



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

**A report on**

**St Helen's Primary School**

**Vincent Street  
Swansea  
SA1 3TY**

**Date of inspection: February 2024**

**by**

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

## About St Helen's Primary School

Name of provider	St Helen's Primary School
Local authority	City and County of Swansea
Language of the provider	English
Type of school	Primary
Religious character	
Number of pupils on roll	260
Pupils of statutory school age	181
Number in nursery classes	49
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%)	29.8%
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%)	19.3%
Percentage of pupils who speak Welsh at home	0.0%
Percentage of pupils with English as an additional language	63.0%
Date of headteacher appointment	
Date of previous Estyn inspection (if applicable)	
Start date of inspection	19/02/2024

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

St Helen's Primary School is vibrant, welcoming and highly inclusive. Pupils enjoy coming to school and make good progress in their learning and well-being. They feel safe, well cared for and valued and this helps them to become confident and capable learners. The diverse faiths, languages and cultures of the community the school serves are embraced and celebrated, and staff and pupils treat each other with friendliness, empathy and respect.

The leadership of the school is highly effective. The headteacher provides determined and compassionate leadership that helps staff, pupils and their families to succeed. The senior leadership team and governing body work together well to ensure that they fully understand the school's strengths and areas for improvement. This helps them to plan how best to use the school's budget, which they do effectively to ensure that the school is well staffed and resourced.

There is a strong culture of collaboration and mutual support amongst staff. The school benefits from a strong team of dedicated and skilled teachers and teaching assistants who work diligently to help the pupils in their care. Teachers plan interesting lessons that enable pupils to develop a good range of skills. In particular, they are highly effective at helping pupils to improve their reading and oracy skills. However, teaching approaches are not always wide ranging enough and as such there are not enough opportunities for pupils to apply their numeracy and writing skills independently.

School staff are skilled at providing effective support to pupils with additional learning needs (ALN) and the many pupils who speak English as an additional language. There are strong links with external agencies and the school uses their expertise well to support its additional and bespoke provision. Teachers and teaching assistants know their pupils well and ensure that the support they provide is tailored beneficially to individual needs. However, staff do not always have high enough expectations of what more able pupils can achieve.

The school has valuable links with the local community. Good use is made of local amenities to enrich the curriculum, and businesses and past pupils give useful help to develop pupils' aspirations and understanding of the world of work. A comprehensive range of after-school clubs provide pupils with excellent opportunities to learn new skills and embrace new experiences.

## Recommendations

- R1 Broaden the range of teaching approaches so that pupils have more opportunities to apply their numeracy and writing skills independently
- R2 Ensure that more able pupils receive increased challenge that enables them to meet their full potential

## What happens next

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

## Main evaluation

### Learning

A majority of pupils enter the school with literacy and numeracy skills that are lower than those expected for their age. During their time at school, most pupils, including those who are eligible for free school meals or the many who speak English as an additional language, make good progress and become confident and capable learners. Most pupils with additional learning needs (ALN) make strong progress towards their individual targets. However, the progress made by more able pupils does not always match their potential.

Most pupils develop their oracy skills particularly well, often starting with a limited knowledge of the English language. Many younger pupils learn new vocabulary quickly and apply it purposefully in new situations, such as when explaining that some animals are 'on the verge of extinction'. Most pupils' listening skills develop well alongside their speaking skills. They listen with sustained concentration, and this makes a positive contribution to their learning. By Year 6, most pupils speak maturely, communicating humour and nuance effectively. They listen well to each other, collaborate confidently and build successfully on the ideas of others.

By the time they leave the school, most pupils make strong progress in the development of their reading skills. This benefits their learning in all other areas of the curriculum significantly. Many of the youngest pupils quickly develop a good phonic knowledge. Their progress continues rapidly and by Year 2 most pupils read with good understanding and expression. Most older pupils are well motivated to read and understand its many purposes. For example, they suggest that it calms their mood or makes time fly when they are bored. By Year 6, most pupils are confident, competent readers who value literature highly.

