



*Rhagoriaeth i bawb – Excellence for all*

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a Hyfforddiant yng Nghymru

Her Majesty's Inspectorate  
for Education and Training in Wales

**A report on**

**Our Lady's R.C. Primary School  
Miskin Road  
Miskin  
Mountain Ash  
RCT  
CF45 3UA**

**Date of inspection: December 2012**

**by**

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



During each inspection, inspectors aim to answer three key questions:

**Key Question 1: How good are the outcomes?**

**Key Question 2: How good is provision?**

**Key Question 3: How good are leadership and management?**

Inspectors also provide an overall judgement on the school's current performance and on its prospects for improvement.

In these evaluations, inspectors use a four-point scale:

<b>Judgement</b>	<b>What the judgement means</b>
<b>Excellent</b>	Many strengths, including significant examples of sector-leading practice
<b>Good</b>	Many strengths and no important areas requiring significant improvement
<b>Adequate</b>	Strengths outweigh areas for improvement
<b>Unsatisfactory</b>	Important areas for improvement outweigh strengths

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

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## Context

Our Lady's Roman Catholic Primary school is a voluntary-aided school in the centre of Mountain Ash. It serves the parishes of Mountain Ash and Abercynon, but pupils come from a wide geographical area.

There are 102 pupils on roll between the ages of three and 11. The school admits full-time pupils to the reception class at the beginning of the term following their fourth birthday. Pupils are taught in four mixed-age class and represent the full range of ability. Twenty-eight per cent of pupils are entitled to receive free school meals. The school regards 23% of pupils as having special educational needs. There are no pupils with a statement of special educational needs.

Most pupils are of white British origin and speak English as a first language. Nearly 10% come from ethnic minority backgrounds and have English as an additional language.

Following falling numbers in the past, the school has seen a gradual increase in numbers particularly over the past 12 months, mainly due to the closure of a local infant school.

The current headteacher was appointed in 2004. Due to the growth in pupil numbers, he was released from his class responsibility in May 2012. It is expected that a new deputy headteacher will be appointed by the summer term 2013.

The school was last inspected in November 2006.

Religious education was inspected separately under Section 50 of the Education Act 2005.

The individual school budget per pupil for Our Lady's RC School in 2012-2013 means that the budget is £3,799 per pupil. The maximum per pupil in the primary schools in Rhondda Cynon Taff is £6,197 and the minimum is £2,719. Our Lady's RC School is 37th out of 107 primary schools in Rhondda Cynon Taff in terms of its school budget per pupil.

## Summary

<b>The school's current performance</b>	<b>Adequate</b>
<b>The school's prospects for improvement</b>	<b>Adequate</b>

### Current performance

The school's current performance is adequate because:

- many pupils make good progress from their starting points;
- nearly all pupils behave very well in classes and around the school;
- staff are enthusiastic and create a positive learning environment;
- the majority of teaching is good; and
- effective care, support and guidance leads to good standards in pupils' wellbeing.

However:

- when compared with performance levels of schools with similar levels of entitlement to free school meals, pupils' results over the past four years have generally been in the lower 50% in all subjects;
- pupils' writing skills across the curriculum at key stage 2 are weak underdeveloped; and
- pupils are not sufficiently involved in the assessment and target setting process.

### Prospects for improvement

The prospects for improvement are adequate because:

- the school has a positive ethos where staff work as a team and show commitment to the school and its pupils;
- the school is a well-ordered community; and
- the governing body is strong and supportive and there is a good partnership with parents.

However:

- the quality of the school's self-evaluation is weak; and
- targets for improvement do not focus enough on raising standards for specific groups of pupils.

## Recommendations

- R1 Raise standards generally in pupils' literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology skills particularly at key stage 2
- R2 Improve standards in writing across the curriculum at key stage 2
- R3 Increase the involvement of pupils in the assessment process so they have a better understanding of how well they are doing and what they need to do to improve
- R4 Improve planning to ensure progression in pupils' key skills across the curriculum
- R5 Ensure that teaching offers enough challenge to pupils of all abilities so as to raise the standards they achieve
- R6 Improve self-evaluation and school improvement planning so that they highlight clearly the achievement targets for different groups of pupils
- R7 Enable governors to participate more fully in determining the strategic direction of the school

### What happens next?

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.

## Main findings

### Key Question 1: How good are outcomes?

Adequate

#### Standards: Adequate

Nearly all pupils start school with levels of skills well below those normally expected for their age, especially in language, literacy and communication.

