



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

A report on

Abercynon Community Primary School

**Ynysmeurig Road
Abercynon
Mountain Ash
RCT
CF45 4SU**

Date of inspection: May 2023

by

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

About Abercynon Community Primary School

Name of provider	Abercynon Community Primary School
Local authority	Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council
Language of the provider	English
Type of school	Primary
Religious character	
Number of pupils on roll	333
Pupils of statutory school age	263
Number in nursery classes	32
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%)	25.9%
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%)	5.3%
Percentage of pupils who speak Welsh at home	*
Percentage of pupils with English as an additional language	*
Date of headteacher appointment	01/01/2012
Date of previous Estyn inspection (if applicable)	02/03/2015
Start date of inspection	02/05/2023

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

Abercynon Community Primary School is a welcoming, inclusive school that places a high priority on the well-being of its pupils. The headteacher and senior leaders are highly invested in the school and its community. Staff at all levels work together effectively in pupils' best interests and are proud of the positive relationships with them. As a result, most pupils feel happy, safe and valued.

During their time in school, most pupils make effective progress in many areas of the curriculum and strong progress in developing their listening and speaking skills. However, across the school, pupils do not develop their Welsh language skills as well as they could. Staff collaborate successfully to plan interesting authentic learning experiences to ensure that the curriculum is broad and balanced. They enrich the curriculum well through regular educational trips and visitors to the school. Teaching across the school has many strengths. However, self-evaluation processes have not identified that, in a minority of lessons, teachers do not provide pupils with enough challenge.

Staff know pupils well and understand their needs successfully. They provide strong support for pupils that need extra help, including those with additional learning needs (ALN). Staff in the specialist resource class have created a highly inclusive environment where pupils grow in confidence and make effective progress. As a result, nearly all pupils' individual needs are met, enabling them to thrive and grow in confidence.

Recommendations

- R1 Ensure that self-evaluation and improvement strategies focus sharply on the impact of teaching on learning
- R2 Address the inconsistencies in the quality of teaching across the school with a particular focus on ensuring that all pupils are challenged effectively
- R3 Improve pupils' Welsh language oracy skills across the school

What happens next

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

Main evaluation

Learning

During their time in school, most pupils make effective progress in many areas of the curriculum. Pupils eligible for free school meals make particularly good progress. Those with ALN in the specialist resource class, and across the school, make effective progress from their starting points.

Most pupils develop their literacy skills well. Many younger pupils increase their confidence in listening and speaking quickly. This progress is built upon successfully as pupils move through the school. Most older pupils listen to each other carefully and support their peers to develop ideas through discussion successfully. Many pupils are beginning to develop their Spanish language skills effectively. For example, in Year 5, nearly all pupils learn a range of simple phrases with enthusiasm.

When they start school, many pupils begin to learn a few Welsh words such as simple greetings and colours successfully. A minority of older pupils ask and answer a few simple questions using Welsh language when given support. However, across the school pupils' Welsh language oracy skills are underdeveloped.

Most pupils make strong progress in reading. In the nursery class, pupils listen attentively to a story and many answer simple questions about a character well. As they move through the school, they learn to read fluently, using a range of strategies to read unfamiliar words with confidence. Many older pupils read a variety of complex texts independently for sustained periods. They select and summarise information from a variety of sources and show a deep understanding of the main ideas and significant details.

Most pupils make effective progress in developing their writing. From a young age, they show enthusiasm when experimenting with mark making and letter formation. By Year 2 many pupils are motivated, confident writers. They use vocabulary effectively such as when they describe the 'glistening sand' or 'clear sea'. Many older pupils plan their writing well and use modelled examples successfully to support their understanding. For example, they identify the main features of a newspaper report or produce a fact file about life in Victorian times.

Across the school, most pupils develop their understanding of the different areas of mathematics well. Most younger pupils gain a firm grasp of numbers and their value. They confidently count to 10 in a range of languages, including Spanish and Bengali. Most pupils develop a strong understanding of measures. For instance, pupils in Years 1 and 2 extend their understanding of weight as they use digital scales to find the heaviest items. Most older pupils build successfully on these early skills as they move through the school. For example, they work confidently with negative and positive numbers when using a thermometer. Many pupils apply their numeracy skills in authentic contexts successfully.