In the development of their writing skills, many pupils make beneficial progress. During the earliest stages of their development, most pupils have an appropriate pencil grip and make suitable marks for their age. Younger pupils make plausible attempts to spell unfamiliar words when making wanted posters for characters from Jack and the Beanstalk. Many older pupils write with good imagination and expressive vocabulary such as when describing a tree as 'bursting with bright green'. In general, they understand the features of a broad range of genres, such as poetry, well. However, on the few occasions when they write across other areas of the curriculum, pupils do not always maintain the same quality of writing.

During their time at the school, most pupils make valuable progress in the development of their mathematics skills. Many younger pupils use their number recognition and counting skills effectively to measure the temperature of different

objects with a thermometer. Most older pupils calculate percentages of numbers accurately, create pie charts successfully and explain their methods clearly when solving mathematical problems. However, the ability of pupils to apply their numeracy skills more widely in a range of real-life contexts is limited by the too few opportunities they have.

Across the school, the progress in most pupils' Welsh language skills is strong. Many younger pupils make impressive early strides in learning Welsh. They respond to simple commands successfully and use basic greetings to acknowledge friends, staff and visitors. Pupils in Year 2 talk about the weather using appropriate vocabulary and name the sport they enjoy playing the most. Older pupils continue this good progress and extend the sentence patterns that they use well. Many of the oldest pupils begin to use more sophisticated Welsh, for instance when starting a sentence with 'i fod yn onest' and talking about the past.

Most pupils develop comprehensive digital skills by the time they leave the school. Many younger pupils use tablets confidently and create suitable images of animals using digital sketchpads. By Year 2, many swiftly log on to online platforms to access their saved work, compile worthwhile presentations using images and text and create simple animations. By Year 6, most pupils use technology purposefully and with confidence. Older pupils apply their skills creatively across the curriculum, such as when designing interesting stop motion films, coding impressive games and developing helpful spreadsheets.

Pupils throughout the school make solid progress in a good range of creative and physical skills. Younger pupils create engaging action sequences to represent scenes from traditional tales. They show good imagination, effective control of their bodies and sensible use of space when planning and demonstrating their interpretations. Many older pupils make purposeful use of the opportunities they have to develop their music skills through learning to play mini harps and violins. Most older pupils develop a good range of physical skills that enable them to play a broad range of sports with enthusiasm and success and the oldest pupils generally develop into competent swimmers. When given the opportunity, many pupils are beginning to use their thinking and problem-solving skills suitably.

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

Nearly all pupils feel safe and respected as a result of the school's outstanding ethos of care and inclusivity. They feel that staff listen attentively to them and take appropriate action to support and guide them. By the time they leave the school, most pupils are confident and capable learners who are ready for the next step in their education. Throughout the school, pupils engage enthusiastically with the wide range of opportunities they have to develop their well-being and learning. In general, they have a strong sense of how highly the school values them and they understand the role they play in making St Helen's a vibrant and inclusive school community. Most pupils, including those who are eligible for free school meals, attend school daily and do so with energy and enthusiasm.

Across the school, pupils fully embrace the broad range of cultures, languages and religions that exist within their community and nearly all develop well as ethical, informed citizens. They engage sensitively in activities that teach them about the life

experiences of their peers and are proud to begin to learn basic elements of their friends' languages. As a result, nearly all pupils develop a strong sense of empathy towards one another and have a strong appreciation of each other's individual circumstances. This has a highly positive impact on pupils' happiness and well-being and enables them to be active participants in the life of the school.

Most pupils feel that they have a voice and are listened to by the school. They confidently present ideas or problems to their class teachers and make good use of the display board in the hall to make written suggestions as to how the school could improve. Through positive engagement in a good range of pupil groups and leadership roles, many pupils actively influence the work of the school. For example, the pupil health and safety group walk the site regularly with the site manager to ensure that there are no hazards. Having identified an issue with puddles developing under a water fountain, the group are proud that they influenced school leaders to act upon and address their concerns.

