



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

**A report on**

**Maesmarchog Primary School**

**School Road  
Dyffryn Cellwen  
Neath  
SA10 9LB**

**Date of inspection: January 2024**

**by**

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

## About Maesmarchog Primary School

Name of provider	Maesmarchog Primary School
Local authority	Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council
Language of the provider	English
Type of school	Primary
Religious character	
Number of pupils on roll	101
Pupils of statutory school age	83
Number in nursery classes	10
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 23.7%)	36.8%
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 13.2%)	32.5%
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	01/09/2023
Date of previous Estyn inspection (if applicable)	12/10/2015
Start date of inspection	22/01/2024

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](https://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

Maesmarchog Primary School is an inclusive and caring school. Leaders, governors and staff know pupils well. They prioritise well-being and inclusivity and this means that pupils enjoy coming to school and feel valued and cared for by staff. Pupils behave well and show respect for each other and their teachers and other staff. The school listens to and considers the views of pupils and parents effectively. However, attendance rates are low, particularly for the most vulnerable pupils.

Teaching across the school is inconsistent. In many lessons, teaching does not develop pupils' skills in literacy and numeracy, well enough. Teaching staff do not provide enough opportunities for pupils to work independently and develop specific skills. As a result, pupils, including those with additional learning (ALN) needs and pupils in the learning support centre, do not achieve as well as they could.

The school's curriculum is at an early stage of development. Planning for pupils to build and apply their skills, knowledge and understanding is not yet systematic or progressive. Teachers use a range of assessment procedures to record the progress pupils are making. However, they do not use assessment information well enough to inform their teaching in lessons or over time. This means that they do not plan well enough to meet pupils' learning needs as they move through the school. This limits pupils' progress.

Senior leaders do not accurately identify areas that need development. Improvement plans and processes are not specific or rigorous enough to bring about necessary changes. As a result, the pace of development is slow. Governors are engaged in the life of the school and ensure that well-being and inclusivity are a high priority. However, governors do not have enough first-hand evidence about standards and pupil progress to hold the school to account.

## Recommendations

- R1 Ensure that leaders use evaluation and improvement processes effectively to ensure that the teaching and learning experiences provided for pupils meet their educational and developmental needs
- R2 Provide a purposeful and engaging curriculum that develops pupils' skills progressively
- R3 Make effective use of assessment information to inform teaching and to support pupils' progress in lessons and over time
- R4 Improve attendance, particularly for vulnerable learners

## 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

Many pupils start school with communication and numeracy skills that are lower than expected for their age. During their time at school, many pupils including those with additional learning needs (ALN) in mainstream classes and the school's Learning Support Centre make suitable progress. Many pupils who are eligible for free school meals make progress in line with that of their peers.

By the end of Year 2, nearly all pupils listen well to instructions. They interact well with one another, showing care and empathy. They greet visitors in a warm and friendly manner, sharing their news and their learning eagerly. Many Year 6 pupils speak clearly and are starting to use extended responses to questions. For example, they successfully debate whether children under the age of thirteen should have pocket money. A minority of older pupils justify their reasoning and use ambitious vocabulary.

Many pupils develop their reading skills appropriately during their time in school. By Year 2, most have a suitable knowledge of the sounds that letters make and many blend these to read unfamiliar words. Many pupils in Year 4 read simple, familiar texts independently. Many older pupils read a range of material with enjoyment and their reading is generally accurate. They show a suitable awareness of punctuation in their reading and vary their voice and tone, when appropriate to do so.

Younger pupils join in confidently with a range of songs and rhymes, which help them to learn how to count and talk about the weather in Welsh. However, the Welsh language skills of older pupils are basic, and they rely too heavily on prompts and structures to formulate sentences.

