



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

A report on

**Oaklands Primary School
Maes Y Deri
The Oaklands
Aberaman
Aberdare
CF44 6AJ**

Date of inspection: November 2017

by

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

About Oaklands Primary School

Oaklands Primary School is in Aberaman in Rhondda Cynon Taf. There are 222 pupils on roll aged three to eleven years, including 28 who attend full-time in the nursery. The school hosts a local authority funded learning support class for pupils between three and seven years of age with communication difficulties.

Around 22% of pupils are eligible to free school meals, which is slightly above the average for Wales at 19%. Most pupils are of white British origin and no pupil speaks Welsh as their first language. A very few pupils have English as an additional language.

The school identifies about 17% of pupils as having additional learning needs. This is slightly below the average for Wales at 21%. A very few pupils have a statement of special educational needs or are looked after by the local authority.

The headteacher took up post in September 2009. The school's last inspection was in January 2013.

Further information is available from the Welsh Government My Local School website at the link below.
<http://mylocalschool.wales.gov.uk/Schools/SchoolSearch?lang=en>

Summary

By the end of key stage 2, many pupils make strong progress in learning from their starting points. All pupils in the learning support class make good progress towards their individual targets. Most pupils are enthusiastic and engage fully with their learning.

The quality of teaching is good. All teachers have strong working relationships with pupils and plan interesting learning activities that engage pupils' successfully. Planning to develop pupils' skills in literacy and numeracy across the curriculum is at an early stage of development.

The school is an inclusive community where staff and pupils show a high level of care and respect for each other. Arrangements for supporting pupils with additional learning needs are strong and enable targeted pupils to make good progress towards their specific targets. At present, systems to track and monitor individual pupils' progress are under-developed.

Senior leaders and staff understand their roles and responsibilities well, and this helps to drive forward improvements in pupils' standards successfully, for example in writing. They evaluate the work of the school accurately.

Inspection area	Judgement
Standards	Good
Wellbeing and attitudes to learning	Good
Teaching and learning experiences	Adequate and needs improvement
Care, support and guidance	Adequate and needs improvement
Leadership and management	Good

Recommendations

- R1 Improve pupils' oracy, reading and mathematical development skills in the foundation phase
- R2 Ensure that learning experiences reflect the ethos and principles of the foundation phase
- R3 Ensure that improvement planning focuses on areas most in need of development
- R4 Continue to develop effective systems for tracking pupils' progress
- R5 Improve pupils' attendance

What happens next

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

Main findings

Standards: Good

Most pupils enter the school with literacy and numeracy skills that are in line with or below those expected of pupils of a similar age. By the end of key stage 2, many make strong progress from their starting points. All pupils in the learning support class make good progress towards their individual targets and achieve well in relation to their ability.

In the foundation phase, most pupils have effective listening skills. A majority use their speaking skills appropriately to communicate with adults and their friends, for example when telling the story of a 'bear hunt'. A minority do so without prompting and explain in more detail. As they move through the foundation phase, many pupils make satisfactory progress in developing their reading skills. A few more able pupils read with strong understanding and with appropriate expression. Many demonstrate a worthwhile understanding of the relationship between letters and sounds. However, in general pupils have limited strategies to decode unfamiliar words. By the end of the foundation phase, many pupils write well for an appropriate range of purposes, for example when describing a character, such as Roald Dahl's 'Big Friendly Giant'. They write legibly and use basic punctuation accurately. A majority spell common words well and make suitable attempts at spelling more difficult words. However, pupils do not consistently use their literacy skills effectively in other areas of learning.

In key stage 2, nearly all pupils listen attentively in lessons. When sharing their ideas with their talk partners or with the class, they pay attention well. Many pupils speak clearly and confidently, for example when discussing their likes and dislikes. At the end of key stage 2, many pupils have strong reading skills and discuss the books they read enthusiastically. They infer characters' feelings from authors' descriptions well. Many scan texts to find specific information efficiently. Throughout key stage 2, most pupils write successfully for a broad range of purposes. By the end of the stage, most pupils use a well-developed and interesting vocabulary to enliven their writing, for example when describing light that 'danced gracefully around a glum room spreading its fingers into every corner'. Many use paragraphs effectively and employ a range of punctuation, such as brackets, to structure their writing skilfully. Many pupils' handwriting and presentation are clear. Most pupils spell accurately in line with their age and ability. They apply their literacy skills appropriately across the curriculum.

At the end of the foundation phase, many pupils understand basic Welsh instructions and they respond suitably using simple words and phrases. As they progress through key stage 2, pupils' language skills develop suitably. Many talk about themselves and their family confidently, for example when saying how they feel, or where they live. However, few pupils use their Welsh independently throughout the day. Throughout the school, most pupils read Welsh texts hesitantly, but identify and understand words and phrases they recognise appropriately. By the end of key stage 2, many produce simple but accurate pieces of short writing. For example, they write an appropriate short paragraph about themselves independently.

