the same responsibility to clarify progression in the different areas of learning and experience. This professional development has yet to have a significant impact on learning in the classroom, although the meeting of local ALNCOs has brought good practice into the school.

Evidence base of the report

Before an inspection, inspectors:

- analyse the outcomes from the parent/carer 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/carers 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' well-being, 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)

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 publication. Any enquiries or comments regarding this document/publication should be addressed to:

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