



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

A report on

St Elfod Junior School

**Ffordd Y Morfa
Abergele
Conwy
LL22 7NU**

Date of inspection: September 2023

by

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

About St Elfod Junior School

Name of provider	St Elfod Junior School
Local authority	Conwy County Borough Council
Language of the provider	English
Type of school	Primary
Religious character	*
Number of pupils on roll	292
Pupils of statutory school age	292
Number in nursery classes	NA
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%)	24.9%
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%)	28.8%
Percentage of pupils who speak Welsh at home	*
Percentage of pupils with English as an additional language	5.5%
Date of headteacher appointment	01/09/2007
Date of previous Estyn inspection (if applicable)	09/09/2005
Start date of inspection	25/09/2023

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 Elfod Junior School is a calm and caring school. Staff pay high attention to the emotional and well-being needs of its pupils and as a result most pupils enjoy school.

Most pupils' behaviour is good. They enjoy participating in lessons and activities in the extensive outdoor learning environment. During their time at the school, most pupils make good progress in their learning from their individual starting points, including those with additional learning needs (ALN). Most pupils develop strong reading, writing and oracy skills. They develop a sound competency in their mathematical skills and transfer this knowledge appropriately to solve problems and apply them to other areas of the curriculum. Across the school, many pupils use their digital skills well to support their wider learning. Many pupils enjoy learning Welsh and participate enthusiastically during Welsh lessons. However, overall teachers do not provide pupils with sufficient opportunities for them to use and practise their Welsh language skills outside of Welsh lessons.

Leaders and teachers have created an authentic and engaging curriculum that reflects the ethos of the Curriculum for Wales. They plan learning experiences which reflect the local community and the interests of the pupils. Feedback from teachers and staff supports pupils' progress appropriately. However, often teachers over-direct learning and, as a result, pupils have limited opportunities to choose how they wish to present their work. In addition, teachers do not always provide sufficient learning opportunities for pupils to develop as independent learners and thinkers.

Leaders monitor attendance carefully and have suitable procedures in place. They work closely with outside agencies to support the families of a few pupils who are absent regularly from school. However, despite these processes and procedures, attendance needs improving.

Recommendations

- R1 Provide opportunities for pupils to make decisions about how they learn, how they respond to feedback, and develop well as independent learners
- R2 Further develop the curriculum to ensure that the school provides a systematic approach to the development of pupils' Welsh language skills
- R3 Improve attendance

What happens next

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

Main evaluation

Learning

Most pupils, including those affected by socio-economic disadvantage, make good progress in their learning during their time in school. Pupils with additional learning needs (ALN) progress well from their individual starting points and achieve well against their personal targets.

Most pupils develop their language and communication skills well. Most pupils speak clearly when speaking to their friends and adults. Many younger pupils use a range of interesting vocabulary, for example when describing characters in stories and talking about their favourite authors. As they move through school, most pupils become increasingly articulate. Many older pupils discuss their work confidently explaining what and how they are learning.

Many pupils demonstrate a genuine enjoyment of reading. Many younger pupils read with increasing fluency and understanding. They blend sounds efficiently and attempt unfamiliar words using a variety of purposeful strategies. They are beginning to use inference, for example to explain how characters in a story are feeling. As they progress through school, many pupils develop a secure range of strategies to become fluent readers. By Year 6, many read texts independently with concentration for sustained periods of time. They apply their reading skills effectively to support their learning across the curriculum, for example when undertaking research into different energy sources.

Most pupils develop a good understanding of the characteristics of different writing genres. Many younger pupils begin to write at length. As they progress through the school, many pupils build on prior learning. Older pupils choose vocabulary carefully to enhance their writing when drafting the story of Rhita Gawr. Many older pupils write for a wide range of purposes across the curriculum and use punctuation accurately.

Many pupils have a positive attitude to learning Welsh. Many younger pupils use simple greetings and respond well to questions, for example about their likes and dislikes and about the weather. As pupils progress through the school many demonstrate an appropriate grasp of previously learned vocabulary and sentence patterns. However, overall, they do not use their oral Welsh language skills confidently enough in other areas of the curriculum and around the school.

Most pupils develop their mathematical skills well. As they progress through the school, many pupils work well with the four rules of number, shape and measure and develop sound data handling skills. For example, they apply their skills well to solve problems. Most older pupils use a wide range of methods competently. They describe their thinking and reasoning clearly when explaining how they reached their conclusions. When given the opportunity, many pupils apply their numeracy skills well in other areas of the curriculum, for example when budgeting for a trip to Yr Wyddfa.

