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a Hyfforddiant yng Nghymru

Her Majesty's Inspectorate
for Education and Training in Wales

**A report on
Pontlottyn Primary School**

**Fochriw Road
Pontlottyn
Bargoed
CF81 9QH**

Date of inspection: March 2011

by

Mr Stephen Dennett

Under Contract for

**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:

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

Pontlottyn Primary School is situated in the village of Pontlottyn, which is about five miles north of Bargoed in the Rhymney valley. The social and economic circumstances of the area served by the school are mainly disadvantaged; most pupils come from around the school.

Since September 2009, the headteacher has also been responsible for leading and managing a neighbouring school. There are currently 129 pupils on roll aged three to 11, including 16 part-time pupils in the nursery. Around 33% of pupils are entitled to free school meals, which is above the local and national averages. One pupil is looked after by the local authority (LA) and there are a number of vulnerable pupils at the school being supported by social services. Approximately 23% of the pupils have additional learning needs (ALN) but none have statements of special educational need (SEN). English is the home language of all pupils, nearly all of whom are from white backgrounds; very few pupils speak Welsh at home. Since the school's last inspection in January 2005, the number on roll has fallen.

The 2010-2011 individual school budget per pupil is £2,904, which compares with a maximum of £6,296 and a minimum of £2,486 for primary schools in Caerphilly. The school has the 41st highest budget per pupil out of the 75 primary schools in Caerphilly.

Summary

The school's current performance	Good
The school's prospects for improvement	Good

Current performance

The current performance of the provider is good because:

- Pupils are making good progress in learning throughout the school and they have secure communication and numeracy skills, which they use effectively.
- Pupils' behaviour is good and they clearly enjoy school, which has a positive effect on their overall wellbeing.
- The school provides pupils with a worthwhile range of learning experiences.
- Teaching, learning and assessment are good throughout the school.
- There are good levels of care, support and guidance for all groups of pupils.
- Leadership and management are good and the school runs smoothly on a day-to-day basis.

Prospects for improvement

The school has good prospects for improvement because:

- Standards have improved rapidly over the last three years at key stage 1.
- Senior managers have a clear picture of the school's performance and they show a strong determination that it should improve further.
- The school's development plans are well focused and clearly set out aspects that need improving.
- Effective use is made of assessment information to set targets for improvement and identify groups of pupils that are underperforming.
- The actions taken by the school to improve aspects, such as reading, have led to measurable improvement.

Recommendations

In order to further improve provision and raise standards, the school should:

- R1 improve the quality of pupils' writing by placing greater emphasis on good handwriting and better standards of presentation.
- R2 improve pupils' Welsh language skills, especially in reading and writing, by ensuring good continuity and progression in all subjects and areas of learning across the curriculum.

What happens next?

The school will draw up an action plan which shows how the school is going to address the recommendations.

Main findings

Key Question 1: How good are outcomes?

Good

Standards: Good

Children make good progress in the Foundation Phase and Year 2. By the end of key stage 1 in 2010, standards were above the family average, but below national and local averages in all three core subjects (English, mathematics and science). Standards have improved significantly over the last three years. The proportion of pupils attaining the higher level 3 was above the family (a group of schools with similar circumstances) average, but below the local and national average in English and science. In mathematics it was below all three indicators. Compared with schools with a similar number of pupils eligible for free school meals, the school was in the top 50% overall in 2010, but in the lower 50% for English. In 2010 boys did better than girls at key stage 2 overall, but the gap in performance is narrowing.

The school's performance at key stage 2 in 2010 was below all three indicators, but over the last three years it has been broadly average. As year groups are small, the analysis of national data should be treated with caution. In mathematics and science, pupils' attainment in 2010 was above the family average, but below the local and national averages. Attainment in English was below all three indicators. Compared with similar schools, the school was in the lower 50% overall, but in the upper 50% for mathematics and the top 25% for science. Standards improved in 2009 and declined slightly in 2010, but overall the trend is upward. The proportion of pupils attaining the higher level 5 was above the family and local averages, but below national average in English; in mathematics and science it was above the family average, but below the local and national averages. Girls did much better than boys at key stage 2, but the gap in performance has now been considerably reduced. Pupils make good progress overall at key stage 2 in core subjects. Pupils with ALN and potentially vulnerable pupils make good progress in relation to their starting points and capabilities.

