



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

A report on

Gabalfa Primary School

**Colwill Rd
Gabalfa
Cardiff
CF14 2QQ**

Date of inspection: December 2023

by

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

About Gabalfa Primary School

Name of provider	Gabalfa Primary School
Local authority	Cardiff Council
Language of the provider	English
Type of school	Primary
Religious character	*
Number of pupils on roll	252
Pupils of statutory school age	184
Number in nursery classes	38
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%)	43.3%
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%)	5.4%
Percentage of pupils who speak Welsh at home	*
Percentage of pupils with English as an additional language	16.8%
Date of headteacher appointment	01/01/2012
Date of previous Estyn inspection (if applicable)	01/02/2015
Start date of inspection	04/12/2023

Data reported is sourced from the latest available Pupil Level Annual School Census. These figures may be slightly different to those observed during the inspection.

Further information is available from the Welsh Government My Local School website: mylocalschool.gov.wales

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

Overview

Gabalfa Primary School provides an inclusive, nurturing learning environment for pupils. Staff know their pupils well, and they work hard to ensure that pupils feel safe and valued at school. Most pupils behave appropriately and try to live up to the school's aim to always do their best.

Staff developed their curriculum in liaison with partner schools. It reflects the lived experience of pupils, by focussing on the local community, its history and people who live and work there. From this, learning moves on to the wider world, where older pupils study important events and matters of global concern, including sustainability and conflict. Teachers bring the curriculum to life by arranging a wide range of visits to places of interest and regular visitors to support pupils' understanding. There are frequent opportunities for pupils to learn outdoors, to use practical work and to use their creative skills in lessons. The comprehensive arrangements for personal and social education help pupils to learn about keeping themselves safe and healthy.

Staff and pupils celebrate the different cultures, languages and faiths represented in the school community well. They encourage pupils to respect their Welsh culture and language. Pupils speak positively about learning Welsh but, overall, most pupils lack confidence when using basic Welsh language patterns.

The school monitors the progress of individual pupils carefully and senior leaders regularly discuss this with teaching staff. Teaching assistants provide beneficial support for pupils' learning and well-being. The school supports families where needed and their counselling service impacts positively on the whole school community.

Pupils' literacy skills develop well. Most pupils develop an enjoyment of reading and become capable readers. There are frequent opportunities for pupils to develop a range of digital skills to support their learning. Most pupils employ different strategies in lessons to solve mathematical problems with support. However, a minority of pupils do not use mental calculation skills well enough, and they lack confidence in solving mathematical problems independently.

The headteacher and leadership team are firmly focused on continuing school improvement. Leaders have effective support from governors to monitor the school's progress. They keep the school's priorities under review and act quickly to remedy anything that needs attention. They ask learners what they think about aspects of school life, and they encourage the active pupil leadership groups to contribute to school improvement wherever they can.

Staff work well as a team and have regular opportunities for professional development. They have high expectations of themselves and their pupils. As a result, pupils make good progress overall within a calm, purposeful and happy environment.

Recommendations

R1 Improve pupils' Welsh language skills

R2 Improve pupils' retention of number facts to support their problem-solving skills

What happens next

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

Main evaluation

Learning

Most pupils make good overall progress during their time at the school. Many of those who are eligible for free school meals make good progress with their learning from their starting points.

Most pupils make strong progress in developing their speaking and listening skills. Younger pupils begin to express their needs and wishes using simple sentences and, over time, most discuss their learning confidently with unfamiliar adults. Most older pupils develop increasingly sophisticated vocabulary and questioning skills, which they use to gain better understanding of a topic or text.

In conversations, most younger pupils listen to instructions and take turns appropriately in conversation with peers and adults. Most older pupils listen carefully and with purpose. Most begin to respond to what they have heard critically, adjusting their responses and justifying their answers.

Most pupils across the school become enthusiastic readers. Many younger pupils use their developing skills to read signs in the classroom or titles in their class project books to show what they have learnt. Most older pupils discuss favourite stories and authors enthusiastically. They read with appropriate expression and show good understanding of what they are reading.

In the Nursery and Reception classes, most pupils begin to make marks and write letters to communicate appropriately. As they move through the school, they use their phonic knowledge to attempt to write words and simple sentences independently. Older pupils quickly develop as confident writers, for example using features such as similes and adventurous adjectives to engage the reader. Most develop good spelling and punctuation. Many older pupils present their work neatly using legible handwriting in a cursive style. Many develop the ability to write at length and for different purposes. Pupils who are new to English make strong progress in developing their literacy skills.