A minority of pupils make satisfactory progress with their writing. As they progress, many pupils write a limited range of commonly used words with suitable accuracy. Around half of the oldest pupils routinely use basic punctuation, such as full stops and capital letters in their writing. Around half of the older pupils, form letters incorrectly and their presentation of written work is poor. A minority of older pupils use more ambitious vocabulary and punctuation. Overall, pupils lack the skills and confidence to write at length, independently.

By the end of Year 2, most learners can name basic two-dimensional shapes correctly, counting the number of sides to identify the shape. Many Year 4 pupils use their knowledge of the value of coins to calculate basic amounts of money. By Year

6, many pupils understand fractions and convert improper fractions to mixed fractions. Pupils learn a range of suitable mathematics skills. However, they have limited opportunities to apply these skills to other areas of learning.

Most pupils use their digital skills enthusiastically. Younger pupils use touchscreen devices confidently and independently to support their literacy and number skills. Older pupils use an appropriate range of applications successfully to create animations and presentations. They use images and film to communicate what they have learned about concepts such as 'belonging.'

Many pupils' physical skills are appropriate. For example, younger pupils hop, skip, jump and crawl skilfully when involved in imaginative play activities. Older pupils develop their core strength, for instance when they take one another's weight to balance their bodies in physical education lessons.

Many pupils develop their creative and problem-solving skills suitably during their time in school. For example, younger pupils select appropriate materials to create monsters out of modelling material. Older pupils use a range of artistic techniques, such as line and shadow, when using charcoal to recreate portraits in the style of local artist Josef Herman.

### **Well-being and attitudes to learning**

Most pupils show pride in their school and feel safe within its inclusive and caring ethos. Most pupils are courteous, welcoming, and eager to show visitors around. Older pupils engage positively with classmates, younger pupils and pupils in the Learning Support Centre. They feel that adults in the school listen to their views carefully and take them into account when considering decisions that affect them. For example, following pupils' suggestions, the school created an autism awareness pupil group to promote inclusivity across the school. Pupils benefit from positive relationships with supportive staff and know who they can talk to if they are worried or upset.

Nearly all pupils behave well in classrooms and around the school. In the best lessons, pupils are attentive, follow instructions and engage positively in their learning. However, when teaching is less effective, pupils become distracted and struggle to maintain focus. As a result, they do not always produce the work of which they are capable.

Most pupils are aware of the importance of staying safe and have an appropriate understanding of keeping safe when online. They have a secure understanding of how to keep healthy through eating a balanced diet and taking regular exercise. Older pupils effectively run a fruit tuck shop and use the profit to buy resources for the school. Most pupils draw on strategies to support their emotional well-being effectively. For example, pupils experiencing emotional difficulties use the regulation stations successfully to control their feelings. Older pupils use visual check-in cards to say how they feel in both English and Welsh. They have a good understanding of how to regulate their behaviour with independence.

Most pupils develop appropriately as ethical, informed citizens. They are sensible and caring in their relationships with others and demonstrate a good understanding

of their own and other pupils' needs. For example, older pupils make thoughtful decisions, support younger pupils during playtimes and help to resolve any conflicts that occur during breaktimes. Nearly all pupils show a strong awareness of the importance of their contributions towards creating a caring and supportive school community.

Many pupils develop appropriate entrepreneurial skills. For example, pupils make items for the Christmas Fair to sell to raise funds for the school. Many pupils have suitable opportunities to develop their leadership skills through a range of pupil voice committees that the school offers. Older pupils take their responsibilities seriously and support younger pupils effectively during break times, assemblies and in the daily life of the school.

Most pupils demonstrate positive attitudes to outdoor physical activity, and many choose to engage in physical games during break times. Most pupils enjoy physical education sessions, developing their physical skills appropriately as they progress through the school.

Many pupils respond positively to verbal feedback. However, they do not use teachers' written feedback to bring about improvements in their work. When given opportunities, pupils show appropriate perseverance and sustain concentration. Many pupils are beginning to evaluate their work and the work of others. This is at an early stage of development.