Many pupils apply their digital skills well in a range of creative contexts to support their wider learning. Many younger pupils use digital devices confidently to practice their literacy and numeracy skills and to record their learning. Older pupils use their digital skills to support independent research. They use a broad range of apps and programmes, for example, when creating a database about mountains in Eryri National Park.

Most pupils enjoy using their creative and artistic skills. Many younger pupils demonstrate competent creative skills, for example when using natural materials in the outdoors. They use their problem-solving skills creatively, for example when investigating how the design and size of a paper aeroplane determines how far it will fly.

Many pupils participate enthusiastically and energetically in a wide range of physical activity. This has a positive effect on their confidence, their ability to work together, and their fitness and well-being.

Well-being and attitudes to learning

During their time at school, pupils develop positive working relationships with staff and each other. Most pupils feel safe at school and know who to ask for help if needed. They greet visitors politely and are keen to engage in conversations about their work and things that interest them. Most pupils have a clear understanding of the school's expectations of behaviour in the classroom and around the school. Most pupils feel safe at school and know who to ask for help if needed.

Across the school, most pupils listen appropriately and participate suitably in learning. However, a very few pupils do not always hold their attention well in lessons.

Across the school pupils are beginning to make choices in their learning, for example when choosing an appropriate level of challenge in their work. However, learning is often over directed by teachers and tasks do not always give pupils opportunities to extend their work or challenge themselves sufficiently. As a result, pupils do not develop successfully as independent learners.

Most pupils enjoy working in pairs and small groups. They happily share their ideas and listen to the suggestions of others. As they move through the school, they begin to develop their cooperation and leadership skills through worthwhile activities such as those in the outdoor environment. Here pupils begin to negotiate roles in group activities and work collectively to solve problems, such as how best to complete an orienteering course.

Pupils value the high-quality verbal feedback they receive from teachers and the feedback from their peers that helps them improve their work. They use success criteria effectively and most pupils contribute well to opportunities to reflect on their own and others' work and understand how this helps them to learn.

Pupils, including those affected by socio-economic disadvantage and those with ALN, take on beneficial leadership roles throughout the school. Pupils learn how to become healthy and confident and understand how diet, physical activity, and mental

health impact on their quality of life. Nearly all pupils enjoy their many opportunities to be active at playtime and during lessons. There are worthwhile opportunities for pupils to participate in after school sports clubs where they develop these skills further. Pupils develop a sound understanding of how to stay safe online, how to keep their personal details private and to talk to a trusted adult if issues arise. Pupils are developing an awareness of their rights and have a growing awareness of their roles as responsible citizens.

Most pupils attend school regularly. However, a few pupils' attendance falls below an acceptable level.

Teaching and learning experiences

Staff across the school develop warm, trusting, and respectful relationships with pupils. As a result, pupils feel valued and cared for. This helps pupils settle quickly to their work and behave well in lessons.

Most teachers and support staff use questioning well to challenge pupils' thinking, identify misconceptions and move their learning forward. They give clear instructions that support pupils to understand what they need to do to complete their tasks successfully. However, generally staff are too keen to provide support and as a result they over scaffold pupils' learning. This limits the opportunities they give pupils to develop their independent thinking and problem-solving skills. In addition, teachers do not always plan well enough for opportunities for pupils to make decisions around how they organise and present their work in response to learning tasks.

Many teachers share effectively what pupils need to do to be successful in their learning through regular feedback during lessons. They share success criteria appropriately, and as a result, most pupils have a good understanding of what they are doing well and what steps they need to take to make progress. Teachers provide worthwhile opportunities for pupils to assess their own work and that of their peers. Staff work closely with outside agencies and other local schools to design cluster provision for assessment and to develop an agreed approach to assessment for learning.

Across the school, skilful teaching assistants provide valuable and effective support in class and through a wide range of interventions. Staff use carefully targeted resources well to support pupils with additional needs, and sensitively use a range of strategies to support the very few pupils with challenging behaviour.

Teachers share information regularly with parents and carers about their children's progress and well-being, which helps them understand how to support them at home. The school's reports to parents are clear and informative. They give useful information about their child's progress and personal and social skills, along with improvement targets for the future.

The school provides suitable arrangements for pupils to develop their use of Welsh in Welsh lessons. Most teachers are good role models of the Welsh language. They promote the culture and heritage of Wales purposefully, for example providing opportunities for pupils to work with a Welsh graffiti artist. However, opportunities for

the pupils to use and extend their Welsh skills outside of Welsh lessons are limited and, as a result, pupils do not develop their language skills well enough.

