



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

A report on

St Mary's R.C. Primary School

**Union Street
Carmarthen
SA31 3DE**

Date of inspection: February 2024

by

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

About St Mary's R.C. Primary School

Name of provider	St Mary's R.C. Primary School
Local authority	Carmarthenshire County Council
Language of the provider	English
Type of school	Primary
Religious character	Roman Catholic
Number of pupils on roll	67
Pupils of statutory school age	54
Number in nursery classes	8
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%)	35.7%
Percentage of pupils identified as having additional learning needs (a) (The national percentage of pupils identified as having an additional learning need in Primary is 13.2%)	11.1%
Percentage of pupils who speak Welsh at home	1.5%
Percentage of pupils with English as an additional language	24.1%
Date of headteacher appointment	01/09/2017
Date of previous Estyn inspection (if applicable)	01/10/2015
Start date of inspection	26/02/2024

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

- a. The term 'additional learning needs' is being used to describe those pupils on the SEN/ALN register of the school.

Overview

St Mary's R.C. Primary School provides a safe learning environment in which many pupils feel well cared for and happy. A majority of pupils behave well in lessons and around the school. A few enjoy their leadership responsibilities and have helped to make improvements to the school, such as making choices about outdoor play equipment. Overall, the attendance of pupils is too low, and leaders do not undertake rigorous enough actions to address this.

The school has had a prolonged period of instability in leadership and teaching, with many staff changes. The acting headteacher has undertaken this role for the last seven years. This instability has had a significant impact on the school's ability to address important shortcomings in their provision. Leaders have started to make improvements, including the appointment of new members of the governing body and the implementation of a positive behaviour policy. However, there are still significant shortcomings in the way leaders address important weaknesses in the school's work, and the rate of improvement is too slow.

In nearly all classes, teaching does not ensure that pupils make strong progress. As a result, pupils do not always achieve the standards of which they are capable, particularly the more able. In addition, staff do not always ensure that they provide pupils with stimulating and authentic learning experiences. They do not take into account the views of pupils about what and how they would like to learn well enough.

The provision to support pupils with additional learning needs (ALN) is generally effective. Staff identify pupils' needs at an early stage and put in place suitable plans to help address their individual needs.

Recommendations

- R1 Establish stable and effective leadership, with the capacity to secure the improvement identified in the report
- R2 Improve the quality of the teaching and learning experiences pupils receive so that they make the progress they are capable of
- R3 Develop provision for the progressive development of pupils' skills
- R4 Improve attendance and establish a positive culture around the importance and value of being in school

What happens next

In accordance with the Education Act 2005, HMCI is of the opinion, that special measures are required in relation to this school. The school will draw up an action plan which shows how it is going to address the recommendations. Estyn will monitor the school's progress usually every four to six months.

Main evaluation

Learning

Most pupils enter the school with literacy, numeracy and social skills at the level expected for their age. A significant number of pupils transition in and out of the school and few complete their full primary education at St Mary's. This affects their continuity and progression in learning. During their time at school, many pupils, including those with English as an additional language and those with additional learning needs (ALN), do not generally make the progress they should.

A majority of pupils listen well to their teachers and peers, for example in assembly they listen well to a Welsh-themed story. However, a minority of pupils do not listen well to their teachers or to others. Many pupils speak enthusiastically with visitors and are eager to share their opinions about life at the school. However, pupils do not develop their speaking skills further, for example by presenting or debating.

Many pupils develop their reading skills suitably. The youngest pupils show an interest in stories, such as Little Red Riding Hood, and can recall parts of the story accurately. Many younger pupils develop suitable phonics skills and are beginning to blend sounds. As they move through the school, many pupils read with expression and fluency, and can summarise texts they read. Although the majority of older pupils read with suitable fluency and understanding, they often lack the ability to use skills such as inference. Only a very few pupils read for pleasure or have a love of reading.

Younger pupils are beginning to develop their fine motor skills appropriately to support their development of early writing skills. In Year 1 pupils are beginning to form letters accurately and write single words such as 'went' and 'saw' when completing a diary entry for their trip to the river Towy. More able pupils in Year 3 rewrite the story of Little Red Riding Hood using a varied vocabulary and generally accurate punctuation, including speech marks. However, many pupils do not make the progress they could in their writing skills as they move through the school and a majority still make basic errors in spelling and punctuation in Year 6. Overall, pupils' writing skills do not develop systematically as they progress through the school.

Most pupils develop aspects of their mathematical skills suitably. The youngest pupils sort objects by shape and colour, and by Year 2 they add two-digit numbers and measure objects in centimetres accurately. Many pupils in Year 6 multiply three-digit numbers by two-digit numbers and add improper fractions together. However, most pupils do not have a broad enough range of mathematical skills, particularly in the

older class. This means they cannot use and apply an appropriate range of numerical skills in other areas of the curriculum.

Many pupils develop a range of basic digital skills as they progress through the school. A majority of younger pupils use digital devices appropriately, for example to play games that enhance their literacy and numeracy skills. By Year 2, many pupils create simple branching diagrams to sort living and non-living things. Older pupils use their digital skills suitably to create presentations about Egyptians. However, overall, pupils' range of digital skills is underdeveloped.