In the Foundation Phase, nearly all pupils make good progress. They settle quickly into class routines, and are confident in choosing activities and developing independence. Throughout the phase, pupils listen, speak and co-operate well. By the end of the Foundation Phase, the majority develop and explain their ideas appropriately using a growing vocabulary. They are beginning to express an opinion simply.

The majority of pupils begin to develop good strategies for reading and, from very early, recognise familiar words in simple texts. They soon use their knowledge of letters and sound-symbol relationship to read simple words and to establish meaning when reading aloud. The majority of pupils develop good writing skills and use appropriate and interesting vocabulary and develop their ideas in a sequence of appropriate sentences, sometimes demarcated by capital letters and full stops.

In key stage 2, many pupils make appropriate progress and show relevant understanding of the topics they have studied. The majority of pupils' skills in speaking and listening are sound. Many listen appropriately and contribute sensibly in lessons. By the end of the key stage, a majority of pupils read with confidence and use their skills appropriately when researching information in books or when using the computer. However, the range of books which they read is narrow, and only a few can talk about their preferences and favourite authors. Generally, pupils' writing skills are not as well developed. Very often, poor handwriting and presentation of work mar the quality of what pupils are recording. Few pupils write well and at length in subjects across the curriculum.

The majority of pupils achieve well in structured Welsh lessons, but their ability to use Welsh outside the classroom is limited. The majority of pupils' knowledge and understanding of the culture and history of Wales is appropriate.

In language, literacy and communication and in mathematical development at the end of the Foundation Phase in 2012, the percentage of pupils attaining the expected level (outcome 5) was below the average for the family of similar schools and for all primary schools in Wales. Results compared well in personal and social development, wellbeing and cultural diversity. When compared with schools with similar levels of entitlement to free school meals, the school's performance places it in the lowest 25% of schools in all areas. However, the percentage of pupils achieving the higher level (outcome 6) compares well with performance levels of other schools in all areas.

The percentage of pupils who achieve the expected level (level 4 or above) at key stage 2 in English, mathematics and science in combination is slightly above the averages for the family of similar schools and other schools in Wales. However, over the past four years, the school's results in all core subjects have generally placed it in the lower 50% of schools.

Pupils achieving the higher level (level 5) in English, mathematics and science in 2012 was significantly higher than the average for the family and schools in Wales. This shows a significant improvement on the previous two years.

Pupils with special educational needs make appropriate progress in relation to their age and abilities.

### **Wellbeing: Good**

Most pupils have very positive attitudes towards healthy eating and exercise and they understand the need for physical activities to improve their fitness. All pupils feel safe in school and say that no bullying or harassment occurs.

Most pupils enjoy their lessons and are well motivated. They remain on task and work well with each other. They are always polite and courteous and display an obvious respect for both staff and each other. Behaviour and self-discipline in lessons and around the school are good.

The school council is well established and members have a strong understanding of their roles. They feel that staff take their suggestions seriously and believe that they have a say in the life of the school. They have been successful in promoting improvements to the school, such as the school garden.

Many pupils are regularly involved with church and community initiatives and they undertake these activities enthusiastically and with pride.

The majority of pupils are beginning to develop the skills necessary to assess their own and other pupils' work; this is particularly evident at the end of key stage 2. However, many pupils throughout the school are still unsure as to how well they are doing and what they need to do to improve their work.

The school's average attendance is almost 93% which is slightly above the average for the family of similar schools, and close to the all-Wales average.

<b>Key Question 2: How good is provision?</b>	<b>Adequate</b>
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### **Learning experiences: Adequate**

The school provides a wide range of learning experiences that generally meet the needs of many pupils. The curriculum is broad and balanced and covers the requirements of the Foundation Phase and the National Curriculum.

Teachers plan together competently and the learning experiences they set out in the Foundation Phase encourage pupils to make sensible choices and to become

increasingly independent learners. At key stage 2, pupils experience a wide range of interesting and stimulating learning experiences both in the classrooms and beyond. Activities such as gardening, cookery, music and craft enrich their experiences successfully.

Long-term and mid-term planning is detailed and useful, but there is a lack of consistency in the school's approach to short-term planning for mixed-age classes. Tasks are not always appropriate for the full range of ability; less able pupils experience difficulty at times in understanding what is expected of them; and teachers do not always plan activities that challenge the more able to achieve their best.