The school has developed a clear vision for its curriculum to align with the principles of Curriculum for Wales. Teachers use the locality thoughtfully to enhance the curriculum and develop a range of learning experiences that improve pupils' understanding of the local area and their sense of belonging to the community.

The school's curriculum offers a broad range of learning experiences that engage pupils appropriately and develop literacy, digital and numeracy skills appropriately. Staff develop a positive culture of reading throughout the school. There are valuable opportunities for pupils to share books with each other, their teachers and at home. As a result, most pupils make good progress in reading, writing and mathematical skills. However, teachers do not always plan systematically well enough for pupils to develop their numeracy skills across the curriculum.

Pupils benefit from learning in the school's extensive outdoor environment. Staff plan worthwhile learning opportunities for pupils to explore, practise and enhance their skills. For example, younger pupils measure liquids, follow instructions and collect natural resources to make a potion. These experiences provide beneficial opportunities for pupils to develop their problem-solving and physical skills, as well as their emotional health and well-being.

The school is developing its religion, values, and ethics aspects of the curriculum well. In addition, teachers plan appropriate opportunities to develop pupils' personal and social skills. This ensures that pupils gain an appropriate understanding of other cultures and societies across Wales and the world.

Care, support and guidance

The school is a happy, caring, and inclusive community, where staff and pupils show a high level of respect for each other. Staff know the pupils, their backgrounds, and the local community very well. They place a high priority on pupils' well-being and ensure that the school provides a nurturing environment in which pupils feel safe, happy and cared for. The school has thoughtfully considered the needs of pupils with ALN in the classroom provision and routines. This has resulted in changes to the learning environment that have created a sense of calm throughout the school.

The school provides beneficial support for pupils' well-being and social skills, helping them build the resilience to work through any challenges they may face. Support staff provide useful support for pupils' emotional well-being and respond sensitively to their individual needs. This ensures that pupils gain confidence and show enthusiasm towards their learning.

The school has addressed additional needs reform effectively. The school's ALNCo (additional learning needs co-ordinator) has worked well with staff to create a comprehensive and robust system of support for staff, pupils, and parents. Teachers set realistic and achievable targets for pupils with ALN and monitor their progress carefully. As a result, nearly all make at least expected progress from their individual starting points.

Support staff deliver a wide range of interventions to improve pupils' literacy, numeracy, and well-being. These contribute successfully towards increasing pupils' confidence, resilience, and self-image. The school's commitment to working jointly with external agencies provides valuable opportunities for pupils to improve aspects of their well-being, in addition to relevant training for staff. As a result, many of the most vulnerable pupils and those with learning needs are eager to come to school, and to participate in school activities. Teachers involve pupils, parents, and outside agencies in planning interventions and evaluating the impact of this work well.

Staff provide valuable opportunities for pupils to develop their spiritual, moral, social and cultural skills. They develop a strong sense of valuing differences and showing concern and care for their peers. The daily acts of worship, where pupils have time for reflection, support their spiritual and moral development well. As a result, nearly all pupils have a clear understanding of fairness, equality, and inclusion within their daily lives. Staff encourage pupils to consider other people's views sensitively, and to acknowledge and respect diversity. However, a very few pupils do not have regular opportunities to take part in daily acts of collective worship.

Leaders build strong relationships with parents and carers, who appreciate how approachable leaders and staff are and value the regular communication they receive. There are regular and worthwhile opportunities for parents to share in and support their child's learning journey.

Staff provide valuable opportunities for pupils to develop their creative and imaginative skills, for example when emulating the work of famous Welsh artists. Staff provide interesting experiences in the outdoor woodland area for pupils to develop these skills, for example when creating pictures using natural materials.

The school ensures that pupils are given worthwhile opportunities to take on leadership roles. Staff ensure that these groups meet regularly and provide pupils with valuable opportunities to make decisions about how to improve their school. Teachers regularly seek pupils' opinions on class topics and how to develop their learning environment. As a result, pupils feel empowered and show a strong sense of purpose and value in the actions they take to make the school a safe environment and a better place for all.

The school has appropriate arrangements to promote healthy eating and drinking. Staff provide beneficial opportunities for pupils to adopt a healthy and active lifestyle. As a result, nearly all pupils know how to eat healthily and are eager to take part enthusiastically in a wide range of physical activity. These effective arrangements motivate pupils to keep fit and deepen their understanding of healthy living.

The school's safeguarding culture is robust, and staff have a secure understanding of their roles and responsibilities in contributing towards pupils' safety and well-being. The school has appropriate arrangements in place to monitor attendance. Leaders work well with a range of outside agencies to support families where pupils have persistent absences. However, despite this support, attendance at the school needs improvement.

