



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

A report on

Abercanaid Community School

**The Park
Abercanaid
CF48 1SZ**

Date of inspection: February 2023

by

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

About Abercanaid Community School

Name of provider	Abercanaid Community School
Local authority	Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council
Language of the provider	English
Type of school	Primary
Religious character	
Number of pupils on roll	182
Pupils of statutory school age	138
Number in nursery classes	18
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%)	15.4%
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%)	10.1%
Percentage of pupils who speak Welsh at home	0%
Percentage of pupils with English as an additional language	8.51%
Date of headteacher appointment	02/01/2017
Date of previous Estyn inspection (if applicable)	07/07/2014
Start date of inspection	13/02/2023

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

Abercanaid is a caring, inclusive school at the heart of its community. The school collaborates well with all staff, parents, governors and members of the community, and this has helped to shape the school vision and motto “All different, all equal, all shining.” Nearly all pupils feel well supported by staff, and many older pupils undertake their leadership roles with enthusiasm and dedication.

Overall, most pupils make good progress from their starting points in literacy and numeracy. Most pupils’ early number skills develop appropriately. However, provision to ensure a secure understanding of mental maths and the four rules of number is inconsistent across the school.

All staff place high value on the well-being of pupils. They provide high levels of care, support and guidance. This ensures that nearly all pupils are well supported and that they have positive attitudes towards their learning. The bespoke curriculum is a strength of the school. It provides an exciting range of activities that motivate pupils effectively. However, the approach to assessment for learning is underdeveloped and, as a result, many pupils do not respond appropriately to written feedback.

The headteacher, leaders and governors collaborate well. There is a clear emphasis on national priorities and, because of a focus on attendance, levels have risen following the pandemic. The school works well with a range of external partners to improve support for pupils, to share practice and to develop provision.

There is a strong culture of safeguarding. The school’s systems to support vulnerable pupils are effective. This contributes well to the inclusive ethos of the school.

Recommendations

- R1 Sharpen self-evaluation and monitoring activities to enable leaders to identify key areas for improvement, particularly in teaching
- R2 Develop a more strategic approach to professional learning that focuses on securing high quality teaching and assessment that helps pupils to improve
- R3 Improve provision to develop pupils’ numeracy skills

What happens next

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

Main evaluation

Learning

Most pupils make good progress from their different starting points, including pupils with additional learning needs (ALN), English as an additional language and those eligible for free school meals.

Most pupils develop their communication skills well. On entry to the school, most improve their vocabulary quickly and develop speaking skills that enable them to engage well with adults and with each other. For example, the youngest pupils speak confidently when describing the items on their shopping list during role play. Overall, younger pupils communicate their needs and thoughts clearly. They talk knowledgeably about the subjects they are interested in. For example, most describe in detail a recent trip to St Fagan's. As they get older, most pupils develop conversations well. They speak knowledgeably about their roles and responsibilities, and about aspects of their local community.

Many younger pupils use their phonic knowledge well to decode unknown words and they have a good sight vocabulary. Many pupils develop as fluent, expressive readers. They show good understanding of texts and use appropriate strategies to determine meaning and understanding. Many older pupils predict what may happen next and describe fictional characters well. They recognise different genres and talk confidently about their favourite authors. Across the school, many pupils enjoy reading for pleasure and to research information.

Throughout the school, many pupils make suitable progress in developing their Welsh language skills. A majority of pupils follow simple instructions in Welsh and often greet adults using simple Welsh phrases. A majority know a few useful words and concepts, such as the names of colours and how to count to 20. As they move through the school they speak with greater fluency and confidence during Welsh lessons, although most lack confidence when speaking Welsh in informal situations around the school.

Overall, pupils' writing skills progress well. Many write purposefully to communicate in literacy lessons and across the curriculum. Many showcase their written work neatly, but a few pupils do not always take enough care with their presentation or spelling. Many of the youngest pupils develop their early writing skills well through a range of play-based activities, such as creating lists in the role play area. As they move through the school, many pupils develop their creative writing appropriately. For example, when Year 3 pupils create their own dragons, they use suitable adjectives, metaphors and similes to describe their story characters well. Many pupils are beginning to apply their writing skills well for a range of purposes across the curriculum. For example, older pupils create thoughtful letters to send home from the trenches when thinking about Remembrance Day.

During their time in school, many pupils develop appropriate mathematical skills. The youngest pupils count objects correctly and apply their knowledge when building towers with blocks of a given set of numbers. Many younger pupils use the language of maths accurately, naming shapes when creating imaginative pictures of homes.

