



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

A report on
Ystrad Mynach Primary

Lewis Street
Ystrad Mynach
Hengoed
CF82 7AQ

Date of inspection: November 2023

by

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

**This inspection was undertaken as part of pilot inspection arrangements.
As a result, this report may be slightly different in format to other
published reports for providers in the sector.**

Evaluation

Pupils' well-being is at the heart of Ystrad Mynach Primary school. Leaders and staff work diligently to ensure that the school is a compassionate and inclusive environment where all pupils can succeed. The care, support and well-being they provide is highly effective, underpins the school's vision and supports pupils to make good progress. The school is a calm and happy community, where staff and pupils show a high level of respect for each other. Pupils enjoy school and understand the importance of attending. They are eager to respond to adults and proud of their school, and appreciate the wide variety of opportunities that support them to learn and make progress. Overall, pupils feel safe and well cared for and trust that adults will always support them through difficult times.

Teachers think carefully about how pupils learn best and use a range of approaches to engage them successfully in their learning. A strength of the school is how staff regularly review and develop their professional skills and knowledge together. This helps them to adjust the school's provision to meet the needs of individual pupils and to implement new initiatives and priorities. For example, the way that leaders work with staff to address the requirements of Welsh Government's Additional Learning Needs (ALN) reforms is exceptional.

Cameo – Developing inclusivity in the classroom

The school's response to ALN reform is highly effective and has a positive impact on learners. Leaders and staff ensure that provision in all year groups is based on current need. There is a flexible and adaptive approach, which ensures that class teachers, who have received bespoke professional learning, are responsible for preparing and delivering high quality learning experiences that meet the needs of all pupils. Person centred outcomes and targets are at the forefront of teachers' decision-making and planning for all learners with ALN.

In most cases, teachers use questioning and feedback effectively to move learning on at a brisk pace. This helps to engage pupils and consolidate their understanding, and supports them to make good progress. From a young age, most pupils make strong progress in their reading, writing and numeracy skills and learn to apply these skills successfully in their work across the curriculum. Although teachers use Welsh suitably during lessons and around the school, provision to support pupils' development of Welsh oracy skills is inconsistent. As a result, most pupils lack confidence to use Welsh to speak to each other in everyday situations.

Most pupils enjoy being physically active and learning outdoors. For example, 'Rucksack' sessions allow pupils to experience and appreciate nature through extended and uninterrupted periods of outdoor learning. Most pupils use digital resources creatively to support their learning and enhance their work. For example, older pupils use coding to create a pedometer to trial in the playground. Most pupils are keen to do well and to take on new challenges. However, at times, staff over-direct activities, and this limits the opportunities for pupils to take ownership of their learning and to develop their thinking and problem-solving skills independently.

The school's 'Flourish' curriculum is well embedded and highly effective, and inspires pupils to raise their aspirations. It provides them with beneficial opportunities to learn about their community, local area and the wider world. Teachers capture pupils' interest by skilfully involving them in the planning of learning experiences and the sharing of learning with parents through 'wow weeks'. Pupils learn about the diverse nature of society and become ethically aware, with older pupils using vocabulary such as 'diversity', 'equity' and 'inclusivity', knowledgeably during useful, well-crafted classroom debates. Staff foster the development of pupils' spiritual, moral, and social skills thoughtfully. Through regular assemblies, pupils have valuable opportunities to reflect on values, such as compassion and empathy. In particular, the curriculum focuses well on developing pupils' self-esteem. This successfully supports the transition of older pupils to high school.

Cameo – Building pupils' resilience and self esteem

The school's Flourish programme encourages pupils to believe in themselves, and to promote positive thinking and self-esteem. Flourish enables pupils to realise their full potential. It gives the pupils tools and techniques to equip and empower themselves to believe that they can dream big dreams.

The school values the opinions of pupils. The many pupil leadership groups work alongside school leaders to bring about improvements. For example, the 'Maths Magicians' created a video tutorial for younger pupils to assist them with numeracy. The pupil groups help them to develop their leadership skills and take on responsibility, and promotes their self-esteem.

Robust and considerate leadership in the school has led to the creation of a caring ethos, strong teamwork and exciting learning experiences for pupils. Leaders invest in staff and build leadership capacity effectively across the school, resulting in a passionate team of professionals with a strong understanding of the needs of the pupils and the local community. Leaders and staff are visible and approachable at key moments during the school day to listen and chat to parents. Close collaboration with other schools supports a shared approach to the curriculum and aids transition. The school works successfully as a lead school for initial teacher education, supporting the development of future teachers.

