Estyn

A report on

Ponthir Church in Wales School
School Close
Ponthir
Torfaen
NP18 1GA

Date of inspection: February 2018

by

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

About Ponthir Church in Wales School

Ponthir Church in Wales School is in the village of Ponthir in Torfaen. Currently, there are 112 pupils on roll, aged from four to eleven. There are four mixed-year classes taught by three full-time teachers and two part-time teachers.

The average proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals over the last three years is around 3%. This is well below the average for Wales of 19%. The school identifies 13% of pupils as having additional learning needs, which is lower than the national average of 21%. A very few pupils have a statement of special educational needs and a very few are in the care of the local authority. Nearly all pupils are of white British ethnicity and come from homes where English is the main language. A very few pupils speak Welsh at home.

The current acting headteacher took up her post in May 2017. She is seconded from another school. The school's previous inspection was in January 2010.

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

Most pupils enjoy coming to school and pupils' attendance is very good. Many pupils behave well in their classes and around the school.

Pupils' progress and the quality of teaching and curriculum planning vary too much from class to class at Ponthir Church in Wales School. As a result, pupils do not always have purposeful opportunities to develop their skills well enough or to apply these independently in their work across the curriculum. Overall, teachers' expectations of what pupils can achieve, particularly those who are more able, are not high enough.

By the end of key stage 2, most pupils develop strong speaking skills and most achieve well in mathematics. However, pupils' skills in Welsh and information and communication technology (ICT) are underdeveloped.

Since her appointment, the acting headteacher has identified important areas for development in the school. She has taken swift action to establish clear policies and procedures, and to ensure that all staff, including the newly-formed leadership team, understand their roles and responsibilities. However, these changes are too recent to have brought about improved outcomes for pupils.

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

Recommendations

R1 Improve curriculum planning and the quality of teaching to ensure that pupils receive appropriate challenges in their work and develop their skills systematically as they move through the school

R2 Improve teaching in the foundation phase to ensure that it aligns with the principles of the foundation phase

R3 Raise standards of pupils' writing

R4 Raise standards of pupils' Welsh

R5 Improve pupils' ICT skills

R6 Develop the school's leadership capacity at all levels to address important priorities for improvement

R7 Improve pupils' independent learning skills

What happens next

In accordance with the Education Act 2005, HMCI is of the opinion that this school is in need of significant improvement. The school will draw up an action plan to show how it is going to address the recommendations. Estyn will monitor the school's progress about 12 months after the publication of this report.

Main findings

Standards: Adequate and needs improvement

When they start school, nearly all pupils have skills that are at the level expected for their age and around half of pupils have strong communication skills. At the end of Year 6, nearly all pupils achieve at an appropriate standard. However, pupils' progress and standards of achievement as they move through the school vary too much from class to class. This means that a minority of pupils, particularly those who are more able, do not achieve as well as they could. The few pupils with additional learning needs make suitable progress from their individual starting points.

Most pupils develop their speaking skills well. In the foundation phase, pupils share their ideas clearly and confidently, for example when discussing in pairs how to transport dinosaur eggs safely back to their nest in a science and technology challenge. By Year 6, many pupils are articulate and adapt their speaking skills successfully to different audiences and tasks. For instance, more able pupils use a variety of oral storytelling techniques effectively to create suspense and drama when retelling a Welsh tale for an Eisteddfod competition. Across the school, many pupils listen attentively to their teachers and to one another.

By the end of the foundation phase, most pupils read with suitable fluency and expression. They show a good understanding of the plot and characters in a story. However, only a few pupils use independent strategies to tackle unfamiliar words in their reading as a majority of pupils do not have a secure enough knowledge of sounds to help them to decode words. In key stage 2, most pupils have positive attitudes towards reading and many talk about books that they read regularly at home. By Year 6, most pupils have a good understanding of the significant events in more challenging texts, which they read accurately. However, a few pupils do not develop their higher-order reading skills well enough, for example to research information efficiently.

By Year 2, within a limited range of genres, most pupils write simple sentences appropriately, for example instructions to make 'snowman soup'. In key stage 2, most pupils have a secure understanding of the features of different genres. By Year 6, they begin to redraft and edit sections of their work successfully to improve their vocabulary choices, for instance when writing a science fiction story. A very few more able pupils use imagery effectively to engage the reader and they vary the length of their sentences to create pace and tension successfully in their writing. However, a minority of pupils make frequent spelling errors in their work and they do not always use basic punctuation well enough to organise their writing. In general, across the school, pupils' ability to express their ideas independently and for a wide range of purposes through extended writing opportunities is limited. The quality of pupils' handwriting and the presentation of their work varies too much across the school.

