



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

A report on

St David's R.C. Jnr. & Inf. School

**Caldicot Way
Pontrhydyrun
Cwmbran
Torfaen
NP44 1UF**

Date of inspection: March 2023

by

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

About St David's R.C. Jnr. & Inf. School

Name of provider	St David's R.C. Jnr. Inf. School
Local authority	Torfaen County Borough Council
Language of the provider	English
Type of school	Primary
Religious character	Roman Catholic
Number of pupils on roll	201
Pupils of statutory school age	157
Number in nursery classes	29
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%)	23.2%
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%)	23.6%
Percentage of pupils who speak Welsh at home	0.0%
Percentage of pupils with English as an additional language	5.1%
Date of headteacher appointment	01/09/2016
Date of previous Estyn inspection (if applicable)	01/05/2014
Start date of inspection	06/03/2023

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

St David's R.C. Primary School is a happy, caring and welcoming school that has pupils' well-being at its heart. Its vision for 'Learning, Loving, Laughing – Following in the footsteps of Jesus' permeates through the whole school community. Staff and pupils feel valued and are an integral part of school improvement processes.

Leaders encourage purposeful collaboration in their drive to develop the school as one where staff are continuously learning. They encourage both pupils and staff to lead individual research enquiries to support their learning. The school leads professional learning in Welsh across the cluster to develop pupils as bilingual citizens. Throughout the school, teachers incorporate the Welsh language into their lessons to a high standard. Over time, most pupils develop strong Welsh language skills and are confident and proud to be Welsh.

Teachers have created interesting learning environments in classrooms and in the outside areas. Teachers make good use of the outdoor environment to enhance pupils' learning experiences and to develop their well-being and creativity. Pupils are thoroughly engaged in their learning and they describe their learning as fun. Many pupils are an active part of their learning and respond effectively to verbal feedback. However, feedback does not always help pupils to know how well they are doing and how to improve their work.

The school is an inclusive, accessible and supportive community. Leaders have high aspirations for all and collaborate and communicate highly effectively with partners to enhance the pupils' learning experiences and to support their well-being.

Recommendations

R1 Strengthen teachers' use of assessment and feedback to support pupils during lessons and over time

What happens next

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

Estyn will invite the school to prepare a case study on its work in relation to leading professional learning across cluster schools to develop the bilingualism of pupils, for dissemination on Estyn's website.

Main evaluation

Learning

Most pupils, including those with additional learning needs (ALN) and those eligible for free school meals, make strong progress in their learning during their time at the school. As they move through the school, many pupils deepen their understanding and acquire knowledge in an interesting range of learning contexts.

Younger pupils talk confidently about their work and listen exceptionally well to other pupils and their teachers. Nearly all respond well to their peers, ask appropriate questions, and show respect for others when expressing their opinions. As pupils move through the school, they continue to develop their speaking and listening skills effectively. Most pupils communicate thoughtfully and sensitively with their friends and share their ideas confidently.

Most pupils' reading skills are developing well. The reception pupils use an appropriate range of phonic strategies to read familiar and unfamiliar words. Many older pupils read accurately in various contexts. They vary their tone of voice and take note of punctuation correctly to show their understanding. As they move through the school, most pupils use their reading skills independently to support their learning in other areas of the curriculum. Most read confidently and many older pupils are competent readers. Most older pupils transfer their knowledge and love of books skilfully to the younger pupils through the school's well-considered reading buddy scheme.

Many pupils develop their writing skills appropriately as they gain confidence in their work. Many reception pupils record their ideas through mark-making, forming legible letters and writing simple words. By Year 2, most pupils write in a range of different forms, choosing vocabulary carefully and using capital letters and full stops accurately on the whole. As their skills develop, a majority of pupils use adjectives, different sentence structures and appropriate punctuation to enhance their work. However, a minority of pupils' spelling and advanced punctuation is less well developed. Nearly all pupils write extensively across the areas of learning in a variety of genres. For example, pupils in Year 4 write clear instructions for making puppets and pupils in Year 5 write interesting narrative stories based on an island adventure. The standard of pupils' writing across the curriculum matches the standard of writing in literacy lessons closely.

Most pupils' Welsh language skills are strong. They speak and respond to one another and visitors confidently and most older pupils extend their sentences successfully. As a result of these high standards in spoken Welsh, many of the older pupils also read a variety of words and texts confidently and use clear sentence structures in their writing and mutate words accurately where necessary. Over time, most pupils develop strong Welsh language skills and are confident and proud to be Welsh speakers.