By the end of their time in school most pupils have not developed their Welsh speaking skills sufficiently. Many pupils in the younger classes can follow simple instructions, such as when playing a game to identify body parts in Welsh. Most pupils in the older class respond appropriately to simple questions and can make simple statements such as about where they live. However overall, pupils' rate of progress in developing understanding and use of simple language patterns is too slow.

Well-being and attitudes to learning

Many pupils feel happy and safe at school and know who to talk to if they have any concerns. Most pupils have a strong awareness of how to stay safe, including when using the internet. For example, they know not to share their passwords or personal information when working online. A majority of pupils are respectful and courteous to each other and to adults.

A majority of pupils understand the importance of healthy eating and drinking and many engage in physical activity enthusiastically during the school day. A few pupils attend an after-school sports club where they learn new physical skills and games such as hockey.

Nearly all pupils are aware of staff expectations relating to their behaviour. They understand the consequences of poor behaviour and how the school rewards system operates. However, these rewards are not consistently applied and therefore do not have enough impact on improving pupils' behaviour. A minority of pupils show a lack of interest in their learning, resulting in them becoming disengaged in lessons and their behaviour then deteriorates. This can impact negatively on the learning of others.

Most pupils across the school lack resilience and the ability to work independently. If tasks become too challenging pupils immediately seek the support of their teacher. When provided, most pupils read and understand their teachers' written feedback but very few respond by improving their work. Pupils have too few opportunities to influence what and how they learn.

Pupils undertake leadership responsibilities through the work of a few pupil voice groups. For example, the school council has purchased of equipment for the playground. However, with the exception of the school council, these groups do not meet regularly enough to have an impact on the life and work of the school.

Overall rates of pupil attendance are too low. Pupils who are eligible for free school meals have attendance that is notably lower than their peers. Across the school, these low rates of attendance result in pupils missing important aspects of their learning. In addition, too many pupils do not arrive at school punctually each morning.

Teaching and learning experiences

Teachers and support staff develop suitable working relationships with pupils. Generally, they support pupils' learning and well-being appropriately, for example, by implementing specific interventions and support programmes. However, teachers do not always deploy teaching assistants effectively and too often staff over-direct pupils, including pupils with ALN. This prevents them from becoming independent learners, who develop important skills such as resilience, perseverance and organisation.

The school is in its early stages of creating a vision for Curriculum for Wales. Staff are beginning to engage with professional learning in collaboration with other schools, to support St Mary's to co-construct a broad and balanced curriculum. However, overall, the processes for planning for pupils' learning are underdeveloped. Although teachers plan learning through termly topics, these topics are not planned purposefully enough as part of a cohesive curriculum. The curriculum does not build well enough on what pupils already know and, as a result, does not develop pupils' knowledge, skills or experiences effectively or systematically enough as they move through the school.

Overall, provision for pupils to develop their knowledge and acquire the skills they need is limited. Teachers plan too few opportunities for pupils to progressively develop and use their literacy, numeracy and digital skills across the curriculum. As a result, pupils do not develop these skills quickly enough or apply them well enough.

Teachers provide a few opportunities for pupils to develop their knowledge and understanding of the cultural, linguistic and diverse nature of Wales, for example through Welsh music week and Diwrnod Shwmae. However, the school does not plan well for the structured development of pupils' Welsh language skills. As a result, most pupils do not make suitable progress in developing their communication skills in Welsh.

Teachers have begun to think of ways to make learning more relevant and engaging, for example they have started to encourage pupils to contribute suggestions when planning topics. However, pupils do not have a strong enough influence on the developing curriculum and, as a result, the themes do not always interest or engage them.

The school is developing its indoor learning environment to create areas that support pupils' learning purposefully, however this is in its early stages and is yet to impact on pupils' independent skills. Staff make suitable use of the school's outdoor areas to develop pupils' physical skills.

The school ensures access to experiences for all pupils, by making effective use of the pupil deprivation grant. A minority of teachers use visits appropriately to support

pupils to make relevant links in their learning. For example, pupils visit the Towy River to enhance their skills and knowledge and provide a stimulus for the topic. However, the school makes limited use of its local community environment.

The school's assessment processes are at an early stage of development and are not used effectively to inform teaching and learning or to measure the progress of individuals and groups. In many lessons, teachers are not clear about what pupils need to learn and do not build on what pupils already know. Teachers' expectations of pupils are not high enough and the level of challenge and pace of learning does not always match pupils' needs well enough. Teachers' questioning to extend pupils' thinking or to check pupils' understanding is limited. Teachers' feedback is inconsistent and does not provide pupils with enough clarity about what they are doing well or what they can do to improve. There are limited opportunities for pupils to assess their own learning and that of others.

Teachers plan appropriate opportunities for pupils to learn about and understand diversity. For example, pupils consider the challenges of others during a Show Racism the Red Card session. The school helps pupils to understand how to look after themselves and there are appropriate arrangements to promote healthy lifestyles, for example working with the community police officer to promote online safety and helping them to understand the dangers of substance misuse.