Leadership and management

The headteacher is a caring and compassionate leader who sets high expectations for themselves and their staff. He places the well-being of the pupils and the staff at the centre of his work. As a result, there is a strong culture of care and understanding of pupils' individual needs, which flows through the school.

The headteacher shares a clear vision for the school that is understood well by pupils and staff. They use this vision to ensure that they provide high expectations in the key areas of learning, including reading, writing, mathematics and digital skills.

Staff have a clear understanding of their roles and responsibilities and have appropriate opportunities to develop their leadership skills. As a result, they are acquiring the relevant skills to take on positions of leadership, such as leading phase year groups and leading on specific school-based projects.

The headteacher provides detailed reports to governors that ensure they are well informed about progress in teaching and learning. The governing body is knowledgeable about its role as a strategic partner and critical friend to leaders across the school. Governors provide appropriate support and challenge to ensure that leaders secure continued improvement. They are suitably involved in the school's self-evaluation and improvement planning processes. Governors have a good understanding of the school's budget and work well with senior leaders when making decisions about spending. Leaders prioritise spending on pupil well-being and provision for learning appropriately.

Governors have a suitable understanding of national and local priorities, including the school's work to develop its own curriculum and the requirements of ALN reform. The headteacher and governing body promote a positive culture of safeguarding and ensure that school practices and policies meet requirements. Governors ensure that the school has appropriate arrangements to promote healthy eating and drinking.

Leaders and governors pay due regard to the impact of poverty on attainment. They are mindful of the number of trips and visits that are arranged by the school and ensure that no pupils are excluded from these. They offer support to pupils and families where finance can be a barrier to learning.

Senior leaders and governors use performance management processes successfully. Targets are linked appropriately to the school's priorities for improvement and to individual teachers' and support staff's personal development goals. Leaders provide a suitable range of professional learning opportunities for staff linked to specific areas of the school's improvement plans effectively. For example, the recent cluster work on developing the schools RSE curriculum has enabled teachers to gain confidence and knowledge in teaching the subject. The school collaborates well with other schools and external partners and, as a result, leaders have identified areas of good practice within the school that will benefit other schools in the local area.

Leaders plan school improvement thoughtfully. There are valuable opportunities for all staff to contribute their ideas to whole-school evaluation and improvement processes. Leaders provide beneficial opportunities for teachers to monitor the

progress of pupils and share their findings with leaders. As a result, the school acts swiftly to provide beneficial support for those pupils who require additional support in their learning and emotional and social needs.

Leaders plan purposeful opportunities for teachers to develop their individual Welsh language skills and to gain confidence when using the language in Welsh lessons. However, leaders do not always ensure that teachers plan for or provide opportunities for pupils to develop their Welsh language skills outside of Welsh lessons well enough. As a result, pupils do not always make the progress that they are capable of by the time they leave the school.

Evidence base of the report

Before an inspection, inspectors:

- analyse the outcomes from the parent/carer and pupil questionnaires and consider the views of teachers and the governing body through their questionnaire responses

During an inspection, inspectors normally:

- hold a meeting with parents/carers to hear their views on the school and its effectiveness
- meet the headteacher, governors, senior and middle leaders (where appropriate) and individual teachers to evaluate the impact of the school's work
- meet pupils to discuss their work, to listen to them read and to gain their views about various aspects of their school
- meet groups of pupils in leadership roles, such as representatives from the school council and eco-committee
- visit a broad sample of classes, including learning support groups and undertake a variety of learning walks to observe pupils learning and to see staff teaching in a range of settings, including classrooms, support groups and in outdoor areas
- where appropriate, visit the specialist resource base within the school to see pupils' learning
- observe and speak to pupils at lunch and break times and at a sample of after-school clubs, where appropriate
- attend assemblies and daily acts of collective worship
- look closely at the school's self-evaluation processes
- consider the school's improvement plan and look at evidence to show how well the school has taken forward planned improvements
- scrutinise a range of school documents, including information on pupil assessment and progress, records of meetings of staff and the governing body, information on pupils' well-being, including the safeguarding of pupils, and records of staff training and professional development

After the on-site inspection and before the publication of the report, Estyn:

- review the findings of the inspection alongside the supporting evidence from the inspection team in order to validate, moderate and ensure the quality of the inspection

Copies of the report

Copies of this report are available from the school and from the Estyn website (www.estyn.gov.wales)

The report was produced in accordance with Section 28 of the Education Act 2005.

Every possible care has been taken to ensure that the information in this document is accurate at the time of publication. Any enquiries or comments regarding this document/publication should be addressed to:

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