School governors have a significant range of professional expertise and contribute well to school life and to its place within the community. They offer the right balance of support and challenge, for instance when discussing issues such as pupil and staff well-being and matters of finance. For example, they fund enrichment experiences so that pupils affected by poverty and disadvantage do not miss out.

Statutory compliance

Safeguarding arrangements

The school's arrangements for safeguarding pupils do not give any cause for concern.

Healthy eating and drinking

The school has appropriate arrangements for promoting healthy eating and drinking.

School finances

Leaders and governors manage the school's finances appropriately, including use of the pupil development grant.

Health and safety (site security)

The school's arrangements for site security do not give any cause for concern.

Recommendations and next steps

We have made 2 recommendations to help the school continue to improve:

- R1 Provide opportunities for pupils to take ownership of their learning and to develop their thinking and problem solving skills independently
- R2 Improve pupils' Welsh oracy skills

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

Additional information

Teaching and learning

- Most teaching moves learning on well. Pupils talk in detail about their learning and the progress they have made at the end of a lesson. The working relationship between teachers and pupils in nearly all classes is strong and pupils are comfortable to make mistakes and ask for help, for example when using coding to create a working pedometer to trial out in the playground.
- Nearly all teachers have high expectations of pupils and involve them in the learning process.
- Most teachers have clear objectives for pupils' learning. They use a range of approaches and resources to engage and support pupils to achieve as well as they can. This enables many older pupils to reflect effectively on their learning.
- Most teachers use questioning and feedback effectively to support pupils' progress. This is seen consistently in the books with teachers and pupils reflecting on learning. In nearly all lessons, the teachers use assessment for learning techniques well to gauge pupils' understanding of tasks.
- The pace of lessons is good in most instances. However, in a few lessons too much time is taken explaining tasks and there are missed opportunities to allow pupils to work independently and discover their own ways to present information or lead their own learning.
- Across the school, pupils are extremely positive about their learning and the opportunities they are given. In nearly all classes, the teachers know the pupils well and can fully engage them and adapt the learning when necessary.
- Learning experiences across the school interest all pupils including those eligible for free school meals and pupils of all abilities make good progress.
- Most learning environments are stimulating and engaging. For example, there is an effective balance of prompts to support pupils' learning and celebrations of their work. There are appropriate and engaging continuous and enhance provision in the early years' classes.
- Standards across the school are good and writing in the older classes is of a high standard. The school's systematic approaches to writing results in many accomplished writers who can write for a variety of purposes and audiences and effectively apply their writing skills across other areas of the curriculum.
- Nearly all teachers develop pupils' thinking and understanding through skilful questioning and monitoring of pupils' learning. As a result, nearly all pupils across the school make good progress in their lessons.
- Most pupils develop their maths skills well; on occasions, pupils' application of numeracy skills, reasoning and problem solving is not as well developed.
- In many classes, the pupils work independently and, at times, collaboratively. Most are pupils confident and capable learners. However, there are missed opportunities for pupils to direct their own learning. Most task and activities are teacher-led, and pupils are not able to use their well-established skills to decide how to carry out tasks or how they might present their work.
- In nearly all classes, the support staff are highly effective in their roles and provide valuable support for both individuals and groups of pupils. There is a

strong sense of inclusivity and staff successfully adapt pedagogy and practice to ensure progress for all pupils.

