



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

A report on

Ynyshir Primary School

**Llanwonno Road
Ynyshir
Porth
RCT
CF39 0HU**

Date of inspection: June 2023

by

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

About Ynyshir Primary School

Name of provider	Ynyshir 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	255
Pupils of statutory school age	184
Number in nursery classes	44
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%)	26.7%
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%)	3.3%
Percentage of pupils who speak Welsh at home	0.0%
Percentage of pupils with English as an additional language	0.0%
Date of headteacher appointment	01/01/2011
Date of previous Estyn inspection (if applicable)	03/03/2015
Start date of inspection	19/06/2023

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

Leaders work purposefully to create a safe and inclusive environment where pupils and staff feel valued and supported. They have built a strong team ethos across the school and ensure that the well-being of all staff and pupils is a high priority. However, there has recently been significant staffing turbulence and, although leaders have ensured staff morale has remained high, the turnover of teachers has created instability that has impacted negatively on the quality of teaching and learning.

Staff meet pupils' social and emotional needs well. They deal with pupils' concerns thoughtfully and appropriately in a timely manner. The school's curriculum provides a suitable range of learning opportunities. Teaching assistants manage pupils in small groups effectively, offering valuable individual support for vulnerable pupils. As a result, many pupils requiring intervention make strong progress.

However, too many lessons do not hold pupils' interest, as they lack pace and excitement. Teachers' expectation of what pupils can achieve are too low, and they do not pitch tasks well enough to challenge pupils, especially the more able. As a result, many pupils do not make the progress they could in essential skills, such as reading and writing in English, and in acquiring the basic skills to communicate in Welsh. Too many pupils do not attend school regularly enough, and this also affects the progress that they make.

Leaders have an appropriate vision for teaching and learning. However, it is not shared well enough and too often is not evident in classrooms. Leaders' monitoring of the school's provision does not focus well enough on pupils' standards and progress. Although leaders identify suitable areas for improvement in the school's work, their actions do not always result in sufficient improvements in outcomes for pupils.

Recommendations

- R1 Ensure that self-evaluation and improvement actions focus sharply on their impact on improving pupils' standards, in particular, their skills in reading, writing and the Welsh language
- R2 Raise teachers' expectations of what pupils can achieve and ensure sufficient challenge, particularly for the more able
- R3 Improve attendance, particularly for pupils eligible for free school meals

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

The majority of pupils start school with skills in literacy and numeracy either in line with or above those expected for their age. Many pupils in nursery and reception develop their speaking skills well. They quickly learn new vocabulary and become confident to talk to their peers and adults. By the time they are in Year 2, many express themselves clearly using appropriate vocabulary. As they move through the school, they make sound progress, adjusting their speech to their audience. Many Year 6 pupils confidently speak to an adult and express their thoughts and opinions freely when asked.

Most of the youngest pupils have good listening skills. They show patience when listening to others and respect the contribution of their peers. Most make appropriate progress in Years 1 and 2. They learn to co-operate in small groups effectively. As they move from Years 3 to 6, many pupils continue to make satisfactory progress. They learn to take the views of others into account in their collaborative work and respond accordingly. By Year 6 many are mature listeners. They are reflective in what they hear and display affirming body language in their listening, such as giving appropriate eye contact.

Many younger pupils' Welsh communication skills are developing suitably. They enjoy singing in Welsh and many are beginning to use simple phrases and vocabulary appropriately when describing their daily routine and when talking about the weather. However, across the school, pupils do not make enough progress in developing their Welsh language skills. They lack confidence when responding to straightforward questions and have a limited vocabulary.

Most pupils in nursery and reception make a good start in learning the basic sounds of letters and recognising simple words in context. For example, when reading words associated with the lifecycle of a caterpillar, they break words down into their letter sounds to read unfamiliar words. By Year 2, many pupils make simple predictions based on a sound understanding of the text. They are well motivated to read and begin to read across a suitable range of different genres. However, the progress in reading for the older pupils, including the more able, is not consistent and slows significantly. By the end of their time in Year 6, many pupils are competent readers with a sound grasp of an appropriate range of genres, but only a few deduce and infer information beyond the literal text.