Across the school, pupils' Welsh language skills are underdeveloped. Many pupils use a few phrases they know to play games on the yard and most sing or pray in Welsh during acts of collective worship. However, although most pupils use Welsh greetings enthusiastically, they do not make progress beyond this, for example to answer simple questions.

Most younger pupils develop their mathematical and numeracy skills well through play activities where they begin to identify numbers. They start to order and sequence numbers to 10 and know how to weigh ingredients to make cakes. Older pupils use numeracy in real-life contexts, for example when they calculate the profit from their winter fair. Most older pupils use practical equipment or digital devices to support them to solve mathematical problems successfully. However, although most pupils make good progress during mathematics lessons, a minority lack confidence when using mental methods of calculation and they do not recall number facts well enough to enable them to solve number problems independently.

Across the school, most pupils develop strong digital skills, which they use regularly to support their learning across the curriculum. Younger pupils use tablet computers to draw or to create simple movies. Most older pupils develop their digital skills well and use them confidently. They search for and present information, learn to write a formula in a spreadsheet and make databases, which they then interrogate to support their scientific investigations. Most older pupils begin to use coding, for example to program a micro bit to measure their steps. They try the code out on the playground to see how well their programming has worked.

Pupils across the school develop their physical and creative skills well. Younger pupils begin to draw from still life, adding relevant detail to their work with care and attention. Over time, pupils experiment with their artwork, making decisions about which media to use and evaluating their results. A few begin to use perspective or shading to enhance their work. In drama, pupils work well in groups to portray a scene depicting a disaster and this supports them when writing descriptive texts. Many participate enthusiastically in physical activity sessions, creating dances or setting goals to improve their fitness over time.

Well-being and attitudes to learning

Nearly all pupils are polite and welcoming. They interact well with their friends, staff and visitors. Nearly all show respect and kindness towards staff and other children in the classroom, around the school and at playtimes.

Pupils' behaviour is a strength of the school. Nearly all pupils move calmly around the building and settle quickly when they return from play and lunchtimes. Most pupils understand the school's expectation of their behaviour in school and are keen to do their best.

Most pupils attend school daily, in part due to the school's successful recent work to improve attendance levels, but also because they enjoy the experiences they have when they are in school. Most pupils feel safe and secure in school and feel that adults listen to their views carefully.

The nurturing and caring ethos of the school enables most pupils to engage well in learning. Most pupils have a clear understanding of classroom routines and resources, which support their well-being positively. For example, pupils know they can access the school's counselling service if they are worried about anything.

Many pupils take on roles and responsibilities. They participate enthusiastically in a good range of active pupil leadership groups, including Criw Cymraeg, Techno Heroes and the attendance group. These groups enable pupils to make a positive impact on the life of the school. For example, the attendance group has recently identified the purchase of interesting and engaging play equipment to encourage pupils to come to school. The School Council, made up of chairs and vice chairs from other pupil leadership groups, works closely with school leaders and governors to share the impact of pupil participation on school improvement.

Pupils lead various fundraising events during the year, for example helping to organise the recent movie night and winter fair. They use their entrepreneurial skills to create and sell items they have made themselves. They speak confidently about

the profit they anticipate making and how that money will be spent in school to support school trips or to provide play equipment.

Most pupils talk knowledgably about healthy eating and drinking and the importance of keeping fit. Pupils participate enthusiastically in a wide range of after-school clubs such as fitness, dance, gardening and girls' football.

Most pupils develop well as ethically informed citizens. They are highly aware of the purpose and importance of human rights. They apply this knowledge in school to empathise with others and to demonstrate respect for others' rights. They understand, for example, the right to rest and play and create posters that demonstrate the importance of time to play during the school day.

Most pupils engage positively with their learning. Many pupils collaborate well and encourage and support each other during lessons.

Across the school, most pupils are attentive when their teachers or other pupils are talking and respect each other's views. In discussion many pupils readily accept others' points of view, asking relevant questions and demonstrating good listening skills. Pupils are keen to help each other. Most maintain concentration well and are resilient during their learning activities. For example, younger pupils persevere when weighing out ingredients accurately to make their cakes for the winter fair.