- Most teachers plan and deliver appropriate lessons to cater for the needs of all pupils, including pupils with additional learning needs. They provide support and differentiate work appropriately.
- In all classes, the learning environments are engaging and purposeful and pupils are provided with appropriate resources to complete their tasks. However, linked with above, pupils should be able to select and access the resources more independently.
- On occasions, staff tend to over-direct the learning, which stifles the development of pupils' independent learning skills and wider key learning skills.
- Every child has a 'learning journey', which is a comprehensive profile on the child including the progress of their learning, and the uploaded pieces of work show their progress well. Pupils take ownership of their learning journeys and use them well to monitor their own progress.
- The school provides the pupils with a highly effective curriculum with breadth and depth across all learning areas. The rich learning experiences and opportunities the pupils have allow the pupils to make strong progress in nearly all areas of the curriculum.
- The curriculum inspires pupils to raise their aspirations and provides them with opportunities to learn about their community, local area and the wider world.
- Pupils learn about the diverse nature of society through lessons, assemblies and visitors, which results in older pupils becoming ethically aware and being able to use and understanding vocabulary such as – 'equity and inclusivity and diversity knowledgeably'.
- The curriculum supports the development of social and emotional skills of pupils from all backgrounds and this a strength of the school. It enables pupils to understand the importance of healthy lifestyles as well as looking after their mental and physical health and well-being. Examples include the introduction of 'Rucksack' days that allow pupils to experience and appreciate nature with extended and uninterrupted periods of outdoor learning.
- Through the varied learning experiences and opportunities that the curriculum provides, the pupils develop their spiritual, moral, social and cultural awareness, for example through the termly 'Wow Weeks' regular assemblies and collective worship sessions.
- Staff develop the outdoor areas effectively for younger pupils. 'Rucksack' days allow all pupils to benefit from a range of outdoor learning experiences. For example, pupils make rockets out of natural materials. The school has developed new outdoor areas. These areas include a wide range of resources that support pupils to develop their thinking and physical skills effectively.
- The school's effective approach to assessment and progression allows nearly all pupils to acquire the necessary skills in listening and reading, speaking and writing, numeracy and digital to support their work and progress. However, the development of pupils' Welsh oracy skills is inconsistent across the school and as a result the pupils do not make the progress of which they are capable.
- Teachers use a variety of assessments and evaluations to track the progress of individuals and groups of learners. This informs the teaching and planning and enables teachers to identify where additional support or interventions are necessary.

- There are suitable opportunities for pupils to develop their creativity both indoors and outdoors and pupils experience art, drama and dance skills regularly across all year groups.
- Most pupils demonstrate very good speaking and listening skills. A notable strength of the school is the way most pupils articulate their learning and speak confidently for a range of purposes and different audiences.
- Staff place a strong focus on developing early reading and writing strategies and consequently older pupils read fluently and expressively with a good understanding of punctuation, such as an ellipsis.
- Younger pupils develop their confidence in writing and, as they move through the school, they improve their writing skills well. They write at length and in a range of genres such as stories, diaries and newspaper reports. Most pupils transfer these skills across the curriculum to a good standard. Presentation of written work is good and most pupils take pride in their work.
- Digital skills are a strength. Pupils can use a variety of on-line platforms and digital resources confidently to support their learning successfully.

Care, support and well-being

- The school is a happy, caring community, where staff and pupils show a high level of respect for each other. Safeguarding and nurture procedures are robust and, as a result, positive relationships pervade the school and behaviour of pupils throughout the school is excellent.
- The introduction of the ALN reform has been clearly understood by the ALNCOs and high quality training given to all staff. This results in a highly inclusive ethos in all classes. ALN pupils feel part of the class and are supported well. Skilled support staff provide worthwhile targeted interventions. Robust tracking systems are used for progress and identifying next steps successfully. Support staff are highly skilled and provide beneficial interventions.
- Most pupils have a good understanding of how to keep themselves safe on-line.
- Pupils are well aware of who to turn to if they have a problem or concern.
- The additional learning needs co-ordinator is well skilled and knowledgeable. There are effective and rigorous systems to track and monitor pupils' progress. This creates an inclusive ethos and offers effective provision to support all pupils with ALN.
- The school has robust procedures for the monitoring of attendance and works effectively with external agencies. As a result, rates of attendance have improved. The pupil well-being team monitor attendance weekly. They visit classrooms and speak in assembly about the importance of attending school. Nearly all pupils know the importance of good attendance.
- The 'Flourish' programme is a strength of the school and contributes successfully towards increasing pupil confidence, resilience and self-esteem. As a result, it enables older pupils to be ready for the next step in their learning journey.
- The school ensures that pupils are given worthwhile opportunities to become members of a range of pupil voice committees and make decisions on how to improve the school, for example running the school radio station. As a result, Most pupils behave very well in school. Pupils move around the school quietly and safely. Most pupils listen attentively in class and the good relationships with staff result in pupils who are engaged and wanting to do their best.

- 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.