Many of the youngest pupils make a good start in learning to write. They quickly see writing as an important skill and work hard at improving this skill. As they move through Years 1 and 2, many pupils become more confident writers. Many Year 2 pupils develop a good understanding of grammar. They write pertinent adjectives and use them to create metaphors to describe objects such as shells. However, many pupils make only limited progress in their writing skills as they move through the rest

of the school. More able pupils particularly do not make the progress they could. Many develop an appropriate understanding of different genres, such as when writing a cinquain poem about the earth in Year 4. However, pupils at all levels, including the more able, fail to use basic punctuation accurately and their handwriting deteriorates rather than improves. They struggle to write at length independently and they make only limited gains in spelling. Whilst progress improves in Year 6, many still do not use grammar accurately enough. Only a few pupils write at length and the majority of pupils' spelling is below the expected level for their age.

Many pupils make appropriate progress in developing a suitable range of mathematical skills across the school. Many of the younger pupils make sound progress in developing their understanding of number. They become confident at basic number skills. For example, many pupils count backwards and forwards in steps of 2, 5 and 10. Older pupils continue to progress appropriately, learning to measure accurately in litres and millilitres and to identify properties of solid shapes. By the time they reach Year 6, most pupils add and subtract negative numbers and convert improper fractions into mixed numbers successfully. However, very few pupils apply their numeracy skills into other areas of the curriculum and real-life contexts.

Many of the youngest pupils make a sound start in developing their digital skills. They use a painting app, adapt animations and create pictograms. Pupils continue to build on their skills appropriately and by the time they reach Year 2, many are competent in a suitable range of skills. They log in to their accounts independently, access apps, create text and paste pictures in presentations. They scan QR codes and make simple graphs. Pupils continue to make sound progress as they move from Year 3 to Year 6. They use email, create simple programs and record their work. The oldest pupils create pie charts, slide shows and videos using the 'green screen' technique, for example when retelling a story by making a film of a conflict scene in a car sales room.

Well-being and attitudes to learning

Most pupils enjoy school and feel happy and safe. Generally, pupils are interested in their work and speak enthusiastically about the lessons that engage them, for example discussing how worms help to create compost as part of their topic on, 'the great outdoors'.

Many pupils know how to make healthy life choices. For example, they know that they should eat fruit and vegetables, and keep fit through physical activities at playtimes and after school. Many pupils recognise the benefits of taking part in a daily mile. They know that they should drink water to keep hydrated during hot weather. Most pupils understand how to keep themselves safe online, for example by keeping their passwords private. They develop well as ethical, informed citizens who understand children's rights, and are thoughtful and considerate, for example in wanting to ensure that they include and value their peers who may have disabilities or barriers to their learning.

Most pupils are respectful of adults and their peers. Many wait patiently to take turns and listen while others speak. Usually, most pupils behave well in class, particularly where their lessons are interesting and exciting. However, where the pace of learning

is too slow, pupils become disengaged and their behaviour deteriorates. A majority of pupils avoid distractions, and many sustain their concentration, often for an extended period of time. When given the opportunity, many pupils work well independently. For example, pupils in the nursery and reception class carefully select their own materials to represent 'worms'. In addition, most pupils read their teachers' written feedback and many respond appropriately when prompted, for instance by improving a sentence. However, overall, pupils do not clearly understand what they need to do next, in order to improve their work.

Pupils are proud to take on leadership roles and, when provided with suitable opportunities, enjoy representing their school, for example at football. There are appropriate pupil groups such as the school council and Criw Cymraeg. However, these are very dependent on adult support and do not influence the school's work actively enough. A few pupils take on the role of playground leaders who oversee breaktime games, and playground buddies who arrange and look after the play equipment. Mostly, pupils play well together, but on occasions there are squabbles and disagreements, particularly over football.

Overall, rates of attendance are too low. Pupils who are not eligible for free school meals have improved their attendance marginally this year, compared with the previous year. However, in contrast and despite the school's best efforts, the attendance of pupils eligible for free school meals has declined and the gap with their peers widened. A few pupils are late for school in the mornings, and a few are persistently absent.