Teaching and learning experiences

Staff have developed a curriculum that reflects the school community and meets the needs of all learners. Through sharing ideas with its local schools, they have devised a curriculum based around the local area, its history, and the impact that humans make on the locality and the wider environment.

The school makes extensive use of trips and visitors to engage the interest of pupils and to expand their knowledge and understanding of real-life situations and events. For example, pupils learn about the world of work and what skills or attributes they would need for different careers. During a visit from a local paramedic, pupils learnt life-saving skills, and following the visit considered how well-matched they are personally to a career in health.

The school's curriculum promotes pupils' own sense of personal identity, language and culture and a sense of belonging to Wales. The school celebrates diversity, for example, when encouraging pupils to use their different languages to greet staff. Older pupils to begin to learn French. Most staff promote the advantages of learning Welsh and pupils understand that Welsh is part of their culture. There are opportunities to learn about important Welsh people as well as the changes in the local area and how local people lived and worked in the past, leading to how we live today.

Lessons build systematically on what pupils know, understand, and can do. Teachers enable pupils to make choices within the topics they study, for example in deciding on aspects of a topic to research. Most staff encourage pupils to use problem solving skills to arrive at a solution. For example, older pupils think about scenarios that could be considered to be bullying, and suggest solutions as well as considering how

things could escalate. They use this information to construct games based on snakes and ladders to spread an anti-bullying message.

There is a comprehensive programme of personal and social education, which supports pupils' understanding of how to stay safe online and helps pupils to think about the choices they make to stay healthy. Younger pupils learn about being safe around medicines and older pupils learn about the dangers of substance misuse and the effects of taking drugs on physical and mental health.

In devising their curriculum, staff work well together to ensure that pupils develop their literacy, numeracy and digital skills. Across the school, pupils have frequent opportunities to develop and use a range of digital skills. This is a strength of the school. Teachers also place strong emphasis on the development of literacy skills in a variety of contexts. For example, the school often uses drama and art to inspire pupils to develop their expressive skills well.

Teachers make their lessons stimulating and engaging. They provide interesting experiences for pupils, which allow them to learn through hands-on, practical experiences indoors and outside. They ensure that lessons enable all pupils to make progress by matching tasks to each pupil's learning needs. They work with support from dedicated teaching assistants, who provide beneficial interventions to help pupils to succeed in their learning and well-being. Senior leaders meet with teachers regularly to review the progress of individual learners. Staff have high expectations of themselves and their pupils, and they work well as a team to support vulnerable pupils.

Pupils set goals for themselves based on the school's agreed dispositions for good learning. There are opportunities for pupils to evaluate their own work and that of others in lessons. Staff provide pupils with beneficial feedback that helps pupils to know how to improve their work.

There are good working relationships between staff and pupils. Staff encourage pupils to behave well and to work hard. Staff know pupils well and as result, manage behaviour sensitively.

Care, support and guidance

The school is a warm and caring community, and staff successfully enable pupils to contribute to its inclusive and friendly ethos by encouraging pupils to help each other, for example when being a friend to play with on the playground. The effective working relationships between staff and pupils and among the pupils themselves are a positive feature of the school.

Teachers and support staff know the pupils well and they respond promptly and sensitively to their emotional and social needs. This includes the beneficial use of the school's counselling programme, which supports individuals purposefully.

The additional learning needs co-ordinator (ALNCo) has created robust processes to identify pupils' needs and works conscientiously with other staff members, external partners, and local schools, to ensure that there is good support for individuals and groups of pupils from an early age. Staff use pupil progress reviews to gain a clear

understanding of the needs of pupils and as a result most pupils with additional needs make good progress.

The school's inclusive culture promotes pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development effectively. Teachers provide suitable opportunities for pupils to learn about a range of faiths as part of their cross-curricular work and through acts of collective worship. These experiences support pupils to reflect on their own values and to behave respectfully towards others within school and in the wider community.

Nearly all pupils feel valued and feel strongly that their views are listened to. The school develops effective opportunities for pupils to participate in making decisions to improve their experiences in school through a variety of elected groups. Staff encourage pupils to work collaboratively in these groups and take on leadership roles effectively. For example, the Eco group organised a whole school day to raise money to purchase beehives. Pupils take pride in their involvement in these groups and talk at length about initiatives they have implemented. For example, they enjoyed organising a movie night for pupils to raise money to subsidise school trips. Pupils also have worthwhile opportunities to improve their fundraising and entrepreneurial skills through events such as the winter fair. All pupils take part in helping with whole-school events, for example by making items to sell.