As they move through the school, most pupils develop a strong understanding of the different areas of mathematics. In all year groups, pupils use their mathematical skills competently and confidently in lessons. The youngest pupils enjoy counting using a

variety of natural objects such as shells and marbles. Most recite number rhymes enthusiastically and develop a firm grasp of numbers and their value. In Years 2 and 3, most pupils consolidate their skills effectively. They develop a good understanding of even and odd numbers and solve simple fraction problems successfully. Older pupils multiply whole numbers and decimals up to a thousand and calculate percentages using large numbers successfully. Across the school, most pupils apply their mathematical knowledge and skills effectively across the curriculum and build on prior learning. For example, In Year 6 when studying the life of Ernest Shackleton, they calculate the cost of insulated clothing and equipment needed to undertake a mission to the Antarctic. Most pupils learn the skills to solve problems well. They use problem solving strategies effectively to identify key words, extract information, and correctly choose the appropriate mathematical operations.

Most pupils develop their digital skills purposefully as they move through the school. From a young age, they begin to use their digital skills constructively in a rich range of learning experiences across learning areas. Most older pupils use their digital skills very well to support independent research and many present their work through creative multimedia presentations and animation programs.

Nearly all pupils' physical skills build gradually through a variety of stimulating activities. The youngest pupils develop their fine motor skills successfully, for example by participating in a variety of activities such as sewing and dough disco sessions. In addition, the youngest pupils solve problems collaboratively when building a shelter for the dragon's eggs.

Pupils' collaborative and creative skills develop well throughout the school, particularly through their independent learning journal activities. For example, in Year 2, pupils created mini beats from clay and, in Year 3, pupils used materials creatively to create a paper mâché mountain.

Well-being and attitudes to learning

Most pupils feel happy and safe in school. In classrooms and around the school, pupils are kind, courteous and considerate. They are sensitive to the needs of others and show respect for the rights of others. Nearly all pupils feel that the school helps them to treat everyone fairly. They have strong relationships with adults and with each other. This contributes notably to pupils' confidence and their positive attitude to school.

Most pupils feel that their views are valued by staff. Pupils influence their learning as well as wider aspects of school life regularly and thoughtfully. Pupils take on leadership roles eagerly, and this helps them to develop their personal and social skills. For example, pupils from the eco committee attended an event at the Senedd about the United Nations Climate Change Conference 'COP27'. This inspired them to raise awareness of global, ethical issues back in school with their peers and take action to reduce negative impacts on our climate, such as planting trees in the school grounds. Pupils lead the school in supporting people in need. For example, pupils in the 'Mini Vinnies' group that mirrors the work of a Catholic charity ran a reverse advent calendar in December that collected a large amount of food for a local foodbank.

Nearly all pupils have very positive attitudes to learning and enjoy much of their learning. This is reflected in the high attendance rates of pupils this year. Nearly all pupils engage well in their learning and contribute enthusiastically to what and how they learn. They respect their teachers, support staff and peers, and are very supportive of each other, for example through their buddy scheme.

Most pupils collaborate well in pairs or small groups and take up opportunities to work independently and maturely, for example through their learning journals. Many pupils are ambitious learners who are not afraid to have a go and make mistakes. Across the school, pupils respond positively to the verbal feedback they receive during their learning. They appreciate the benefits of being challenged in their work and demonstrate good resilience when learning. For example, the youngest pupils work collaboratively when building a house for the three bears and older pupils persevere while solving the height of the world's tallest Easter egg.

Pupils participate in an extensive range of clubs, activities and events at lunchtime and after school. These include a variety of sports, arts, science, technology, reading, Welsh and a 'nurture club'. Through these, pupils feel valued, develop useful skills that support the curriculum, and build strong relationships with each other and with members of staff.

Pupils know how to make choices that support their health. They are often physically active in school, for example through the regular use of outdoor learning, daily mile walks and events like a 'Games-a-thon' that engage pupils in a variety of fun physical activities.

Teaching and learning experiences

Staff collaborate highly effectively to develop an engaging and exciting curriculum that ensures pupils have a range of interesting learning experiences. These experiences are inspired by the local environment and reflect the vibrant cultures that make up modern Wales and the thriving Welsh language.