Teachers have carefully planned the development of pupils' key skills through a 'skills ladder' approach, but it is not always implemented well enough to ensure continuity and progression in pupils' work throughout the school. The over-reliance on work sheets limits the range, quality and standard of writing by the majority of pupils.

The provision for Welsh language development within the classroom is adequate. However, the school does not promote the use of Welsh outside the classroom enough.

The school operates in a sustainable way and is well supported by an enthusiastic eco council who have a good understanding of the principles involved. Opportunities to develop pupils' knowledge of the diverse world through their links with Zanzibar provide pupils with a good understanding of how others live.

### **Teaching: Adequate**

All teachers have good up-to-date subject knowledge and use a wide range of approaches to secure the interest and motivation of most pupils. There are good relationships between the staff and pupils. Teachers manage pupils' behaviour very well and strategies to deal with rare incidents of unacceptable behaviour are clear.

In the majority of lessons, the teaching is of good quality. Lessons have clear objectives that are appropriate to pupils' ages and abilities and they move along at a suitable pace. Teachers use a varied range of resources and they deploy support staff effectively to help individuals and groups of pupils. However, in a minority of lessons, teachers do not have high enough expectations of all pupils and pupils' learning does not move along at a suitable pace.

Pupils receive good oral feedback on their progress in lessons. In most cases, comments on children's work offer clear guidance as to what to do next. However, this is not always the case and a few less able pupils find it difficult to understand what to do. In general, teachers do not give pupils enough opportunities to develop the skills necessary to assess their own work.

Assessment of learning is adequate. Records are accurate and detailed for the Foundation Phase and for core subjects of the national curriculum, but teachers do not use them regularly and effectively enough to adjust their future planning.



Parents' evenings and written reports keep parents well informed about their children's progress and they meet statutory requirements.

**Care, support and guidance: Good**

There are effective arrangements for supporting pupils' health and wellbeing in addition to encouraging their involvement in their school and the wider community. The school provides good opportunities for pupils to take responsibility.

The school promotes pupils' moral and spiritual development successfully during acts of collective worship and circle time. Courtesy and respect are prominent qualities within the school and all staff foster these qualities in pupils very well. The school provides well for pupils' social and cultural development through links with several organisations in the local community.

The school's arrangements for safeguarding pupils meet requirements and give no cause for concern.

Provision for pupils with additional learning needs is successful and staff identify pupils with needs promptly. Staff review and update individual education plans effectively and regularly in consultation with parents, the pupil, and the appropriate specialist agencies. There are clear systems in place to monitor the progress of pupils.

The school provides a safe and secure environment which caters effectively for pupils' health and wellbeing. It is a well-ordered and caring community with expectations, rules and procedures that pupils understand well. Pupils' happiness and wellbeing are given a high priority.

**Learning environment: Good**

The school is an inclusive and caring community in which pupils feel happy and safe. The school's homely and Christian ethos places a strong emphasis on pupils getting along well together. The school encourages pupils to show respect and care towards each other and others, and they have a good relationship with their peers and with the school's staff. All pupils have equal access to the curriculum and are encouraged to participate fully in the life of the school. There are plenty of resources that are well matched to pupils' needs and that support learning and teaching. The school's attractive internal accommodation, including wall displays, creates a stimulating learning environment for pupils. All areas inside and outside the school are used well for teaching and learning.

The buildings and grounds are well maintained and meet the needs of all learners well. The outdoor area for the Foundation Phase is attractive and the development of the garden area to create an outdoor classroom is an impressive feature of the school.

<b>Key Question 3: How good are leadership and management?</b>
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<b>Adequate</b>
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**Leadership: Adequate**

The headteacher has a clear vision for the future of the school. All members of the senior management team have well-defined job descriptions and they carry out their individual and collective roles purposefully. They work well as a team and have shared values about learning, behaviour and relationships. There is a strong sense of common purpose, but this focus has not focused enough on driving up pupil outcomes.

The school makes full use of data to monitor the performance of pupils, but other monitoring processes, such as the scrutiny of pupils' work and talking to pupils, are not rigorous enough. As a result, there is not sufficient challenge to staff to improve pupils' outcomes.

Governors undertake their responsibilities conscientiously and have a strong interest in the day-to-day life of the school. They have a suitable knowledge of the school's performance data and how the school performs in relation to other school. However, they are not regularly involved in setting the strategic direction of the school or in challenging the school as a critical friend.