Throughout the school, most pupils develop their physical and creative skills well. For example, younger pupils use a range of tools to explore paint on a large scale. In

Years 3 and 4, pupils combine traditional steps and repeating patterns well to choreograph and perform their own folk dance. Older pupils create imaginative poems, relating the movement of a river to the behaviour of different animals. In the specialist resource class, many pupils show a particular interest in developing their creative skills. They produce detailed work, such as when they create paintings inspired by a range of well-known artists.

Many pupils extend their thinking and problem-solving skills effectively when given the opportunity. For example, in Year 2 a few pupils try different approaches when attempting to make a stable light house from construction bricks. Younger pupils access tablet computers and interactive whiteboards enthusiastically to access a range of games to support their learning. Most older pupils use an application to share thoughts and ideas appropriately, such as when they collaborate to create a class slideshow about Wales. However, pupils' data handling and coding skills are generally underdeveloped.

Well-being and attitudes to learning

The school is a happy and welcoming environment where most pupils, including those in the specialist resource class, feel safe and valued. Most pupils behave well in lessons and move around the school in a calm manner. There are positive working relationships between adults and pupils, and pupils know where to turn for support or guidance. Many pupils feel that adults in the school listen to their views effectively and take them into account when considering decisions that affect them.

Most pupils demonstrate care and support for one another. For example, younger pupils readily nominate their peers to go on the 'caring and sharing tree' after demonstrating exemplary thought for each other. Nearly all pupils understand the purpose of rules and rewards in school, and many use their voice proactively to promote ideas they care about. Those who take part in the many leadership groups take their roles seriously and support the school to make improvements well. For example, the 'well-being council' introduce playtime buddies to make sure that no one feels left out during break times.

Many pupils participate enthusiastically in a range of after school clubs. For example, they enjoy attending gardening, karate and creative clubs. Pupils are particularly proud of their recent sporting achievements in football. These activities benefit pupils physically as well as contributing positively to their well-being.

Most pupils have a good understanding of the importance of eating and drinking healthily and discuss the benefits confidently. They choose to eat healthy snacks at break time and many pupils enjoy physical exercise such as participating in sports and swimming lessons. Across the school, most pupils understand the importance of celebrating diversity and ensuring equality and fairness. For example, pupils in the football club are proud to have a mixed team of boys and girls, who have equal opportunities to compete in football tournaments.

Most pupils across the school have suitable opportunities to make decisions about their learning. For example, they generate ideas about what they want to learn at the beginning of each topic. Many younger pupils make effective choices as they access a range of beneficial resources independently as they play. However, opportunities

for pupils to make purposeful decisions about their learning are generally underdeveloped.

Most pupils listen well to others and speak with confidence about their work and school life. Many pupils recall prior learning effectively at the beginning of lessons and a few pupils readily link learning to their experience successfully. Across the school, pupils work together productively in pairs and small groups. Generally, in most lessons, pupils show a suitable level of interest in their work. When teaching engages them well, they sustain concentration and persevere when facing difficulties. Nearly all pupils in the specialist resource class show enthusiasm and interest in learning experiences such as when they use a microscope or solve tricky number problems.

Most pupils have a good understanding of what they need to do to complete a task and settle to activities quickly. They value and demonstrate respect for the contributions of others. For example, when collaborating online to learn and create a shared fact file about bees. Most pupils understand the feedback given by their teachers and respond to it positively to support their learning. Most pupils have a good understanding of how to stay safe when using the internet.

Teaching and learning experiences

The school has established a clear vision for their 'Aspire' curriculum, which is firmly based on the school's motto of 'Caring, Believing, Achieving'. Staff are actively experimenting with curriculum design and work well with all partners to develop curriculum provision. Staff collaborate effectively to plan interesting authentic learning experiences. They ensure that the curriculum is broad and balanced and builds systematically on pupils' existing knowledge, understanding and skills in most areas of learning and experience.

The school enhances the curriculum well through the use of engaging immersion days at the beginning of each topic and celebration events at their end. For example, pupils invite parents to a 'taster menu' evening where they serve them food from around the world to showcase their learning during a 'Global Gourmet' topic.