Many older pupils develop their understanding of place value and their ability to recognise and classify shapes. They select the most appropriate methods of calculation when budgeting during entrepreneur week. However, generally, older pupils do not always demonstrate a secure understanding of number or a good knowledge of their times tables.

Most pupils use digital resources confidently and develop their digital skills appropriately as they move through the school. From a young age, they begin to use their digital skills constructively in a range of learning experiences. For example, in Year 1 they programme a toy to move around a path and use a data base to record their senses. Most older pupils use their skills well to support independent research and present their findings through creative presentations.

Most younger pupils enjoy a range of physical activities and develop their gross motor skills well. They display an increasing sense of space and control of movement as they go on imaginary bike rides. Older pupils build on these skills appropriately through varied opportunities to explore the outdoors, as part of the curriculum and during their break times.

Most pupils' creative skills are developing well. Younger pupils choose water colours independently and create their own rainbow painting. They use painting materials skilfully and select colours appropriately. Pupils in Year 1 and 2 make musical instruments from recycled materials such as bottles, sweet boxes and cartons. They decorate and play them whilst marching proudly around the locality for parents and neighbours to experience. Older pupils create interesting dance routines as part of their theme about Egyptians.

Well-being and attitudes to learning

Nearly all pupils are proud of their school and play an active role in school life. They feel safe and secure in a very caring environment. Pupils trust staff to support them and to act on any issues they raise to support their well-being. Nearly all pupils are happy, active members of the school community. Their behaviour is good when moving around school and in class. This helps to foster a productive working environment. Nearly all pupils are polite and respectful to each other and staff.

Most pupils have a good understanding of how to keep themselves safe and healthy. They enjoy taking part in the daily "Abercanfit" exercise programme to promote healthy living. They speak confidently about how to eat healthily and the benefits of regular physical exercise. Older pupils support the rest of the school well through their 'Healthy Hero' roles. They encourage others to have a healthy diet and to exercise. Most pupils know how to keep themselves safe online, including not sharing their password with others.

Most pupils are fully engaged in their learning and have positive attitudes to their work. They work with enthusiasm and share their learning confidently in class and to a wider audience, such as when Year 5 pupils share information enthusiastically with each other in relation to their topic on Egypt. Most pupils show strong levels of resilience. They discuss their work freely and describe how they overcome any problems or mistakes. Most pupils relish the chance to contribute to planning for topics and this secures their involvement and interest in learning.

Many pupils make good use of opportunities to undertake leadership roles that support school systems well. They take on a range of roles such as being part of the Eco Committee and the school council. Nearly all pupils carry out their responsibilities with pride and can explain how their work impacts positively on school life. This is a strength of the school. For example, their recent work to influence the design of the new school library has enabled pupils to raise the profile of reading across the school.

Most pupils discuss the importance of school values effectively. They talk knowledgably about their work to choose the values and the positive difference this makes to all pupils across the school. Most pupils are aware of the different cultures and beliefs within Wales and other countries and the importance of treating everyone with respect and understanding. They are developing a sound awareness of the need to protect the planet and have a good understanding of the importance of sustainability. For example, older pupils try to reduce their carbon footprint by walking to school and switching lights off.

Most pupils use the range of emotional support across the school well to understand how to respond to their emotions and feelings. For example, they use well-being boards in their classes every day to share their emotions and they know whom to talk to when they need support.

When given appropriate opportunities, a minority of pupils are beginning to review their learning suitably. A few pupils recognise their mistakes and make effective changes to improve their work. However, overall, many pupils do not have a secure understanding of what to do to improve their work.

Pupils are attending school more regularly this year compared to last year, when the COVID-19 pandemic had a negative impact nationally on school attendance. Considerably fewer pupils are persistently absent this year compared to last year.

Teaching and learning experiences

Leaders and staff have worked productively to create a stimulating curriculum for the whole school. They have worked closely with pupils, parents and governors to develop a purposeful curriculum vision based on the school's core values. Using this vision and by working collaboratively with other local schools, teachers have trialled new ideas and gauged the impact of any new approaches on pupils' learning. As a result, their newly designed curriculum is relevant, broad and balanced, and it meets the needs of all pupils. The school uses the community well to support pupils' understanding of their locality and heritage.

Throughout the school, teachers and support staff have strong working relationships with pupils. Many teachers use clever ways to entice pupils into learning and teaching moves at a lively pace. They use a variety of successful strategies that enable pupils to stay on task and complete their work. Younger pupils use the outdoors frequently to enhance their learning experiences well. Many teachers use questioning appropriately to develop pupils' thinking and check for understanding. Many teachers make strong links to prior learning, reinforce key ideas, and meet the needs of their pupils well. In a minority of lessons, teachers match tasks closely to pupils' abilities, offering all pupils an appropriate level of challenge.