Behaviour throughout the school is consistently strong. During lessons, assemblies and less structured times, nearly all pupils show care and positive regard for one another and respect for the school's rules. In all classes, pupils are polite, friendly and respectful and they welcome visitors with enthusiasm. Nearly all pupils enjoy strong working relationships with staff and this creates a warm, positive and supportive ethos throughout the school. This atmosphere of mutual respect contributes valuably to strong pupil well-being. Nearly all pupils know what to do if they are upset or concerned and develop a good understanding of how to support themselves or who to talk to if they need help. Where necessary, pupils make good use of the specially designed breakout areas or sensory spaces to support their emotional and well-being needs.

Pupils of all ages display visible pride in their learning. Most pupils develop well as capable learners and show diligence and positivity in class. They listen attentively to teachers' instructions and sustain concentration well across a range of tasks. Throughout the school, pupils are comfortable in sharing their work and describing their learning experiences. Most pupils make sensible contributions during lessons. They work together enthusiastically and listen carefully to the views of others. When prompted by adults, many pupils successfully assess their own work and that of their friends, using the school's chosen method. In nearly all cases, pupils encourage each other, celebrate each other's successes and provide sensitive support to their friends who are finding work difficult. For example, Year 3 pupils happily support their friends to find errors when coding and help them to successfully recode the sequence to reach the end destination.

Most pupils have a good understanding of a healthy lifestyle and talk accurately about how to look after their physical and emotional well-being, including when online. Most pupils have a good understanding of e-safety and know not to share private information with strangers. Most pupils engage enthusiastically with the wide range of extra-curricular activities that the school offers and develop good physical skills as a result.

## Teaching and learning experiences

The school's approach to teaching and assessment supports the delivery of the St Helen's curriculum well. Teachers and support staff carry out their work in a calm, sensitive and professional manner and develop highly effective relationships with the pupils in their care. All staff engage enthusiastically with professional learning, which helps them gain strong subject knowledge and a good understanding of how to address pupils' wide range of needs. Overall, they use this knowledge skilfully to ensure that the school is a positive and successful environment for learning.

Staff give clear explanations to pupils and are skilled at adapting their language to the wide-ranging needs of the school's pupils. They know their pupils well and are particularly effective in developing pupils' oracy and reading skills. Throughout the school, staff model language in a highly effective way and, in general, have high expectations for pupils' progress. The school has developed a systematic approach to the teaching of language and staff use this very effectively to ensure that most pupils' progress is good.

The school is developing a broad, balanced and interesting curriculum. The curriculum provides good opportunities for pupils to apply their reading, oracy and digital skills in particular. The chosen curriculum approach ensures that learning experiences for pupils develop systematically through relevant whole-school topics. It includes sensible sequences of lessons across a variety of curriculum areas that engage pupils well and ensure that most make good progress in their learning. Staff use a valuable range of assessment strategies well. This ensures that in most cases, pupils' learning builds successfully on their existing knowledge, understanding, skills and experiences as they move through the school.

In all classes, staff have clear intentions for pupils' learning and use an appropriate range of approaches and resources to engage and support all pupils. ALN pupils receive excellent, personalised support that meets their needs purposefully. Staff have high expectations of all pupils' behaviour and expect all pupils to succeed during lessons. However, whilst teachers use differentiation to target the needs of all pupils, their expectations of what more able pupils can achieve are not always sufficiently high.

In most cases, teachers respond quickly to pupils' learning needs during lessons and adapt their activities accordingly, providing purposeful next steps for their learning. This approach is particularly successful for the school's youngest pupils. Teachers provide helpful opportunities for pupils to assess their own and their peers' learning. They plan lessons and next steps in learning carefully and as such most pupils build on their prior learning well. Most teachers develop pupils' thinking and understanding suitably through well-considered questioning when working with the whole class. However, too often adults over-direct pupils during lessons. Where this is the case, opportunities for pupils to apply their numeracy and writing skills independently, and in meaningful contexts, are restricted.

Classrooms and shared spaces are stimulating and engaging. They support most pupils, including those with ALN and the many who speak English as an additional language, to learn productively. Teachers use displays to good effect to support pupils' learning. Many older pupils often access these independently for helpful

reminders and additional scaffold. Staff manage pupils' behaviour very well and treat all pupils equally and respectfully. They are excellent role models for pupils and work together effectively as a team. ALN pupils in particular benefit from this teamwork, as do those pupils in the early stages of learning English.