A range of close community links enhance pupils' learning successfully. During an 'On my Doorstep' topic, younger pupils develop a sense of Cynefin well. For example, they make a map to guide Santa around Abercynon. Older pupils share their enjoyment of learning about life in Patagonia with a member of the local church and compare this with life in their village. As a result, most pupils appreciate the importance of being multi-lingual citizens who are learning to speak Spanish and Welsh, and develop a strong sense of belonging within the community.

Staff identify frequent opportunities to enrich the curriculum through educational trips and visitors to the school. For example, when celebrating carnivals around the world, younger pupils enjoy the opportunity to work with specialists to learn samba dances, create music and hold a masked parade. Staff provide a beneficial range of provision indoors and outside that help young pupils to learn effectively through play and exploration. This has a particularly positive impact on their communication, personal, social, and physical development. For example, younger pupils collaborate and

develop their use of tools purposefully as they pretend to make pies in the mud kitchen.

Nearly all staff have effective working relationships with pupils, which foster a supportive and inclusive environment. Staff manage pupils' behaviour well in classes and around the school and they provide highly successful support for pupils with significant emotional needs. Most teachers have clear learning intentions for lessons and provide useful explanations to ensure pupils understand what they need to do. Across the school, teachers recap on pupils' prior learning at the beginning of lessons well. This supports pupils learning effectively. For example, it helps them to remember key vocabulary and concepts, giving them a solid foundation for new learning.

In many lessons, the pace of learning is effective and supports pupils to maintain interest and concentrate well. However, in a few lessons the pace is too slow. For example, younger pupils spend too long sitting on the carpet or older pupils are given lengthy periods to complete straightforward tasks. Staff provide beneficial challenge for pupils in many lessons. In a few cases this is particularly effective for more able pupils. However, in a minority of lessons teachers do not ensure that all pupils are challenged well enough. For example, they provide a group of pupils with too much direction. This limits opportunities for pupils to think for themselves and develop their independence in learning.

In most cases, teachers and support staff know their pupils' strengths and areas for improvement well. They encourage pupils and praise them for their achievements. A majority of teachers routinely use effective questioning to challenge pupils' thinking and check for understanding. In Year 5, teachers use probing questions to support pupils to extend their thinking and identify how they can improve their work. However, the quality of feedback does not always help pupils to understand the next steps in their learning.

Staff in the specialist resource class plan interesting learning experiences to meet the individual needs of pupils successfully. A wide range of enrichment activities such as regular horse-riding lessons engage pupils and support learning well.

Care, support and guidance

The school provides a caring and nurturing environment where most pupils feel safe and secure. Close relationships with parents and carers ensure that families receive timely support to meet their needs. This contributes well to raising pupils' self-esteem and confidence. There is clear respect between pupils, and staff share a consistent and calm approach to supporting positive behaviour.

Leaders have developed an approach to supporting pupils' emotional well-being that underpins the caring culture of the school successfully. For example, well-being bases placed around the school support pupils to regulate their emotions effectively. Staff provide useful opportunities for pupils to share and discuss their feelings when appropriate. As a result, most pupils develop their confidence and resilience well.

Staff monitor the progress of pupils and identify when they need extra support effectively. For example, focused interventions for developing numeracy and literacy

skills help most pupils make good progress in these areas. The provision for pupils with ALN is robust and meets their individual needs successfully. The school has helpful systems for the early identification of pupils who need additional support, and as a result they receive targeted provision in a timely manner. The ALN co-ordinator works well with a range of outside agencies to ensure pupils receive any specialist support they may require. Staff in the specialist resource class have created a warm inclusive environment where pupils grow in confidence and make effective progress. They know and care for pupils very well. As a result, nearly all pupils' individual needs are met.

Healthy lifestyles are promoted purposefully throughout the school, such as the need for pupils to eat healthy snacks at break time, and the benefits of drinking water throughout the day. Pupils in all classes have access to a beneficial range of extra-curricular activities. These clubs enhance pupils' health and well-being effectively and enable them to develop new interests. The school provides ample opportunities for pupils to join leadership groups including the 'school council', 'Ciw Iaith' and 'eco council'. These groups provide valuable opportunities for pupils to influence aspects of school life. For example, they have made improvements to outdoor areas such as the popular Zen Den.

The school encourages pupils to engage with the creative arts positively through their studies and educational visits. For example, pupils in the specialist resource class are inspired by a visit to Cardiff Museum. The 'Oriol' project supports pupils to appreciate the work of Welsh artists such as Rhiannon Roberts and Martyn Evans and use them as inspiration for their own artwork successfully.