The school's inclusive culture promotes pupils' understanding of the importance of becoming active citizens in their school and wider community. Most pupils demonstrate a good knowledge of children's rights. Each class studies articles from the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). For example, pupils in Year 6 explored the right to live a full and decent life in relation to disabilities.

The school promotes pupils' awareness of their heritage and Welsh culture effectively through the curriculum, through Eisteddfodau and through numerous trips and visits in the local and wider area. For example, nursery pupils visit the local post-box to post their letters to Father Christmas and older pupils go to a local heritage centre as part of their 'Black Gold' Welsh history topic.

The school actively promotes the importance of healthy eating and encourages physical fitness and mental well-being through a range of activities and clubs. For example, the youngest pupils benefit from purposeful opportunities to use outdoor areas to develop their physical skills. There are opportunities for the older pupils to take part in a fitness club, football and gardening club.

Staff are diligent in managing the well-being and safety of pupils and the school takes its safeguarding responsibilities seriously. Safeguarding procedures give no cause for concern.

Processes for monitoring attendance and punctuality are effective. The school uses a range of strategies to support pupils and families when promoting good attendance and as result attendance levels have improved.

Leadership and management

The headteacher is knowledgeable, and passionate about how the school can make a difference in the local community. She promotes a strong vision, which she shares with pupils, staff, parents and governors. Leaders and staff are aware of the needs of the pupils and as a result work tirelessly to support pupils and their families. Leaders prioritise the needs of the youngest pupils as they begin their journey at Gabalfa and as a result pupils make good progress from their starting points. The headteacher and acting deputy headteacher have high expectations and provide effective support for staff and pupils in creating a nurturing, calm and purposeful learning environment.

Leaders ensure that well-being is a priority and the school's work to address the impact of socio-economic disadvantage on education is a strength. For example, leaders provide a strong programme of personal and social support for pupils and their families and monitor pupils' well-being regularly to ensure that support is having a positive impact on pupils' learning and well-being. They encourage parents to play a part in school life. For example, the school runs a regular community café and arranges training events such as first aid for families.

Self-evaluation is thorough and leaders accurately identify most of the school's strengths and areas for improvement. The current improvement priorities are relevant and reflect local and national priorities. The school has a good track record in bringing about improvements. For example, the school's focus on developing early reading and oracy skills enables most pupils to access the curriculum well and make good progress across the school in literacy.

The school places a high priority on developing its staff and supporting their career development. All staff take part in performance management to ensure that they continue to develop their skills and have relevant professional learning opportunities. There is a strong culture of sharing effective practice both within the school and through collaboration with other schools.

Overall, the school uses its financial resources well. The headteacher and governing body work together to ensure that they have good oversight of the school's finances. They prioritise the deployment of well-trained staff and this impacts positively on the progress pupils make. For example, they allocate teaching assistants effectively across the school to target and support those pupils most in need. The effective use of grant funding enables a staff to target support for the very youngest pupils to help them settle into school quickly. Leaders produce clear and detailed plans for spending, and regularly evaluate the impact of this spending. For example, they use a proportion of the pupil development grant to fund a counselling service in school and staff training to meet the well-being needs of pupils. This highly effective, proactive approach meets the needs of pupils and families well.

Senior leaders ensure that all staff contribute purposefully to school improvement. For example, leaders of areas of learning and experience (AoLEs) work conscientiously to design and create the school's new curriculum making it relevant and appropriate for pupils at Gabalfa Primary.

Governors work well with the headteacher and staff, providing effective support to the school. They know and represent the school and community well. Governors

discharge their responsibilities effectively and bring expertise to their roles. They have a clear understanding of the school's strengths and are beginning to identify areas for development, for example to ensure that pupils make suitable progress in learning in Welsh. Governors provide a good balance of support and challenge. They are regularly involved in learning walks, and this strengthens their knowledge and understanding of what is going on in school. Governors make appropriate arrangements to promote healthy eating and drinking in school and challenge the school's leadership effectively to maintain a robust safeguarding culture.

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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