Care, support and guidance

The school provides a safe learning environment for pupils and staff. The school is a caring community that supports the well-being of pupils and develops a sense of belonging for most pupils. Teachers develop appropriate relationships with parents and carers and provide them with suitable support, for example through the school's open-door policy.

Across the school, staff develop appropriate working relationships with pupils to support them with their learning. However, staff's application of the school's positive behaviour approach is inconsistent, and therefore the respect pupils show to each other, staff and visitors is variable.

Teachers are beginning to consider ways to enrich the curriculum, for example with visits linked to the topics they plan. However, teachers do not consistently plan effective, purposeful and authentic experiences for pupils to build and practice their skills. Teachers do not plan carefully enough to allow older pupils to consider how their learning is useful to them in life or how their experiences raise their aspirations and contribute to the choices they may make about future careers.

The school provides a limited range of experiences to help pupils to develop an appreciation and understanding of their identity, heritage, and culture. Recent opportunities to explore sustainability in the local area and visits to the nearby river inspire pupils but are not part of a coherent curriculum that develops over time. In addition, many pupils develop their awareness of fairness, equality, and children's rights. For example, the school undertakes fund raising activities and raises money for national charities.

The school's provision for pupils with ALN is appropriate. The ALN co-ordinator identifies appropriate support for vulnerable pupils including those with ALN and those with English as an additional language. Staff work suitably with other professionals and services to support families sensitively. Staff deliver appropriate support to pupils with ALN during well-being interventions and many pupils are developing strategies to help them manage their emotions.

The school has introduced various pupil voice groups where pupils from vulnerable groups and diverse backgrounds are represented appropriately. These groups provide pupils with suitable opportunities to develop leadership skills, although the impact of these is limited. Many pupils take part in sports and physical activities and enjoy the after-school clubs on offer, for example the Urdd and creative clubs. The school helps pupils understand how to look after themselves and there are appropriate arrangements to promote healthy lifestyles. However, despite this, a minority of pupils continue to bring unhealthy snacks into school for breaktime and lunchtime.

The school produces detailed reports on attendance rates and has a good understanding of the variances in the attendance of different groups of pupils. However, the school does not proactively celebrate good attendance or promote a culture of good attendance. The school's systems to follow up on absences are not rigorous enough and, as a result, the attendance rate continues to remain too low.

The school's procedures for safeguarding are appropriate and give no cause for concern.

Leadership and management

For a prolonged period, there has been significant instability in staffing at the school. The acting headteacher has been in post for the last seven years, and during that time there have been frequent changes in the teaching staff. This has made it difficult to distribute leadership responsibilities effectively, has impacted on the well-being of staff, has hindered the school's ability to carry out improvements and has had a negative impact on the progress of too many pupils.

The school does not have a clear and shared sense of purpose that guides its work. This hinders the school's ability to make progress in many important areas such as addressing the quality of teaching, addressing national priorities and designing a progressive curriculum that develops pupils' skills.

Leaders have recently planned a suitable programme of activities to monitor and evaluate the work of the school. This includes gathering an appropriate range of evidence from activities such as learning walks, scrutinising pupils' work and listening to learners.

However, these activities do not always happen when planned due to staffing issues. When leaders are able to carry out these activities they do not focus well enough on how well their actions improve outcomes for pupils. Overall, leaders do not use the limited monitoring evidence they have to sufficiently evaluate pupils' progress and put in place realistic actions to make improvements.

The school has recently worked with the local authority to begin to address key issues. In a few important areas where there are shortcomings, there are early signs of improvement, for instance in the work of governors. However, school leaders have not developed a sustained culture of improvement over time.

Leaders are addressing the national ALN reform suitably, and have put in place appropriate support for pupils where needed. However, the school does not address other national priorities, such as improving pupils' skills in literacy, numeracy and the Welsh language well enough.

Recently, the acting headteacher has begun to ensure that performance management processes are more robust and staff development activities link appropriately to school improvement priorities. However, leaders do not use the evidence from self-evaluation activities well enough to rigorously challenge any underperformance in teaching or to improve the quality of teaching across the school.

Leaders are beginning to develop a culture of professional learning. Staff participate in training linked to school improvement priorities. For example, recent professional learning has led to improved teacher knowledge and practice in developing the learning environment. However, overall, opportunities for staff to observe and share good practice within the school and across the region are limited. There has been insufficient focus on targeted professional development, particularly to support teaching and learning, to enable staff to make improvements across the school over time.

The governing body has seen recent significant change to its membership and is very supportive of the school. Governors have positive relationships with the acting headteacher, staff and parents and a suitable awareness of national priorities for improvement. They are aware of their duties to promote healthy eating and drinking, although this is not yet having enough of an impact on those families who do not take up their free school meal eligibility. They manage the budget efficiently and they know how leaders use the pupil development grant to support vulnerable pupils with their well-being. The skills and understanding of governors enable them to support the acting headteacher and the school well. However, this is at an early stage and governors have not been in their roles long enough to see the full impact of their leadership. Over time, the school's governance has not ensured that the acting headteacher has had the capacity to fulfil her roles to drive or make improvements.

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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Publication date: 01/05/2024