The school provides beneficial opportunities for pupils to develop their moral and spiritual awareness. Staff provide pupils with time to reflect on shared values such as teamwork and gratitude during assemblies. This supports pupils to value the contribution of others effectively. The school challenges stereotypes well and supports every pupil to understand that they are a valuable and unique member of society. For example, staff use stories and role-play to help younger pupils understand that everyone is different but has special qualities.

Staff develop pupils' understanding of sustainability and the need to look after the environment effectively. Younger pupils develop their curiosity about nature and learn to look after outdoor areas during 'Muddy Monday' activities. Older pupils consider global issues well. For example, they collaborate with Welsh Water to promote a clear argument when asking the question 'Should plastics be banned?'

All staff are committed to ensuring the safety of pupils in their care. As a result, the school's arrangements for safeguarding pupils meet requirements and are not a cause for concern. The school has clear systems to track and analyse attendance information and takes appropriate action where needed. Rates of pupil attendance have increased successfully and a recent exercise in improving punctuality has shown a marked improvement in the number of late arrivals.

Leadership and management

The headteacher and senior leaders are highly invested in the school and its community. They are caring, accessible, and set a clear, shared vision that everyone contributes to. Through a determined focus on promoting well-being and personal development, leaders have sustained a strong family community to which pupils and parents have a firm allegiance and affection.

Staff at all levels work together purposefully in pupils' best interests and are proud of the positive relationships. As a result, most pupils are happy and make effective progress through many areas of the school's curriculum.

Leaders have built and maintain highly effective relationships with parents. Parents are well informed about their child's progress and the work of the school through digital platforms and detailed and individualised written reports. Formal and informal lines of communication between parents and the school are clear and productive. For example, the 'Parent Café' offers parents the opportunity to complement or query the work of the school informally. Consequently, parents trust all staff to act upon any concerns they may raise.

Leaders' operational management of the school is strong. Throughout the school, staff have clearly defined roles and responsibilities. Leaders distribute responsibility for important areas of the school's work across the senior leadership team well. Overall, staff performance is monitored effectively through a robust cycle of performance management.

Purposeful whole staff communication ensures that everyone is kept well informed about what is happening in school. Staff contribute towards identifying school improvement priorities appropriately. Consequently, all staff have actively participated in the recent curriculum development work.

Leaders promote the professional development of staff successfully. All staff receive worthwhile professional learning in addition to statutory annual safeguarding training. Professional learning is linked closely to whole school improvement priorities, including through innovative year-long research projects undertaken by staff. These projects focus on school improvement priorities and identify effective strategies to improve provision and raise pupil outcomes. Additionally, school leaders are building leadership capacity and all staff have access to professional learning to support their career aspirations. These include training for aspiring leaders, initial teacher training, and training to become a Higher-Level Teaching Assistant.

Leaders work well to address national priorities, including the Curriculum for Wales and recent changes to legislation to support pupils with ALN. Leaders make highly effective use of grant funding such as the pupil development grant, to provide an extensive range of activities and interventions to support pupils. These interventions are helping narrow learning gaps and are a clear strength of the school.

The school's specialist resource class is led and managed well. Leaders have a secure understanding of the provisions' strengths and areas for development, which lead to positive improvements for pupils. The specialist knowledge of staff is used successfully to support improvements in provision for pupils with ALN across the

school. For example, the teacher in the resource class advises other staff on effective strategies to meet pupils' individual needs.

Leaders complete a thorough programme of monitoring and self-evaluation activity that is spread systematically across the school year. They observe teaching, talk to pupils about their work, and regularly review pupils' assessment data. However, this work does not focus on the impact of teaching on learning tightly enough. As a result, a few important areas for improvement have not been identified by the school.

Governors are supportive of the school and have a sound understanding of their roles and responsibilities. They have an appropriate understanding of the school's main strengths and areas for improvement, and regularly conduct their own quality assurance work. Through the finance committee, the governors robustly monitor the school's finances. However, other committees are not currently operational, and this limits the governors' ability to scrutinise strategic planning and act as a critical friend effectively. Governors work with school leaders to promote a robust safeguarding culture and ensure there that are suitable arrangements for healthy eating and drinking.

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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