Leading and improving

- The headteacher has worked conscientiously alongside senior leaders to provide a clear strategic direction for the development of the school, to evaluate its work and plan and deliver improvements. There is a strong team ethos among all staff, who believe that pupils' mental health and well-being are fundamental ingredients to their success.
- The headteacher and leadership team deliver strong, considerate leadership and, supported by all staff, have created an inclusive culture where pupils feel safe and protected, and have a strong sense of trust in others.
- All leaders, including governors, have a good understanding of the needs of pupils and the local community, and make every effort to meet these needs effectively. They have high expectations of each other, their staff and the pupils. Throughout the school, there is a strong sense of belonging and a strong safeguarding culture. 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.
- Leaders have an accurate picture of how well the school is performing. Monitoring activities are purposefully planned across the academic year and, linked to school priorities, these provide leaders with a reliable picture of the school's strengths and areas for improvement.
- The headteacher has a clear vision for building leadership capacity across the school and the wider leadership team contributes effectively to school improvement. There is strong leadership at all levels and this has improved the school's capacity to achieve change successfully. For example, work to implement ALN reform involved robust training for all staff and thoughtful communication with parents. As a result, the school uses careful assessment processes, termly reviews and effective interventions to ensure that those receiving additional support make good progress.
- Leaders place a high priority on professional learning. This has a positive influence on the school's work, for example by broadening the school's leadership capacity. Leaders promote a successful professional learning culture amongst staff by supporting and challenging them to undertake research into aspects of their areas of responsibility. This work has been beneficial, for example leading to the school's 'Flourish' curriculum that includes a whole-school mental health and well-being strategy. These opportunities enable staff to contribute fully to the life and work of the school and to flourish professionally. All staff engage positively in a well-developed performance management process.
- Leaders give a high priority to developing the skills of all staff and are building a culture of a learning organisation. There is an ongoing focus on improving teaching across the school. Staff have used their professional learning opportunities to undertake research to improve their own teaching and that of their colleagues.
- Communication across the school is a strength. There is clear timetable for all monitoring activities and leaders including governors draw upon a range of first-hand information to inform their judgements. Overall, the school is developing a

good track record of reviewing and developing its provision. For example, leaders identified a need to improve the youngest pupils' speech and language skills, and teachers adapted their practice to enable these pupils to progress.

- Leaders and staff enjoy close working partnerships with parents. Communication between home and school is effective and leaders ensure that staff are visible at key moments during the school day. Parents trust that the school is doing the right thing for pupils and always acts in their best interests.
- The school collaborates successfully with a range of partners, for example with local schools and within their cluster to develop a shared approach to teaching aspects of the Curriculum for Wales and to improve transition. Of note is the school's ongoing work as a lead school for initial teacher education, supporting the development of future teachers.
- Governors are very supportive of the school and are kept well informed by senior leaders and staff with specific roles and responsibilities. For example, leaders present updates to the governing body on their R&R and on the impact of their work. The governing body are fully aware of national priorities. For example, they understand the need to make ongoing tweaks and refinements to the curriculum and have supported this as a priority on the school's development plan.
- The governing body have a significant range of professional expertise and contribute well to school life and to its place within the community. They understand the school's improvement priorities and the reasons that support them. They assist leaders to implement and monitor improvement work well, for instance by taking part in learning walks, and agreeing to allocate funding for valuable projects. Governors understand their role in ensuring equality, place high priority on closing the gap between poverty and are fully committed to supporting the school staff and leaders' well-being.
- Work to address national priorities is effective. There is a clear focus on refining the school's approaches to implementing the Curriculum for Wales and addressing ALN reform. The school has robust processes to track pupils' progress in developing their literacy and numeracy skills and most pupils have effective digital skills. Leaders are highly committed to tackling poverty in the local community.
- School leaders and governors manage finances effectively. They make sensible decisions that benefit all pupils. The school uses its grant funding effectively to ensure targeted support for vulnerable pupils and to ensure that all pupils access all experiences. Additional funds support provision for pupils' mental health and well-being. Governors also make appropriate arrangements for promoting 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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Appendix 1: Ystrad Mynach Primary

Name of provider	Ystrad Mynach Primary
Local authority	Caerphilly County Borough Council
Language of the provider	English
Religious character	
Number of pupils on roll	483
Pupils of statutory school age	345
Number in nursery classes	58
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%)	12.9%
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%)	11.3%
Percentage of pupils who speak Welsh at home	0%
Percentage of pupils with English as an additional language	0%
Date of headteacher appointment	03/09/2012
Date of previous Estyn inspection (if applicable)	01/11/2014
Start date of inspection	20/11/2023

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.

Appendix 2: Numbers – quantities and proportions

The report makes references to different quantities and proportions e.g. '*most pupils...*' or '*very few pupils...*'. We use these terms to describe quantities and proportions as outlined in the table below:

nearly all =	with very few exceptions
most =	90% or more
many =	70% or more
a majority =	over 60%
half =	50%
around half =	close to 50%
a minority =	below 40%
few =	below 20%
very few =	less than 10%

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