Across the school there is a collaborative culture, in which pupils share their views and ideas with teachers and have valuable opportunities to influence the content of their learning. For example, pupils asked to visit more places around the locality. Teachers now weave these into learning experiences well, including visits to Mountain Ranch View, and through exploring the locality on community walks. Leaders and staff welcome the changes to the curriculum and have increased pupils' opportunities to make links across areas of learning and experience. For example, when learning about sustainability, older pupils joined with the 'Size of Wales' project, a unique charity that is making Wales part of the global solution to climate change. In addition, there is a broad range of engaging extra-curricular activities that enrich pupils' experiences. For instance, many pupils across the school learn Spanish.

Teachers provide many opportunities for pupils to their develop literacy and digital skills. These build systematically to secure progression in lessons and over time. However, provision for developing pupils' numeracy skills is inconsistent and does not ensure that all pupils acquire a secure understanding of mathematic including their times tables, for example. The school supports the development of pupils' social and emotional skills successfully. Staff work closely with external partners to provide a range of targeted intervention to provide for pupils' individual needs in a friendly, caring and nurturing environment. This means that pupils build their confidence to communicate their feelings more easily.

Teachers ensure a range of worthwhile opportunities to learn about the history and culture of Wales. For example, they celebrate special events such as the annual Eisteddfod and they visit local places of interest linked to their topics, such as Cyfartha Castle and Castell Coch. Pupils meet with members of the town council to talk about the school's Eco green wall project. They collaborate well with Welsh artists, celebrate special days, and learn about influential Welsh citizens. Most teachers provide appropriate opportunities for pupils to learn Welsh. Whilst there are regular Welsh sessions to practise their Welsh speaking skills, teachers do not always model spoken Welsh well enough for pupils to gain confidence in conversations.

Support staff across the school are caring and effective in their roles. They support pupils to make good progress in important aspects of their learning, such as in numeracy and literacy. They reflect the thoughtful and supportive ethos of the school in their working relationships with pupils and provide strong support for vulnerable pupils and those with additional learning needs.

Overall, the school makes appropriate use of assessment to track pupil progress in areas of learning as they move through the school. However, there is not a shared, embedded understanding of the impact that effective day-to-day feedback has on pupil progress. Many teachers do not develop pupils' own knowledge and understanding of how well they are doing and how they could improve well enough. In addition, they do not provide regular, effective verbal feedback for pupils, and this hampers the progress they make across the curriculum and over time.

Care, support and guidance

The school is an extremely happy community that supports pupils' needs effectively. Staff and pupils show respect for each other, and everyone works well as a team.

The school provides a nurturing environment where pupils feel safe and secure. Staff provide a broad range of interventions to support pupils' well-being effectively, such as daily well-being check ins and emotional literacy support. During the day, there are clear systems in place to help pupils who struggle to control their behaviour or who are anxious. Specific staff members provide bespoke support and guidance for these pupils. This helps them to regulate their emotions well and to access their learning appropriately.

The school is inclusive and provides an effective range of opportunities to support pupils with additional needs. There are clear systems in place to identify pupils in need of support, plan interventions and track progress. Staff use an online assessment tool appropriately to assess pupils on entry to the school. This enables staff to understand their needs and review their progress. Support staff use programmes that focus on improving pupils' emotional well-being, literacy and numeracy skills skilfully. As a result of intervention and support, most pupils gain confidence, work with greater enthusiasm and make suitable progress. The school also works in close partnership with a variety of external agencies to provide effective support for pupils with additional learning needs.

The school's inclusive ethos and values ensure that all pupils have regular opportunities over time to participate fully in the life of the school through membership of various school committees and teams. They meet regularly and staff value their contribution to the leadership of the school and the community highly. The school's environment and collective worship sessions promote pupils' spiritual and moral development successfully. Staff encourage pupils to consider the views of other people and to respect diversity and the importance of the school values. They provide regular, meaningful opportunities for pupils to reflect on the values that they demonstrate, such as through their value of the week and weekly celebration assemblies.

School leaders ensure that pupils are fully involved in the process of decision-making in relation to all aspects of school life. Older pupils have good opportunities to act as role models and to provide support for younger pupils, for example through their role as sports leaders in the daily "Abercanfit" sessions. Staff provide appropriate opportunities for pupils to learn about different cultures and traditions through their work across the curriculum. The school uses a commercial scheme and bespoke programmes effectively to promote pupils' personal development. This approach helps pupils to develop their understanding of healthy relationships.