Teachers plan whole-school termly themes that integrate learning across the curriculum highly successfully. These themes are guided by what pupils want to learn about and this means that the learning is interesting and fun for pupils. In addition, teachers encourage pupils to use their learning journals to plan and present learner-led enquiries as part of their class theme.

Leaders ensure that the curriculum builds systematically and coherently on pupils' existing knowledge, understanding, skills and experiences. As a result, pupils build well on previous learning and develop their skills progressively.

The school uses the outdoors effectively as an integral part of its provision. Staff plan exciting learning opportunities regularly and this supports pupils' well-being and creativity successfully. For example, Year 2 pupils locate and record the different habitats of mini beasts and Year 5 pupils work collaboratively when building a shelter to protect themselves from the elements. The well thought out school grounds enhance provision for the development of pupils' physical and team building skills.

The school fosters a strong Welsh ethos where all staff have high aspirations for the development of pupils' Welsh communication skills. An outstanding feature of the school's work is the provision for developing pupils' listening and speaking skills in Welsh. Staff are successful language role models, and this helps pupils to become confident and respectful speakers, keen to develop and use new vocabulary. Staff promote the use of Welsh language skills continuously around the school and in classrooms through everyday language, bilingual wall displays, marking, bilingual dialogue with staff and specific language lessons.

Teachers and support staff offer many learning activities to develop pupils' personal and social education skills well. Through visits and community links, most pupils have a clear understanding of issues relating to their well-being, lifestyle choices and behaviours. The school has a strong ethos to promote and support pupils' physical and emotional well-being.

Throughout the school, teachers have crafted well-organised and interesting learning environments for pupils; classrooms are lively and busy. Nearly all teachers have good subject knowledge and plan effectively, often using pupils' ideas, to ensure that learning experiences are exciting and engaging. They manage pupils' behaviour well and pupils are engrossed in their work. Most lessons move at a good pace. Pupils visibly enjoy their experiences, and have fun learning.

Skilled teaching assistants support pupils effectively to make good progress in important aspects of their learning. They reflect the warm, 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. All staff are good language role models for pupils. All staff build positive working relationships with pupils and develop a strong culture of trust, care and respect for others throughout the school.

Overall, the school makes good use of assessment to track pupil progress in areas of learning as they move through the school. Most teachers use questioning effectively to assess pupils' understanding. In a few classes, teachers involve pupils in evaluating their own work and the work of their peers suitably. Many teachers provide worthwhile verbal feedback to help pupils improve their work. However, feedback does not always help pupils to know how well they are doing and how to improve their work. As a result, this limits the progress they make.

The school communicates well with parents about their children's progress. Parents appreciate online parent meetings and written reports. They provide useful information about the progress they make and what they need to do to improve.

Care, support and guidance

There is a warm sense of family in the school community. The school promotes pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development very well. The values of the Catholic church are woven through school life.

The school supports pupils' emotional and social needs highly effectively. The staff team is caring and supportive, with a strong focus on nurturing pupils' well-being. This ensures that pupils enjoy coming to school and engage positively with a wide

range of learning experiences. Staff are attentive and sensitive to the needs of individual pupils. Staff work closely with parents and carers to understand how they can best support pupils in school.

The extensive use of outdoor learning has a beneficial impact on pupils' well-being as well as engaging pupils in their learning. Younger pupils in particular move freely between indoor and outdoor areas through the day.

Staff value the voice of pupils highly and take account of their views. Through formal and informal approaches, the school offers extensive opportunities for pupils to influence their learning and the wider life of the school. For example, pupils campaigned to purchase a portable public address speaker system to use in the yard to play music, including Welsh songs, and to encourage dancing at breaktimes as an alternative to ball games.

The school has good provision to meet the needs of pupils with additional learning needs. Leaders provide teachers and support staff with useful profiles of all learners. They are conscious of pupils' needs and use appropriate strategies during lessons to provide inclusive learning activities. For the very few pupils with an individual development plan, staff design the school's provision thoughtfully to respond to the individual needs of pupils and support them to make progress with their objectives. The school involves pupils, parents and external agencies regularly in reviewing and developing this provision.

Support staff provide tailored, individual interventions for targeted pupils to improve their reading skills. These 'catch-up' interventions are highly successful. Staff track and monitor pupils' progress carefully, and adjust the provision where necessary. The school's interventions support most pupils, including those receiving free school meals, to make strong progress.