Pupils' attendance is low, particularly for the most vulnerable pupils. Procedures put in place to promote attendance have had little impact on improving attendance rates.

### **Teaching and learning experiences**

Senior leaders have a clear vision for the curriculum. To develop this, they worked in partnership with staff, parents, and governors. Teachers work together to plan a suitable range of learning experiences that take into account the age of their pupils. For example, as part of the whole-school topic on the concept of 'conflict,' the youngest pupils learn about opposites and use their bodies to explore how they can move 'under' and 'over,' 'up' and 'down.' Older pupils examine the reasons for global conflict and wars, such as World War 2. However, the school is still in the early stages of implementing Curriculum for Wales and there are few opportunities for pupils to learn about diversity in the wider world.

Teachers plan suitable opportunities for pupils to develop aspects of their literacy and digital skills, for example when pupils create information leaflets to describe the features of the local area. However, the curriculum does not ensure opportunities for pupils to develop their numeracy skills or to write at length. Provision for the progressive development of pupils' cross-curricular skills is weak. There are limited opportunities for pupils to apply their skills in their work across the curriculum and in authentic, real-life contexts. Overall, the school does not make consistent and effective use of its outdoor spaces to support pupils' learning.

The school's provision for developing the personal, social, and well-being of pupils is good. As a result, pupils have a good understanding of the importance of a healthy lifestyle on their general well-being.

Staff are suitable Welsh language role models. They use Welsh consistently during the school day, such as when registering pupils at the start of the school day when entering the class, or when coming into collective worship. However, the provision to teach pupils to use the Welsh language does not ensure that pupils make enough progress or that they develop enthusiasm for speaking Welsh.

In the best lessons, there is a good pace and effective questioning, which motivates most pupils and supports their learning. As a result, many pupils make visible progress within the lesson. For example, when older pupils learn to convert improper fractions to mixed fractions. However, the quality of teaching is inconsistent, in a majority of classes, and this impacts pupils' ability to achieve their full potential. In nearly all lessons, teaching staff over direct pupils' learning. This impacts on pupils' ability to learn independently.

The school has a wide range of assessments in place, and these identify pupils who need additional support. However, teaching staff do not use assessment information well enough to plan learning experiences to develop pupils' skills, knowledge, and understanding. Consequently, they do not always provide the right level of challenge or adapt learning experiences to meet pupils' needs.

Teaching staff ensure that verbal feedback to pupils is regular and generally positive. However, marking and feedback have a limited impact on pupils' learning. Teachers' verbal and written feedback does not provide enough detail for pupils to follow up on and there is too little time allocated for pupils to improve their work.

The school uses visits and trips within the local appropriately to support its curriculum.

### **Care, support and guidance**

The school is a very supportive community, and staff encourage pupils to contribute to its caring and friendly ethos successfully. There are strong relationships between staff and pupils. Pupils treat each other with respect, empathy and consideration. Teachers and support staff know the pupils well and they respond sensitively to pupils' emotional and social needs.

Staff make pupils' well-being a priority. They work successfully to support pupils' needs through a range of whole-school strategies. A strength of the school is its inclusive ethos. The school provides well-considered support for pupils' health and well-being, including nurture provision. This ensures that vulnerable pupils can generally regulate their emotions and behaviour effectively.

Teaching staff in the Learning Support Centre have a secure knowledge of the needs of their pupils and how best to support them in daily activities. For example, pupils with autism engage in beneficial sensory activities.

The school uses a range of strategies and learning experiences to support the pupils with ALN suitably. Where appropriate pupils have one-page profiles which helps staff across the school understand the needs of learners with ALN. However, the school does not always evaluate the progress of pupils and plan the next steps effectively.

The school supports pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development appropriately. Pupils have suitable opportunities to develop their understanding of their community. Younger pupils go on walks around the village to support their understanding of the concept of belonging.