Teachers and support staff provide appropriate opportunities for pupils to celebrate the history and traditions of Wales. They organise a range of events in partnership with the community that reinforce the sense of belonging and help pupils to treat others with respect and care. For example, through their intergenerational work with Greenhill Manor old people's home, older pupils learn to show high levels of care and compassion. The school provides extensive after-school activities, including football, netball and tag rugby. The clubs are well attended and provide pupils with opportunities to extend their learning and experiences.

The school offers an extensive range of opportunities to engage families with their children's learning. For example, regular family literacy sessions help parents and children to work and learn together effectively. All staff support this beneficial work

well. The family liaison officer strengthens the school's work with families further by providing bespoke support for pupils and parents in need of additional help or advice.

The school has a strong culture of safeguarding, which is promoted effectively through the school vision, aims and the curriculum. There are clear procedures in place to ensure the safety and well-being of all. The site is well managed and provides a safe, attractive environment for all pupils. The school's robust systems monitor persistent absenteeism well. As a result, attendance figures indicate an improving picture compared to previous years when attendance was lower.

Leadership and management

The headteacher provides effective, thoughtful leadership with a clear focus on developing the well-being of pupils and raising standards across the school. The school motto "All different, all equal, all shining", guides the vision for school improvement, which the head shares effectively with all stakeholders.

Leaders place great emphasis on equality of access to learning. They consider the cost of the school day carefully and minimise the impact of costs on family finances appropriately. For example, they use grants, school funds and business and industry links to subsidise the cost of school trips. In addition, the school employs a family liaison officer who provides worthwhile support to pupils and their families, such as ongoing advice regarding relationships at home.

The deputy headteacher provides highly effective support to the strategic development of the school. For example, her ongoing work to develop the school's curriculum is successful. The deputy headteacher and members of the senior leadership team support the headteacher purposefully. They work well as a team and fulfil their roles and responsibilities appropriately. For example, they lead departmental teams to develop a shared understanding of new initiatives. Together with the headteacher, they provide clear strategic direction for the school and set appropriate professional standards.

All staff have clear roles and responsibilities and work effectively to support each other and to meet the needs of pupils. Support staff are an integral part of the school team and contribute successfully to improving pupils' standards, well-being and social skills. Arrangements for the management of staff performance are appropriate. Targets link well to the school's priorities and ensure a collaborative approach to improvement among staff. Leaders challenge underperformance in teaching robustly through appropriate school systems. They provide appropriate support through use of an established system of coaching and mentoring.

Leaders track pupil performance carefully and use the information suitably to identify areas where standards need to improve. This has led to improvements, for example in the development of pupils' independent skills across the "Explorer" classes of younger aged pupils.

The headteacher and senior leaders lead appropriate termly monitoring and self-evaluation activities, including book scrutiny, learning walks and pupil progress reviews. This helps leaders to identify areas for improvement in learning. However, self-evaluation activities do not always provide a clear enough picture of important

aspects of teaching that require improvement, including the need to focus on improving whole-school assessment for learning processes and inconsistencies in the teaching of mathematics.

Governors are very supportive of the school and senior leaders keep them well informed. They are fully aware of national priorities. For example, they understand the need to develop the school's curriculum and support this as a focus in the school development plan. Governors place high priority on closing the gap between poverty and attainment. They support grant spending on a variety of interventions for pupils who are eligible for free school meals or from low-income households. Alongside the headteacher, they monitor this carefully, particularly in relation to its impact on pupil well-being, which has been a focus following the pandemic. Governors work with leaders to ensure that suitable policies and procedures are in place to promote the importance of healthy eating and drinking among pupils.

The headteacher and senior staff collaborate well with cluster schools and external partners to plan appropriate provision. This supports pupil transition to high school effectively. Collaboration across the cluster also helps the school with its ongoing curriculum development appropriately. For example, the work of curriculum leaders across the cluster ensures that learning experiences are consistent and meet curriculum requirements.

Leaders link professional learning suitably to performance management and to personal development objectives, such as the opportunity to take part in higher level teaching assistant training. Whilst leaders provide an appropriate range of professional learning opportunities, learning amongst staff is not always specific enough and not carefully matched to the key areas that need most improvement, for example the need to improve inconsistencies in teaching such as assessment for learning.

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:

Publications Section

Estyn

Anchor Court, Keen Road

Cardiff

CF24 5JW or by email to publications@estyn.gov.wales

This and other Estyn publications are available on our website: www.estyn.gov.wales

© Crown Copyright 2023: 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.

Publication date: 19/04/2023