Throughout the school, pupils' Welsh skills are weak. In the foundation phase, many pupils respond appropriately to basic instructions in Welsh. Throughout key stage 2, a majority of pupils do not have a secure enough knowledge of sentence patterns to answer questions confidently, for example about where they live, their families and

their hobbies. In Year 6, many pupils have negative attitudes to learning Welsh and very few pupils recognise the benefits of learning the language. Across the school, very few pupils speak Welsh outside their formal Welsh lessons.

In mathematics, many pupils in the foundation phase develop appropriate shape, measuring and data-handling skills. For example, reception pupils name and describe two-dimensional and three-dimensional shapes well. However, too often, more able pupils do not develop their ability to add and subtract larger numbers quickly enough as they move through the foundation phase. By the end of key stage 2, most pupils achieve well in mathematics. Many Year 6 pupils order numbers beyond one million and they find differences competently, for example when comparing the number of 'twitter' followers famous people have. More able pupils use their measuring skills successfully to create their own pie charts to represent how many people take part in activities to support their physical and spiritual health. However, across the school, many pupils' reasoning skills are underdeveloped and pupils do not apply their numeracy skills well enough in their work in other curriculum areas.

In the foundation phase, a few more able pupils use a search engine appropriately, for example to find videos on cyberbullying suitable for a young audience. In key stage 2, most pupils use basic tools to create a simple presentation. However, they do not use databases and spreadsheets to collect, store and manipulate data. Overall, pupils' ICT skills are limited and they do not apply them to support their learning in other areas of the curriculum.

Wellbeing and attitudes to learning: Adequate and needs improvement

Most pupils feel that school staff listen to them well and show them a strong degree of support and respect. They feel happy and safe in school and they know where to turn if they have any concerns. Nearly all pupils know how to keep themselves safe when using the internet.

Attendance over time places the school well above the average, when compared with similar schools. Nearly all pupils have a strong understanding of why it is important to attend school regularly and nearly all are punctual at the start of the school day.

Pupils benefit from an appropriate range of physical activities, for example swimming, cycling, football and cricket. Many pupils feel that the school encourages them to make healthy choices when eating and drinking. However, across the school, a majority of pupils are not aware of the benefits of exercise and their understanding of why it is important to keep healthy is limited.

Many pupils are friendly, polite and courteous towards each other and adults. Most pupils behave well during lessons and playtimes. However, a few pupils, particularly boys in the foundation phase, lose interest in tasks easily and disturb others' learning, often because they are not active enough to try new activities and to lead their own learning. Across the school, a few pupils do not listen to other pupils respectfully, for example when pupils share their ideas and opinions. In general, very few pupils have suitable knowledge and understanding of children's rights.

Recently, pupils have taken more prominent leadership roles. For example, the school's fair trade, eco and school council committee meets regularly with the acting headteacher to discuss aspects of the school's work, such as how to improve the outdoor learning environment. They encourage the school community to take part in worthwhile fundraising events for a range of charities. This helps many pupils to develop care and empathy towards others, as it raises their awareness of vulnerable groups, such as the elderly. However, the work of pupil leadership groups is at an early stage of development and has had limited impact on the life and work of the school thus far.

Many pupils have a positive attitude towards learning. For example, pupils in Years 5 and 6 join in enthusiastically in an oracy task to convey a particular emotion while reciting a nursery rhyme. A minority of pupils persevere in their activities and they support each other effectively, for example to solve mathematics problems. However, pupils often rely too heavily on adult support and they do not develop fully as confident and independent learners. Generally, in key stage 2, many pupils have a sound understanding of how well they are doing in their learning. However, few pupils know what their personal learning targets are or what they need to do to improve their work.

Teaching and learning experiences: Unsatisfactory and needs urgent improvement

Overall, the quality of teaching is unsatisfactory and needs urgent improvement. The acting headteacher has recognised this and she has taken appropriate steps to bring about improvements. However, a minority of teachers do not take enough responsibility for the progress of pupils in their class or their own professional learning.

A majority of teachers do not have high enough expectations of all pupils and, too often, pupils of all abilities complete the same task, often at too low a level for many of them. For example, pupils complete colouring-in activities; copy out work from a prompt or fill in a worksheet. As a result, too many pupils do not achieve as well as they could and a few pupils lose focus and disrupt the learning of others.

Teachers do not always have clear learning objectives and success criteria for pupils' learning. In these instances, teachers are unsure of which skills they expect pupils to develop during the lesson. Consequently, pupils do not know what teachers and support staff expect of them and what they need to do to be successful in their tasks.

Where teaching is good in a few classes, teachers and support staff use an effective range of approaches to progress most pupils' learning successfully. In these lessons, teachers use ICT effectively to stimulate and motivate pupils. Planned activities, in topics which appeal to pupils, are often lively, practical and meet most pupils' needs well. A few staff use skilful questioning to probe pupils' understanding and to elicit more in-depth responses from pupils, for example in mathematics, when discussing efficient methods to calculate the perimeter of regular and irregular shapes.