The school pays good attention to national and local priorities, for example in relation to the promotion of healthy eating and sustainable development, and the school has established the Foundation Phase well.

**Improving quality: Adequate**

The headteacher has a satisfactory understanding of the school's strengths and shortcomings and a culture of self-evaluation is developing. Although other members of staff are involved in the process, the analysis of information has not identified clearly the key areas for improvement. The school has sought the views of governors, parents and members of the church community and pupils regularly contribute their ideas through a very active school council. They feel that staff take their observations and comments seriously.

The self-evaluation report gives a detailed description of many aspects of the school's life and work, but it is not always evaluative enough. There are a sensible number of priorities in the school development plan which focus on improving standards but the actions identified do not focus clearly enough on improving the standard of pupils' work.

Members of staff are supported well by continuous professional development opportunities and share their experiences appropriately, but they do not do enough to promote best practice with each other. The establishment of a local professional learning community to look at improving literacy has not yet had an impact on standards at the school.

### **Partnership working: Good**

The school has developed a wide range of useful partnerships. Links with parents are good and they raise money regularly to purchase additional resources, which are used to good effect to support pupils' learning. Volunteer parents support pupils well in after-school activities, such as technology.

The school has a wide range of links with the community. Good working relationships with the church and the local Community First committee are having a positive impact on pupils' spiritual and moral development and their environmental awareness.

Pupils are well prepared for moving on to secondary school. By undertaking practical units of work at the secondary school and through visits by secondary teachers to the school, pupils develop a good understanding of the demands of secondary education and how subjects are taught in the secondary school.

There are good partnerships within the local cluster of primary schools. The moderating of pupils' work in English, Welsh, mathematics, science and religious education has resulted in useful portfolios of work. These are improving teachers' understanding of assessment practices and the standards expected at the end of key stage 2.

Joint working on projects via a network of small schools has resulted in joint planning of teaching units, for example in music. Teachers find the pooling of ideas useful and have improved their knowledge and understanding of the subject.

The school works well with a range of outside agencies to meet the particular needs of individuals and groups of pupils.

### **Resource management: Adequate**

The school is well staffed and resourced to meet the needs of pupils. Teachers and support staff are appropriately deployed. Effective use is made of planning, preparation and assessment time, although arrangements to monitor its impact are underdeveloped.

There are effective arrangements in place to meet the development needs of all staff through appraisal and performance management arrangements.

Learning resources are well managed, accessible and well used. The school's investment in information and communication technology during the past two years has resulted in pupils' increased confidence in this area.

The school manages its budget carefully and spending decisions are clearly based on priorities for improvement. The school's purchasing policy sets out governors' expectations in relation to cost effectiveness. There is a sensible balance between the financial responsibilities of governors and those delegated to the headteacher and subject co-ordinators.

In view of the satisfactory standards attained by most pupils, the school gives adequate value for money.

## Appendix 1

### Commentary on performance data

Nearly all pupils start in the school with skills well below those normally expected for children of their age, especially in language.

Teacher assessments at the end of Year 2, in the Foundation Phase, and at the end of Year 6 in key stage 2, must be treated with care because the relatively small number of pupils in a year can have a considerable effect on the school's performance from one year to another.

In teacher assessments at the end of the Foundation Phase in 2012, the number of pupils attaining the Foundation Phase indicator (outcome 5) was below the average for the family of similar schools and for schools in Wales. In language, literacy and communication and in mathematical development, the percentage of pupils attaining the expected level (outcome 5) was below the average for the family and the national averages. Results compared well with the family and schools in Wales averages in personal and social development, wellbeing and cultural diversity. The percentage of pupils achieving the higher level (outcome 6) was slightly below the average for the family of similar schools in language, literacy and communication. Results compared well in mathematical development and were slightly higher in personal and social development, wellbeing and cultural diversity when compared with the average for the family of similar schools, but were slightly below the average for schools in Wales.

When compared with schools with similar levels of entitlement to free school meals, the school's performance places it in the lowest 25% of schools in all areas.

Girls perform significantly better than boys in all areas particularly in language, literacy and communication and in mathematical development.

The performance of pupils in 2012, when compared with that of similar schools, placed the school in the lowest 25% of schools for the Foundation Phase indicator and for language, literacy and communication skills, mathematical development and personal and social development, wellbeing and cultural diversity.