Teaching and learning experiences

Throughout the school, staff create strong, supportive professional relationships with pupils who clearly appreciate the warmth and care that staff demonstrate towards them. Staff make time for pupils' social and emotional needs and will deal with issues sensitively and effectively as they arise. Teaching assistants manage pupils in small groups effectively, offering valuable individual support for vulnerable pupils. However, across the school too many teachers do not have sufficiently high expectations of what pupils can achieve. In too many sessions, the pace is slow, and pupils lose motivation. Teachers throughout the school do not always provide pupils with challenging enough tasks, which limits the progress of the more able pupils.

Teachers provide pupils with purposeful opportunities to express their own interests to shape the content of topic work. For example, a survey of minibeasts in Year 2 highlighted the absence of bees and consequently pupils decided that bees should be the focus of their 'Wild and Wonderful' topic. However, overall, pupils have few opportunities to make choices about what they learn. While the curriculum for the youngest pupils provides valuable opportunities for pupils to develop their critical thinking skills and ability to innovate, opportunities throughout the rest of the school are limited. Teachers do not always make appropriate use of the extensive outdoor spaces to support pupils' development and skills.

Across the school, classroom practice does not consistently reflect the school's vision for teaching and learning. This is particularly true for older pupils, where teachers do not develop pupils' writing and reading skills systematically in an interesting context. In too many sessions, activities provided by the teachers do not

develop pupils' skills progressively from what they have already learnt. The curriculum does not enable pupils to make sufficient progress in developing their numeracy skills across the curriculum or their skills in speaking Welsh.

The school is beginning to provide suitable authentic and engaging learning experiences for pupils. For example, it has introduced 'Immersion Days' at the start of new topics that spark the interest of pupils and generate enthusiasm. They are also beginning to plan purposeful end points for topics, for example, selling produce made in class at the school fair. The school uses visitors effectively to enhance curriculum provision. For example, a local drummer takes beneficial workshops with the pupils.

In the best sessions, teachers have clear objectives for pupils' learning and use a good range of approaches and resources to engage and support all pupils to achieve and make progress. For example, pupils in the nursery and reception classes were highly engaged in exploring the lifecycle of caterpillars as part of learning about minibests. In the most effective sessions, pupils know what they need to do to succeed. These pupils also assess each other's work effectively. However, this good practice is not consistent throughout the school, and in sessions where activities lack purpose, pupils' progress slows. This weakness in provision particularly affects more able pupils.

Teachers make limited use of feedback to support pupils during lesson and activities to move learning forward. Written feedback is positive, but often does not provide a way forward for pupils to improve their work. In the best practice, teachers respond to pupils' learning during sessions and adapt their approach accordingly.

The curriculum supports pupils' well-being and mental health well, for example taking due account of those who require a reduced timetable, providing specific focus on emotional well-being with 'Feel Good Friday' and timetabling a mental health week.

Care, support and guidance

The school is a caring and inclusive community, where staff meet pupils' social, emotional and health needs well. There is a shared culture of safeguarding, and all staff understand their role in working together to keep pupils safe.

There is strong support for pupils with additional learning needs. Skilled support staff provide guidance and nurture that addresses these pupils' needs well. For example, in the 'Little Blossoms' group, staff work with a small group of the youngest pupils to support their communication, social and behavioural needs. This enables these pupils to get off to a strong start in their learning.

The staff work effectively with a range of outside agencies to support pupils, including occupational health and the educational psychologist. They put in place worthwhile and detailed support plans and ensure that these are reviewed regularly by specialist professionals, the pupil's parents or carers and, where appropriate, the pupil themselves. The additional needs co-ordinator tracks these pupils' progress against their targets robustly. Overall, this support ensures that many pupils with additional needs make the progress they should over time. In addition, there is valuable support for pupils whose circumstances may make them vulnerable to underachievement.

For example, focused activities using toy construction blocks, and sessions with a professional therapy dog, provide pupils with effective support for their well-being, help them to address their anxieties and supports them to regulate their emotions. In all classes, staff are aware of and access, the broad range of interventions that are available across the school to support pupils to catch up with their peers. Staff and leaders track the progress that pupils make appropriately during their time on an intervention.