Most staff have positive working relationships with pupils and they manage their behaviour appropriately most of the time. They have sound questioning skills and they intervene at appropriate times to provide useful feedback to pupils about their

work and to check pupils' understanding. Learning support assistants offer valuable support to groups of pupils and individuals. Recently, there have been improvements in the quality and effectiveness of teachers' written feedback to pupils. In literacy, this helps key stage 2 pupils to know what they have done well and what they need to do to improve their writing. A few older pupils use self-assessment and peer assessment successfully to help take their learning forward.

The school does not currently have a coherent whole-school approach to curriculum planning. For instance, it does not set out clearly when teachers will deliver topics or subjects over time. Teachers' plans do not always contain appropriate or clear information about the knowledge, understanding and skills that pupils should acquire as they progress through the school. As a result, there is little in place to ensure that lessons build systematically on pupils' previous achievements or that the school's curriculum meets all statutory requirements.

The school's implementation of the literacy and numeracy framework is at a very early stage of development. The curriculum does not provide purposeful opportunities for all pupils to develop and extend their skills effectively in a range of relevant contexts. Overall, teachers do not plan sufficient activities to develop pupils' ICT skills systematically as pupils progress through the school.

Leaders have taken suitable steps to improve provision in the foundation phase. For example, pupils now have direct access to the outdoors and appropriate areas for enhanced and continuous provision activities in their classrooms. However, staff do not have a strong enough understanding of how to teach effectively according to the principles of the foundation phase, for example to support learning of high quality through play, particularly in the outdoors. There is not always an appropriate balance between adult-directed tasks and independent learning for pupils. This means that planned opportunities do not always help pupils to make choices and to develop their creative, problem-solving and thinking skills.

Regular visitors to the school support the curriculum well. For example, visitors from the Wye and Usk River Foundation raise pupils' awareness of river pollution and visitors from Welsh Water develop pupils' scientific understanding of the water cycle. Visits to places of national interest, such as Castell Coch, and reading books by local authors, help pupils to develop their knowledge of Welsh heritage and culture appropriately. However, the school does not promote the Welsh language effectively.

Care, support and guidance: Adequate and needs improvement

The school has an open and caring ethos where staff encouraged pupils to discuss any concerns with them. There are beneficial arrangements through the curriculum, assemblies and extra-curricular activities to promote pupils' spiritual, moral and cultural development effectively. For instance, reflection areas in each class encourage pupils to consider their own beliefs and values by writing prayers and messages, which the school then shares with the parish community. The meadowland within the school grounds has a faith shelter, which provides pupils with a further opportunity to reflect and to foster shared values, such as sustainability. Reading texts on more challenging themes, such as racial injustice, and taking part in curriculum events, such as 'Japanese day', help to develop pupils' understanding of equality and diversity appropriately. Visits from theatre groups and the wide range of

music sessions available to pupils on a weekly basis encourage them to engage successfully with the creative arts. However, a few staff do not apply the school's behaviour policy consistently or support a few pupils well enough for them to develop respectful attitudes towards others.

Arrangements for promoting healthy eating and regular exercise are appropriate. Water fountains around the school encourage healthy drinking, and foundation phase pupils choose a healthy fruit or vegetable from the snack café. Older pupils take part in cluster school sports competitions, and a beneficial range of after-school clubs promotes pupils' health and fitness suitably. However, the school does not plan purposeful opportunities through the curriculum to develop pupils' skills, knowledge and understanding to make healthy lifestyle choices.

The school encourages pupils to offer their opinions about aspects of school life, for example through the fair trade, eco and school council committee and through questionnaires. However, opportunities for pupils to participate in whole-school decision-making or to influence what and how they learn are limited.

The school has introduced a tracking system at whole-school and class level to identify and monitor individual pupils' progress. Under these new arrangements, all teaching staff are now responsible for closely monitoring, recording and evaluating pupil outcomes in their classes to support every pupil to make appropriate progress. As a result, teachers have an improving awareness of individual pupils' achievements. However, they are not yet fully confident in assessing pupils' progress and outcomes accurately.

Useful class profiles help teachers to focus appropriately on pupils with additional learning needs and on those with weaker basic skills. In general, individual education plans include suitable, personalised targets for pupils. Learning support assistants deliver a limited range of suitable literacy programmes to support individuals and groups of pupils, for instance to work towards their targets in reading and spelling. However, the school does not take the views of pupils and parents into consideration well enough when writing and reviewing pupils' individual learning plans. In addition, it does not evaluate the impact of particular interventions on pupil outcomes. As a result, staff do not have a clear understanding of which approaches are most effective in supporting pupils' learning.