The school offers a wide range of interesting clubs and activities at lunchtime and after school, covering a range of sports, the arts, STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics), drama, sports, reading, and Welsh. Pupils have many opportunities to develop their leadership skills. The school provides worthwhile experiences that enable pupils to take part in performances to develop self-confidence and improve their speaking skills. For example, they take part in church services and class performances for parents.

The school promotes a culture of safety, empathy, care and support. There is an established system to report safeguarding concerns about pupils and the school makes timely referrals to outside agencies when appropriate. The school has a strong culture of safeguarding with clear arrangements for monitoring pupils' attendance and punctuality. The school's arrangements for safeguarding pupils meet requirements and are not a cause for concern.

Leadership and management

The headteacher provides strong, thoughtful leadership. She works conscientiously alongside school leaders and governors to provide a clear strategic direction for the development of the school. They work effectively with parents, pupils and staff to set the school's vision, evaluate the quality of provision and plan and deliver

improvements. There is a strong team culture amongst all staff and they ensure that the well-being of pupils is everyone's main concern. Overall, leaders establish and maintain a strong culture of safeguarding at the school.

School systems for evaluating the quality of its work and the progress achieved by pupils are streamlined and robust. A strength of this approach is that all staff are involved in monitoring activities and this enables them to be an integral part of the school improvement process. For example, following a whole-school audit of maths, staff worked together to produce rich plans to enhance pupils' experiences and boost pupils' numeracy skills across the curriculum. The school values the opinions of all stakeholders. For example, leaders regularly ask pupils and parents for their views about the use of outdoor learning and homework activities. Older pupils work closely with school leaders to monitor the work of the school, such as evaluating learning environments and giving helpful feedback to class teachers. This purposeful collaborative working supports the school in its drive to develop as a learning organisation.

The headteacher grows leadership capacity across the school highly effectively. Leadership is purposeful at all levels and this allows the school to manage change successfully. The roles and responsibilities of leaders and staff are well defined and communicated clearly. Overall, senior leaders have a good track record of improving pupil performance and the quality of education. For example, work to improve outdoor learning for pupils and their Welsh language skills is highly effective.

Leaders organise the performance management of staff well. It links closely to school improvement priorities and aligns with professional learning activities. Leaders ensure that teaching assistants receive bespoke training that enables them to meet the specific needs of pupils effectively. School leaders are committed to staff development. They create time for teachers to read and research new learning strategies and for all staff to grow into leadership roles and progress through their careers. For example, all staff lead on aspects of the curriculum, support pupil leadership groups and lead professional learning sessions.

The school's work in partnership with parents, support agencies and other schools is highly successful. Parents trust that the school is always acting in their children's best interests. Leaders ensure that important celebrations throughout the year include the whole school community. There are effective curriculum celebration events for parents where pupils share their work and experiences. The school joins with the local parish regularly and together they support local families and charities. Leaders encourage collaboration. For instance, staff work with professionals beyond the school, such as Gwent Well-Being, pupil welfare officers and bereavement counsellors, and this work helps to secure positive outcomes for pupils.

Work to address national priorities is progressing well. There is a clear emphasis on refining the school's approaches to the Curriculum for Wales, addressing ALN reform and developing pupils' Welsh language skills across the school. The school has efficient processes to track pupils' progress in developing their literacy and numeracy skills and most pupils have good digital skills. In addition, the school is committed to reducing the impact of poverty on pupils' outcomes.

Governors are supportive of the school. They are developing an understanding of their roles and fulfil their responsibilities appropriately, for example in areas such as financial management and self-evaluation. Governors are learning to be critical friends and how to support the school to move forward. They gain an accurate and detailed picture of the school by visiting, talking and listening to pupils, meeting staff and receiving informative reports from the headteacher. They keep up to date on the school's progress against national priorities, such as the need to address the risks of pupil deprivation and support the school's positive approach to developing outdoor learning. In addition, governors ensure that suitable policies and procedures are in place to promote the importance of healthy eating and drinking among pupils.

School leaders and governors manage finances effectively and make sensible decisions that benefit all pupils. The school uses its grant funding effectively to ensure targeted support for vulnerable pupils and to provide them with experiences that they might not otherwise have. Additional funds support provision for a range of additional approaches, including beneficial pastoral care to support pupils' emotional well-being and interventions to support pupils' progress in key skills.

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

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