Many pupils have opportunities to contribute to the wider life of the school. For example, older pupils run a daily fruit tuck shops and make items to sell at the school fair. Many pupils have opportunities to perform in school events and assemblies, which support and develop their self-confidence and creative skills.

The school provides beneficial opportunities for pupils to prepare for life as citizens in modern day Wales. Residential experiences support older pupils in developing their confidence, self-esteem, resilience, and collaboration. The school provides a wide range of extra-curricular activities. These enable pupils to improve their physical fitness, to be part of a team, and develop a range of physical skills.

All pupils are encouraged to take up roles in the various school representative groups. Pupils are proud of the responsibilities they have and the contribution they make to the school. However, their role in leading and shaping the life of the school independently is at an early stage of development.

Safeguarding procedures are robust and give no cause for concern. All staff know their roles and responsibilities in contributing to the safety and well-being of pupils. The school provides a range of opportunities for pupils to learn the importance of staying safe online.

The school monitors attendance closely. Senior leaders have communicated the importance of good attendance to parents and have systems in place to promote attendance. However, attendance rates are low, particularly for the most vulnerable pupils.

## **Leadership and management**

Leaders, staff and governors have a shared vision to ensure Maesmarchog Primary is a caring and inclusive school, where every pupil is valued. They know the local community and its challenges well. The school has a newly established leadership team. They recognise the need to extend their leadership capacity to develop the curriculum and school self-evaluation and improvement processes.

Leaders work suitably to address national priorities including ALN reform. However, work to develop Curriculum for Wales is at an early stage of development and does not ensure purposeful and engaging learning activities that develop pupils' skills progressively.

Members of the governing body are enthusiastic about their role and are keen to support the school. Governors prioritise well-being and inclusivity. They have a secure understanding of the school's finances and health and safety concerns and discharge their duties appropriately, for example by ensuring the school meets the requirements for healthy eating and drinking. The headteacher provides regular reports and keeps them informed about aspects such as pupils' well-being, safeguarding and the school's premises. However, governors do not receive



sufficient or accurate information about pupils' progress, the quality of teaching or the school's approach to curriculum delivery. As a result, they are not able to hold leaders to account well enough for improvements concerning these aspects of the school's work.

Leaders and governors manage finances appropriately. They use a range of grant funding to ensure that all pupils can access additional learning experiences, like residential visits. However, leaders do not use the pupil development grant specifically to address the needs of the most vulnerable pupils.

Leaders engage well with parents to identify opportunities to improve the school's provision. For example, feedback in parental questionnaires identified a need for a breakfast club. The school now offers this facility, and it is popular with pupils. Senior leaders collaborated with parents to adapt the format of pupils' annual reports. They have ensured that the new reports are shorter and sent out termly, to inform parents regularly about their child's progress. Leaders communicate regularly and beneficially with parents. Parents appreciate the level of information which gives them time to make suitable arrangements. The school has established a positive dialogue with parents, which has ensured that their views influence school provision.

Over time, the school's self-evaluation and improvement processes have not been effective enough to bring about improvements in teaching and learning. As a result, the progress of pupils has been limited. Self-evaluation work does not enable leaders to understand the difference that provision makes to pupils' progress. Leaders focus on what adults do rather than on the difference this makes to pupils' learning. Leaders do not identify and prioritise key areas for development with sufficient rigour. Improvement activities are not always targeted well enough to secure the improvements needed. As a result, the pace of improvement is too slow.

The school provides a suitable range of professional learning for staff. However, leaders do not evaluate this work well enough. Leaders do not consider the impact that this work has on the quality of classroom provision or the progress that pupils make. As a result, professional learning has had a limited impact on improving the quality of teaching and learning.

## 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](http://www.estyn.gov.wales))

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

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

Publications Section

Estyn

Anchor Court, Keen Road

Cardiff

CF24 5JW or by email to [publications@estyn.gov.wales](mailto:publications@estyn.gov.wales)

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