By the end of the foundation phase, many pupils have effective number skills. Most read and write numbers to 100 and compare and order two-digit numbers accurately. Many pupils can double and halve numbers in practical situations, for example to share pieces of a pizza. When using money, they add up and then give change under one pound accurately. However, pupils do not always apply their numeracy skills confidently across the curriculum. By the end of key stage 2, most pupils reach a good standard in mathematics. Many calculate the percentage or fraction of an amount well. They multiply and divide whole numbers and decimals accurately. Many measure carefully and calculate the internal angles of three and four sided shapes correctly. They interpret data from a pie chart well, for example one that represents children's choices for their favourite days out. Many pupils apply their numeracy skills well in science, but inconsistently in other curriculum areas.

In the foundation phase, many pupils begin to develop their confidence in using a range of information and communication technology (ICT) equipment appropriately. For example, they use tablet computers to take photographs of their work and scan quick response codes successfully. Most pupils in key stage 2 use a range of software and 'apps' to present their work creatively. They use presentation software confidently, for example when creating a quiz about their favourite superheroes. However, pupils' understanding of spreadsheets and databases is not as strong.

Wellbeing and attitudes to learning: Good

Nearly all pupils are polite and respectful to each other, staff and visitors. They show care and concern for the whole school community. Nearly all pupils' behaviour in lessons and on the playground is consistently good. They feel safe in school and are confident to approach staff if they have any concerns.

Nearly all pupils know how to keep healthy through regular exercise and eating a healthy diet. For example, during snack time, pupils in the foundation phase demonstrate a good understanding of the importance of avoiding too much sugary food. Year 6 pupils take seriously the responsibility of running a healthy tuck shop. Many pupils take part in regular physical activities and enjoy the sports clubs that are available including rugby and football. Nearly all pupils know how to keep safe on the internet. Pupils speak knowledgeably about how they should be careful about the information they share online.

Most pupils are enthusiastic, engage fully with their learning and concentrate well in class. Older pupils work well independently or in small groups, where they respect and respond well to the contributions of their peers. However, many pupils in the foundation phase do not focus on their tasks and activities well enough when working independently.

Pupils throughout the school fulfil their leadership responsibilities with pride. For example, the school council has organised and improved playground resources recently for all pupils. Digital leaders work responsibly, support younger pupils and staff diligently with ICT. The school's 'committee of planet savers' promote energy saving throughout the school effectively. For example, they develop suitable strategies to reduce electricity usage.

Rates of pupil attendance for the last four years place the school consistently in the lower 50% and bottom 25%, when compared with similar schools. However, unverified data shows that in 2017 the rate of pupil attendance was at its highest for at least the last five years.

Teaching and learning experiences: Adequate and needs improvement

The quality of teaching is good. All teachers have strong working relationships with pupils and consider the needs of individuals well. Most plan interesting learning activities that engage pupils' successfully. In nearly all classes and in the learning support class learning assistants support pupils well. Most teachers use questioning techniques effectively to develop pupils' thinking. They use a variety of pupil engagement strategies skilfully, such as encouraging pupils to talk to their 'shoulder partners'. This allows pupils to share and consider different ideas well. In all classes, teachers have high expectations of pupils' behaviour. They offer constructive praise at appropriate times and create an environment in which pupils feel confident and valued. However, teachers do not always plan learning activities effectively enough to challenge pupils at an appropriate level.

All teachers provide helpful oral feedback to pupils during lessons. This helps pupils to see what they are doing well and where they may be making errors. In many classes, and particularly at the end of key stage 2, teachers' written feedback gives clear and useful guidance to pupils on what they need to do to improve their work. Many teachers give pupils useful opportunities to consider the quality of their own and the work of others. This helps pupils to understand the strengths and shortcomings in their own learning well and consider what they can do to improve.

The school's curriculum provides interesting and engaging learning experiences through its termly topics, for example the themed work around 'superheroes' in Year 6. In the foundation phase and key stage 2, medium term planning allows teachers to design learning activities in many curriculum areas that develop pupils' knowledge and understanding efficiently. However, planning for ICT does not cover all aspects well enough. As a result, pupils do not develop a sufficiently strong understanding in important areas, such as spreadsheets and databases. On many occasions, planned learning in Year 1 and Year 2 does not reflect the ethos and principles of the foundation phase. Throughout the day, pupils have too few opportunities to learn through active play or to direct their own learning both in and out doors. This restricts pupils' development as independent and resilient learners.

The school's medium term planning identifies a suitable range of opportunities within the curriculum for pupils to develop their literacy, numeracy and thinking skills. However, when planning specific learning experiences, teachers do not always consider these effectively enough to ensure that pupils develop and build on these skills as they move through the school. Provision and planning to develop pupils' Welsh language skills outside of the classroom are limited and many pupils do not use the Welsh language confidently enough.

The school provides an appropriate range of interesting experiences to foster pupils' enthusiasm for learning and give them wider opportunities to develop their knowledge and skills, particularly in oracy. For example, older pupils take part in an annual Shakespeare festival and recently performed Macbeth in a local theatre.

Pupils in Year 1 visit a local manor house where they learn about life in Stuart times. These practical experiences allow pupils to talk enthusiastically, for example about what it would have been like to live at that time, to be a servant and to sleep on a thin mattress stuffed with hay.