The school works effectively with a wide range of specialist agencies, including educational psychologists, counselling services for pupils with emotional and social needs, and the hearing impaired service. These provide beneficial advice and support for staff, pupils and their families. As a result, these pupils make suitable progress towards their learning and wellbeing targets.

Across the school, identification and provision for more able and talented pupils is weak.

In recent months, the school has improved the range and effectiveness of strategies it uses to communicate with parents. For example, informative newsletters, the school website and social media keep parents updated regularly about the school's work. The newly introduced 'parents' forum', which is run by parents, meets termly to discuss school issues with the acting headteacher. For instance, parents have reviewed the school's new behaviour policy and leaders have acted upon their suggestions for improvement.

The school has effective strategies to monitor and improve pupils' attendance. For instance, parents receive individualised letters about their children's attendance and the school works effectively with the education welfare officer to follow up swiftly on pupils causing concern. Leaders use assemblies effectively to explain the importance of attending school regularly and to congratulate pupils with high levels of attendance. The school offers a range of rewards and incentives, which motivate pupils successfully to attend school.

Overall, the school's arrangements for safeguarding pupils meet requirements in nearly all areas, but one specific area gives some cause for concern. During the inspection, the team made governors aware of this concern.

Leadership and management: Adequate and needs improvement

The seconded, acting headteacher provides effective leadership. She has appropriately high expectations of staff and pupils and she places strong emphasis on improving teaching and learning across the school to raise standards for all pupils.

Since her appointment, the acting headteacher has set an appropriate strategic direction for the school and has acted swiftly to address a large number of important issues robustly, for example relating to weaknesses in the quality of teaching. There is now a more consistent approach to many aspects of the school's work, for example in relation to the teaching of reading and the quality of teachers' written feedback to pupils. However, it is too early for these recent measures to have had a deep impact on pupil outcomes thus far.

Following a review of leadership roles in the school, nearly all members of staff have responsibility for leading aspects of the school's work. For example, the acting headteacher has introduced curriculum co-ordinator roles. Most members of staff monitor and review the completion of actions for their areas of responsibility appropriately, but, in most cases, the work of the co-ordinators is at an early stage of development and most staff do not have high enough aspirations for what pupils can achieve. The newly-formed senior leadership team does not have as much impact as it should, as not all members carry out their roles effectively enough to bring about necessary change.

The membership of the school's governing body has changed significantly in recent months. Governors have developed appropriate knowledge of the school's strengths and areas for improvement, for example by taking part in learning walks to gather first-hand evidence. They scrutinise information on pupil performance with increasing rigour and this is beginning to help them to provide more effective challenge to school leaders about the standards pupils achieve.

The acting headteacher has put in place appropriate performance management arrangements for teachers and a suitable appraisal system for teaching assistants with targets that link well to the school development priorities. Leaders place strong emphasis on the importance of professional learning and a majority of staff appreciate the opportunities they have to develop their skills.

Staff in leadership roles have regular opportunities to visit other schools to observe effective practice in the areas for which they are responsible. Staff from cluster and

partnership schools visit the school to provide beneficial guidance to teachers and support staff in their own classrooms, for example on how to organise areas of provision in the foundation phase. Leaders use staff meetings to provide valuable training on whole-school priorities, for example to help staff to improve pupils' reading and writing skills. However, it is too early to see the impact of these recent professional learning activities on the quality of teaching and learning.

The school's self-evaluation is honest and mostly accurate. Leaders use a wide range of first-hand evidence, such as performance information, observations of lessons, scrutiny of pupils' work and the views of pupils, parents, governors and staff, to draw robust conclusions about the school's strengths and weaknesses. There is a close link between the outcomes in its self-evaluation report and the priorities in the school development plan. However, the large number of actions in the school development plan means that leaders and staff do not always focus well enough on the most urgent priorities. A majority of staff recognise that there are significant weaknesses in the school's provision, but a minority do not yet realise the need for change.

Leaders match expenditure carefully to the priorities in the school development plan. The acting headteacher and the governing body have taken immediate action to reduce the school's surplus budget to an acceptable level by employing additional staff and by purchasing much-needed resources, such as books and tablet computers, to improve pupils' reading and ICT skills. The school's parents' association works hard to provide valuable funds to supplement these resources.

The recent support of a business manager, funded by the local authority, helps to improve further the management of the school budget and to provide an accurate and up-to-date audit trail of the school's finances. Very recently, leaders have secured additional grants to improve the quality of the outdoor provision in the foundation phase, which they recognise is underdeveloped.

The school makes suitable use of its small pupil development grant. However, leaders and governors do not monitor the impact of this expenditure on eligible pupils well enough.

The school has been too slow to respond to many national priorities, such as improving pupils' literacy and numeracy, developing pupils' Welsh language skills and implementing the foundation phase effectively. As a result, there are important shortcomings in these areas. The school has not fully addressed many of the recommendations from the last inspection.

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.

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