The results at key stage 2 in 2012 refer only to boys as there were no girls in the cohort. The percentage of pupils who achieved the expected level (level 4 or above) in English, mathematics and science in combination was slightly above the average for the family of similar schools and for other schools in Wales. Taken separately, the school's performance compared well with family and schools in Wales averages in English, mathematics and science. With the exception of 2009 when results were significantly higher than averages for similar schools and other schools in Wales, results in other years were lower.

In 2012, the percentage of pupils achieving the higher level (level 5) in English, mathematics and science was significantly higher than the family and schools in Wales averages. This shows a significant improvement on the previous two years.

Teacher assessments at key stage 2 in 2012, for the separate attainment targets of oracy, reading and writing, compare well with the family of schools and schools in Wales averages.

When compared with performance levels of schools with similar levels of entitlement to free school meals, pupils' results at the expected level in 2012 were just below the average in English and mathematics, but in the lowest 25% for science. Over the past four years, from being in the top 25% in 2009, results have been in the lower 50% in all subjects.

Pupils with special educational needs make appropriate progress in relation to their age and abilities.

## **Appendix 2**

### **Stakeholder satisfaction report**

#### **Responses to parent/carers questionnaires**

Twenty-three questionnaires were received from parents/carers. Parents' satisfaction levels are high, and for most questions are higher than the average for other primary schools.

All parents state that they are satisfied or very satisfied with the school in general and that their children are safe. They are all happy with the way children are helped to settle when they start at the school and feel that they are well prepared for moving on to the next school. They also believe that pupils' behaviour is good and that they are developing to become more mature and to shoulder responsibility. They say that their children are encouraged to be healthy and to take regular exercise and also that there are good opportunities to participate in a range of activities including trips or visits.

Nearly all parents are of the opinion that the school is run well and feel that teaching in classes is good and that their children are making good progress. They agree that homework builds well on what is taught at school and that they feel comfortable in raising any issues. Nearly all parents say that their children like school and are respected and treated fairly. They feel that they have regular information about their children's progress and that they understand the school's arrangements for dealing with complaints.

#### **Responses to learner questionnaires**

Learner questionnaires were completed by 49 pupils in key stage 2.

All pupils feel safe at school. They all say that the school teaches them to be healthy and provides opportunities to take regular exercise. All pupils feel that teachers help them to learn and to make progress and they know where to turn if they are worried or whom to ask for advice. Nearly all feel that they are doing well at school.

Most pupils say the school deals well with any bullying. Nearly all believe that their homework helps them to understand and to improve their work at school.

The level of satisfaction compares well with the average for primary schools, except that a minority say that they do not have enough books, equipment and computers to do their work and are of the opinion that children do not always behave well so that they can do their work.

## Appendix 3

### The inspection team

Mervyn Lloyd Jones	Reporting Inspector
Enir Rees Morgan	Team Inspector
Edward Tipper	Lay Inspector
Thomas Davies	Peer Inspector
Francesco Fulgoni	School Nominee

## Copies of the report

Copies of this report are available from the school and from the Estyn website ([www.estyn.gov.uk](http://www.estyn.gov.uk))

Under the Independent School Standards (Wales) Regulations 2003, the school must provide copies of the report to all parents of the school. Where a pupil is subject to placement by a local authority, a copy of the report should be sent by the school to each relevant authority.

### Year groups and key stages

Schools use a common system of numbering year groups from the start of compulsory schooling to 18 years of age. This system emphasises the importance of continuity and eases communication among schools, governing bodies, parents and LEAs.

The term 'Reception' (FPR) refers to the year group of pupils in a primary school who reach the age of five during the academic year. FYear 1 refers to the year group of pupils who reach the age of six during the academic year and so on. Year 13 is the year group of students who reach the age of 18 during the academic year.

Primary phase:

Year	FPR	FPY1	FPY2	Y3	Y4	Y5	Y6
Ages	4-5	5-6	6-7	7-8	8-9	9-10	10-11

Secondary phase:

Year	Y7	Y8	Y9	Y10	Y11	Y12	Y13
Ages	11-12	12-13	13-14	14-15	15-16	16-17	17-18

The four key stages cover the following year groups:

Foundation Phase	Reception, Year 1 and Year 2
Key stage 2	Year 3 to Year 6
Key stage 3	Year 7 to Year 9
Key stage 4	Year 10 and Year 11