Care, support and guidance: Adequate and needs improvement

The school is an inclusive community where staff and pupils show a high level of care and respect for each other. Staff understand and respond to pupils emotional and social needs well.

There are effective arrangements to identify, support and monitor pupils' with additional learning needs across the school. These arrangements include useful class profiles and individual education plans with clear personalised targets. This helps teachers to understand the specific learning needs of identified pupils well. Effective support is in place for those pupils with weaker numeracy and literacy skills, such as smaller group learning sessions. These help the pupils involved to consolidate their learning effectively. In the learning support class, staff know their pupils' needs extremely well. They personalise their learning skilfully in small, planned and manageable steps. As a result, these pupils make good progress towards their specific targets. All staff work well with a wide range of specialist services, including educational psychologists and speech and language therapists who provide beneficial advice and support for pupils.

There is a strong working relationship with parents, particularly with the parents of vulnerable pupils. Communication strategies, such as newsletters and social media keep parents well informed about the work of the school. In addition, the home-to-school book in the learning support class encourages and supports parents' involvement beneficially in their child's education.

Progress meetings between the headteacher and class teachers enable them to discuss how well pupils are progressing towards their targets. In these meetings, staff identify barriers to pupils' learning and then implement appropriate interventions where needed. The school has recently introduced a tracking system to identify and monitor individual pupils' progress. However, at present teachers do not have a strong enough understanding of pupils' skills. The new systems have not yet had an impact on the quality of teachers' planning or on the effectiveness of challenge in pupils' learning experiences.

There are beneficial arrangements through the curriculum, assemblies, and extra-curricular visits to promote pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. For instance, a recent visit from Spanish teachers enabled pupils to develop their understanding of life in another country. Pupils designed a 'friendship sundae' to develop an awareness of the 'ingredients' for a good friendship. Arrangements for promoting healthy eating and regular exercise are appropriate. A suitable variety of extra-curricular activities and visits enhance the curriculum, for example Year 4 pupils visited the local water treatment centre to learn about mini-beasts and watery habitats from a practical perspective. Arrangements for safeguarding pupils meet requirements and give no cause for concern.

The school has introduced recently a wider range of strategies to both monitor and improve attendance. However, these are yet to have a strong enough impact on improving the attendance rates of pupils, particularly those eligible for free school meals and persistent absentees.

Leadership and management: Good

School leaders have a clear vision and ethos that places effective teamwork at the heart of the school. They ensure that the whole school community shares this vision purposely. Senior leaders and staff understand their roles and responsibilities well, and this helps to drive forward improvements in pupils' standards successfully. For example, a recent focus has improved the quality of pupils' writing considerably.

The school has a clear timetable for monitoring its activities and uses a beneficial range of evidence to evaluate its work, such as lesson observations and the scrutiny of pupils' books. Staff make good use of this information to identify a comprehensive list of improvement priorities. The school's improvement plan sets out relevant and measurable actions clearly. However, leaders do not always focus improvement planning well enough on the areas that are most in need of attention, such as improving the quality of foundation phase provision.

Leaders provide valuable professional learning opportunities for all staff, both within and beyond the school. All staff attend relevant training that links well to improvement priorities. Teachers visit other schools to observe and share good practice. As a result, staff develop strategies that improve provision and raise standards, for example, working with a group of schools to develop and embed effective teaching strategies to promote collaborative learning between pupils. This has had a positive effect on the way that pupils share information and learn from each other.

The governing body is supportive of the school and over time has developed its ability to question leaders more effectively. Senior leaders keep governors well informed with useful, detailed reports. Regular visits to the school and learning walks increase governors' understanding of the impact of improvement actions and the effect they have on pupils. As a result, governors have a beneficial understanding of the school's strengths and areas for improvement. They use this information effectively to challenge the school on its performance, for example on the impact of initiatives on the quality of teaching.

The school focusses appropriately on a number of national priorities, such as reducing the adverse effect of poverty on pupils' standards and well-being. Leaders make effective use of the pupil development grant to ensure they meet the needs of pupils eligible for free school meals effectively, for example through successful learning interventions.

Overall, leaders plan and monitor finances effectively and their spending decisions relate suitably to priorities in the school improvement plan. For instance, the school has recently upgraded its computer suite to provide improved teaching and learning opportunities for pupils. However, the outdoor learning environment for the foundation phase is underdeveloped. In a very few cases, leaders do not always ensure that all staff have appropriate skills to undertake their roles effectively.

Copies of the report

Copies of this report are available from the school and from the Estyn website (www.estyn.gov.wales)

Estyn evaluates a provider's effectiveness using a four-point judgement scale:

Excellent	Very strong, sustained performance and practice
Good	Strong features, although minor aspects may require improvement
Adequate and needs improvement	Strengths outweigh weaknesses, but important aspects require improvement
Unsatisfactory and needs urgent improvement	Important weaknesses outweigh strengths

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 going to press. Any enquiries or comments regarding this document/publication should be addressed to:

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