The recognition and celebration of diversity across the whole school is a strength. Staff plan many excellent opportunities for pupils to learn about the diverse range of experiences, beliefs and languages in their school community. Through their lessons, activities and the holistic approach of the school, the school ensures successfully that pupils understand and respect the different aspects of each other's lives. The school has started to develop its work in relationships and sexuality education purposefully and staff work closely with parents to ensure that the content of lessons is contextualised and understood. The school makes effective use of the local police community support officer to develop pupils' understanding of online safety and substance misuse.

Provision to develop pupils' wider skills and experiences through a comprehensive range of extra-curricular activities is highly effective. The school provides an excellent range of after-school clubs such as knitting, coding, French and myths and legends. These provide pupils with new and exciting experiences. Staff make creative and beneficial use of local amenities to enrich the curriculum wherever possible. For example, pupils visit to the 'Vetch Veg' allotments to grow and harvest food and learn about sustainability.

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

St Helen's Primary School is highly inclusive, warm, welcoming and homely. The school's motto, 'All different, all equal', is evident in every aspect of its provision. Leaders and staff are diligent in removing barriers from pupils' learning and well-being and reflect well on their practice to ensure that it is fit for purpose. There is a very strong culture of well-being and safeguarding which permeates the whole school and ensures that pupils and their families are well cared for at all times. The school's safeguarding arrangements meet requirements and give no cause for concern. Staff exude compassion and empathy. They carry out their work in a confident and enthusiastic manner that helps them to develop strong relationships with pupils and parents.

Pupils' well-being is a high priority for the school, and the highly inclusive ethos means that most pupils are happy and nearly all feel safe in school. St Helen's is a designated 'school of sanctuary' and as such hosts a valuable range of effective strategies to support all members of the school community. For example, key staff such as the family engagement leader lead and facilitate beneficial workshops for parents to help develop their language skills, well-being and confidence. Highly effective training opportunities help both staff and pupils to better understand their own and other people's emotions and how to manage challenging situations. The school building is used well to create safe and comfortable spaces where pupils can go if they feel distressed. For example, the 'sunshine room' provides a safe and calm environment for pupils who sometimes find working in a busier classroom overwhelming.

The school celebrates the wide range of pupils' languages, cultures and religions fully. Well-crafted displays show examples of how to say basic phrases and greetings in the school's many languages. Staff and pupils make good use of these to remove language barriers and to help establish purposeful relationships. The pupil-led 'language buddies' group is an innovative way of empowering pupils to help and support their friends by using their home language and translating words for them. A digital application is used to ensure communications to parents can be translated and skilled members of staff are available to provide valuable language assistance where needed.

Relationships between staff, pupils and parents are particularly very strong. Across the school, staff are compassionate and empathetic. Teachers and support staff consistently model positive behaviour, attitudes and language through their exchanges with pupils, parents and each other. Nearly all parents value and appreciate the support and encouragement their children receive at the school. Arrangements to promote positive behaviour are clear and robust. Along with the strength of relationships across the school, they ensure that nearly all pupils behave consistently well.

The school's provision of learning support for ALN pupils and any other groups of pupils whose circumstances make them vulnerable to underachievement is strong. The ALN co-ordinator provides purposeful and determined leadership. She has a clear vision for the school's ALN provision and along with the family engagement leader has established highly effective links with parents and outside agencies. The school deploys support staff effectively. They receive well-planned training that enables them to support and advise other members of staff in their work in a strong culture of collaboration. There are valuable working relationships with a useful range of external partners that help to provide effective support and guidance for pupils and families.

Staff value pupils' opinions highly and there are good processes to ensure that they can influence their experiences in school. There is a comprehensive range of pupil leadership groups who meet regularly to discuss relevant matters and suggest next steps. The school makes good use of feedback from pupils' questionnaires to affect change. For instance, recent developments to playground provision in response to pupils' views have improved pupil interactions at play time.