A report on Pontlottyn Primary School
March 2011

In lessons pupils make good progress at both key stages. Nearly all pupils clearly enjoy their lessons and engage enthusiastically in the activities provided. They use their speaking skills well when explaining their reasoning in mathematics, for example. Their reading skills are good and they use them effectively. Most pupils apply their writing skills well to write poetry and war stories in the style of W E Johns, although their handwriting is sometimes untidy and standards of presentation are variable. Nearly all pupils have good information and communication technology (ICT) skills, which they use effectively when producing presentations about healthy eating. They also have well developed word processing skills and use these effectively in subjects across the curriculum.

Pupils make good progress in developing oral skills in Welsh through the school. Those in nursery and reception count to 20 and name colours. Pupils in years 5 and 6 use a good range of question and answer sequences accurately. All pupils respond to instructions and use a variety of greetings appropriately. The ability to read and write simple Welsh sentences is beginning to develop appropriately in key stage 2. However, the use of Welsh across the curriculum is limited.

Wellbeing: Good

Most pupils engage well in learning and are highly motivated. Nearly all pupils behave well in lessons and around the school. They are considerate and courteous and relate well to each other and adults. Nearly all pupils say they feel safe and happy in school and have positive attitudes to healthy living and eating. They enjoy physically active pursuits. All pupils are encouraged to take an active part in the life of the school. Older pupils show a high level of maturity and this responsible attitude has a positive effect on the life of the school. The school council is actively involved in decision making. Councillors take on additional responsibilities readily and discuss further improvements. Nearly all pupils show respect, care and concern for others. Most pupils have the necessary skills to work with others, solve problems and develop their thinking to move on to the next stage in their learning. Nearly all pupils arrive on time and their attendance over the past three years is well above average when compared to similar schools.

Key Question 2: How good is provision?	Good
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Learning experiences: Good

The curriculum offered by the school is broad, balanced and coherent. It is clearly based on the areas of learning in the foundation phase and national curriculum subjects in key stage 2. Long term planning is organised carefully according to a range of English writing genres, into which a skills programme is integrated effectively. Detailed weekly plans also include planning for the development of skills, and 'mind maps' which effectively encourage pupils' ownership of the curriculum. Skills that are specific to curriculum subjects are also planned in detail with careful provision for their transference across the curriculum. They are integrated effectively into the two-year programme of topics and into weekly and daily plans.

Planning for the development of Welsh skills is based on a progression of sentence patterns that increase in complexity through the school. Teachers' use of Welsh

A report on Pontlottyn Primary School
March 2011

develops well, and sufficient time is allocated to lessons. Use of incidental Welsh is beginning to extend into a range of contexts, but bilingual signs are not sufficiently evident through the school to develop pupils reading skills. Evidence for the Welsh dimension is clear in most areas of learning and is an integral part of the curriculum in key stage 2.

Education for sustainable development and global citizenship permeates the curriculum. The eco council is proactive in a range of successful initiatives, including litter picking and planting trees in the community and saving energy in school. The most recent venture is the development of an allotment in partnership with the local community. The school has gained its second 'Green Flag' award. Global citizenship is developed well through religious education and geography lessons about world religions and cultures.

Teaching: Good

The overall quality of teaching is good. Teachers plan lessons thoroughly and explain the purpose of lessons clearly to pupils. Tasks are well organised to provide a good level of challenge for pupils of different abilities, including those with ALN. Classroom assistants work effectively with teachers to plan activities, and to support and assess pupils. A wide variety of resources, including ICT, is used creatively to enhance pupils' learning. Working relationships between all staff and pupils are excellent, and contribute significantly to pupils' progress. All staff have high expectations of pupils' effort and behaviour. Skilful questioning is used to good effect in introductory sessions to improve pupils' speaking and listening skills, and opportunities for pupils to work independently are carefully integrated into a range of practical tasks.