The school ensures worthwhile provision for the arts and drama, mainly delivered by outside providers. Arrangements, such as the daily mile, provide pupils with suitable opportunities to be physically active. However, pupils, particularly girls, do not have sufficient opportunity to take part in competitive sport. The school develops pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural awareness appropriately. However, it does not ensure that a statutory act of collective worship takes place each day.

The school provides valuable support to families to ensure pupils' regular attendance. For example, the administrator calls parents whenever a pupil is absent without a reason and involves outside agencies where appropriate. The school's use of 'return to school' plans encourage pupils who have disengaged, particularly following the pandemic, to reintegrate at a pace they can manage. This helps them re-establish the routines and expectations of daily attendance. Overall, however, despite this support, too many pupils do not attend school regularly enough and leaders do not have a strategic overview of patterns in attendance over time.

There is a strong ethos of inclusion within the school community. For instance, staff ensure that adventurous outdoor activities include adaptations that allow pupils with disabilities to take part in a variety of activities, such as surfing, alongside their peers. The school provides a worthwhile range of residential trips and visits within the local area.

Leaders analyse well-being data and use their findings to adapt the school's provision appropriately. For example, leaders identified that too many pupils had low aspirations for their future, so worked to broaden pupils' outlooks through meeting a solo transatlantic rower and experiencing first-hand, animals that normally live in the rainforest. The school ensures worthwhile opportunities for pupils to consider the world of work, for instance through coding activities at a local electronics factory, and by developing their entrepreneurial skills through growing and selling herbs.

Leadership and management

Leaders at Ynyshir Primary work purposefully to create a safe and inclusive environment where pupils and staff feel valued and supported. They have built a strong team ethos across the school and ensure that the well-being of all staff and pupils is a high priority. However, there has recently been significant staffing turbulence and, although leaders have ensured staff morale has remained high, the turnover of teachers has created instability that has impacted negatively on the quality of teaching and learning.

Leaders have developed an appropriate timetable to enable them to monitor and evaluate the school's work. The range of activity includes, lesson observations, learning walks and the scrutiny of pupils' work. From this, leaders accurately identify

many of the areas where the school needs to make improvements. However, too few monitoring activities focus closely enough on improving pupils' outcomes and the progress they make with their learning. In addition, leaders do not sufficiently involve other stakeholders, such as teachers, pupils, parents and governors, in self-evaluation processes. Furthermore, they do not hold all staff to account strongly enough when addressing issues of underperformance. As a result, in a minority of classes, pupils do not make the progress of which they are capable.

Leaders organise suitable professional learning opportunities to target the school's improvement needs. Teachers engage with helpful professional learning networks in the cluster of local schools, for example to develop coverage and progression within the areas of learning and experience in the curriculum.

Leaders address national and local priorities suitably. The school is making strong progress in reforming its provision for pupils with additional learning needs in line with Welsh Government reforms. As a result, well-planned interventions make a positive difference to the well-being and learning of these pupils. In addition, the school is developing a suitable vision for the new curriculum. However, the impact of this work is limited as too many lessons lack excitement, pace and high expectations. In addition, leaders have not focused sufficiently on developing pupils' skills in Welsh.

The school communicates useful information, such as through regular newsletters and on social media with parents. However, this is not always shared in a timely manner. The school works closely with the parents of vulnerable pupils, for example to improve their child's attendance. The senior leadership team are involved in many multi-agency meetings and work well with outside agencies to strengthen provision for these pupils. The headteacher has developed a strong safeguarding culture.

Members of the governing body are supportive to the headteacher and the school. They make useful informal visits, for example attending pupil well-being days. Leaders keep them well informed about developments at the school. However, they are over-reliant on the headteacher's reports to governors and do not gather enough first-hand evidence. This limits their understanding of important aspects of the school's performance, such as the progress pupils are making, and inhibits their ability to act as a critical friend and to hold leaders to account. Governors ensure that the school has appropriate arrangements to promote healthy eating and drinking.

The headteacher, alongside the governing body, manages the school finances suitably. For example, the pupil development grant is used to pay for a range of helpful initiatives such as 'Little Blossoms', which is having a positive impact on the well-being of a few younger pupils. In addition, the school's spending on interventions to strengthen provision for pupils with additional learning needs has ensured that many of these pupils make sound progress.

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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