The school makes good provision for the development of pupils' cultural knowledge and understanding. Staff ensure that pupils who are experiencing social disadvantage or seeking refuge are not restricted from accessing a broad range of experiences due to financial constraints. For example, all educational visits are heavily subsidised by the school and all older pupils take part in swimming lessons in addition to their regular allocation. Through beneficial partnerships with local businesses and former pupils, pupils have rich opportunities to learn about careers in practical projects that promote the world of work. The school celebrates the achievements of a few members of staff who attended the school as children and highlights to pupils the opportunities that could be available to them in the future. This helps them to begin to consider possible career choices for later life and helps to raise their aspirations successfully.

## **Leadership and management**

The headteacher provides passionate, determined and dynamic leadership. She communicates with zeal her vision of a fully inclusive school community where all people are treated fairly, equally and respectfully. The deputy headteacher, senior leadership team and governing body support her very well. As a group of leaders, they have successfully developed a school that is a haven of sanctuary at the centre of its diverse community. Leaders have high expectations of themselves, staff and pupils and as a result most pupils make good progress in their well-being and learning.

Through clear communication and compassionate support, leaders have established excellent relationships with parents. Parents value highly the way in which they and their children are helped by school staff and are embraced into the St Helens family. Leaders' work to limit the impact of social disadvantage on pupils' education is highly successful. They make valuable use of the pupil development grant to provide well-considered support for pupils who need it. As such, most pupils who receive additional support progress well from their starting points, attend school regularly and develop strong relationships with their peers and staff.

The governing body is fully committed to supporting the school and governors are proud of the role that they play. They have a comprehensive first-hand knowledge of the school's strengths and areas for improvement. Governors join school staff in carrying out a useful range of self-evaluation activities to support their understanding of the impact of the school's work. They carry out their statutory duties fully, actively promote healthy eating and drinking and support the school's highly effective safeguarding culture well.

Governors and the headteacher work together successfully to manage the school's budget. They use finances effectively to ensure that the school is well-staffed and resourced. A comprehensive maintenance plan ensures that the school's internal and external learning environments are inviting and promote strong learning. Leaders rightly prioritise the needs of pupils when allocating funds. Valuable use of the budget is made to ensure that all older pupils have regular swimming lessons and exciting opportunities to learn a variety of instruments.

Leaders know the school very well. Self-evaluation is rigorous, robust and accurate and involves all staff and governors. This helps to ensure a shared recognition of what is working well and what the school needs to do to improve. Staff and governors value the opportunities they have to work together and to challenge each other with useful questioning. Leaders seek the views of parents and pupils regularly and they use this information beneficially to enhance the self-evaluation process. With the assistance of the family engagement leader, senior staff have acted upon feedback successfully to improve homework arrangements so that there are better opportunities for parents to support their child's learning.

Processes for performance management are strong. All staff, including support staff, have sensible targets that drive personal and whole-school development effectively. In recent times, a shared focus on Welsh has been successful in building pupils' and staff confidence, improving the quality of teaching and enhancing the progress most pupils make with their oracy skills. All staff benefit greatly from the school's robust

approach to professional learning. Leaders ensure that staff have access to quality professional learning to develop their own practice and address whole-school priorities. There is a highly valuable culture of collaboration across the school. Staff work in 'trust trios' to help each other's development through a successful, low stakes approach to challenge and support. Recently, this has led to improvements in provision for, and progression in, pupils' scientific skills through joint planning, team teaching and valuable professional dialogue.

School leaders are diligent in addressing national priorities. Work to address the well-being of pupils and staff is highly successful. The development of the school's new curriculum is progressing well and staff have established good systems for monitoring and evaluating pupils' progress. Senior staff meet termly with teachers to discuss the progress pupils are making and use the time beneficially to identify pupils who require additional support.

School leaders successfully ensure that staff have valuable opportunities to collaborate with colleagues from other schools. For example, the ALN co-ordinator's work with cluster colleagues has strengthened the school's work to address the ALN reform requirements. The school contributes to the wider education system by working effectively with the local teacher training college to support the development of student teachers. The school's student mentor works with colleagues from other schools to ensure that the assistance students receive is beneficial and enables them to develop their skills and knowledge in a constructive and supportive environment.

## 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:

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Publication date: 24/04/2024