The school has effective procedures for assessing and recording pupils' progress and for reporting to parents. Teachers mark work consistently and comment on how well pupils have achieved the objectives of the lesson. They use praise purposefully and write comments that, in the best practice, explain clearly how pupils may improve specific aspects of their work. Pupils' assessment of their own work and that of their peers is developing well through the school. Assessment for learning is well established in classroom practice. Information gathered in the main from teachers' regular assessments and from a few standardised tests is used effectively to guide the further planning of lessons. Assessment is also used effectively to identify pupils with ALN and those who are more able and talented. Pupils are increasingly involved in setting their personal targets with the help of their teacher, and they know when those targets are achieved. Annual reports to parents give clear judgements on pupils' progress and set precise targets for improvement.

Care, support and guidance: Good

The school supports pupils' health and wellbeing successfully. Pupils are encouraged to become fully involved in their school and the wider community. Nearly all pupils enjoy coming to school, feel safe, supported and are encouraged to be healthy. Pupils are given opportunities to take responsibility, show initiative and develop an understanding of living in a community. Learning experiences promote pupils' personal development well, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. The school is proactive in establishing and maintaining a range of support systems from specialist services. This is having a positive effect on pupils'

A report on Pontlottyn Primary School
March 2011

outcomes and wellbeing. The school has an appropriate policy and has procedures for safeguarding. The school provides good individual support for pupils with ALN. Effective early intervention procedures identify and address needs. The school is aware of the challenges faced by the pupils and works hard to ensure that these pupils access the appropriate support. Support systems meet the range of needs without adversely affecting the balance and continuity of the pupils' curriculum. Good systems are in place to monitor the progress of pupils with ALN and to react to their changing needs. There is a shared understanding and responsibility for care, support and guidance in the school. The whole staff are fully committed to the pupils' wellbeing and in ensuring that each pupil reaches their potential.

Learning environment: Good

The school is a fully inclusive community where diversity is recognised and celebrated well. Pupils are encouraged to reflect on their own beliefs and values as well as those of others. Racial issues, diversity and social equality are successfully promoted through the personal and social education programme, assemblies and visitors to the school. The school actively promotes equal opportunities and all pupils have equal access to all areas of the curriculum. The good range of extra-curricular activities such as netball, football, art, music and needlecraft are open to all pupils regardless of gender or background. The accommodation is well maintained and sufficient for the number of pupils. The buildings and grounds are looked after well and respected by pupils. The school has a good range of resources that match the needs of learners. The colourful and stimulating displays in corridors and classrooms support learning well and celebrate achievement.

Key Question 3: How good are leadership and management?	Good
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Leadership: Good

The headteacher, supported effectively by the deputy headteacher and other senior managers, provides a clear educational direction for the work of the school. Good relationships between staff and a smooth-running administration have a positive effect on the whole learning environment. Staff share common values and have a real sense of purpose to their work. The senior management team and other managers ensure there is consistency in the structures and systems across the school. This in turn leads to good standards. Leaders communicate a driving ambition to further raise standards and improve provision. Governors are well informed about the school's performance through regular visits and well-written headteacher's reports. There is an appropriate range of committees to oversee the work of the school. Governors meet regularly with the school council, which keeps them well informed of pupils' views. Policies and initiatives, including those that meet local and national priorities, are implemented appropriately. A 'skills-based' approach has been implemented across the curriculum, reflecting the need for pupils to develop their skills in communication, numeracy, information and communication technology and problem solving. The headteacher of Pontlottyn leads and manages a neighbouring school and to facilitate the joint strategic vision, an effective professional learning community has been established between the two schools.

Improving quality: Good

The school has effective procedures for self-evaluation. The senior management team has a clear picture of the school's performance, its strengths and areas for development. There is a good range of monitoring activities, including accurate lesson observations. The self-evaluation report produced for the inspection was a useful document as a result. Good use is made of assessment information to set targets for improvement and identify groups of pupils that are underperforming. All the information gathered is used effectively to produce a detailed and clear school development plan. Effective leadership has moved the school forward since the last inspection. This is demonstrated by the improvement in standards at key stage 1 in mathematics and science. The quality of teaching has also improved and subject leaders are now more actively involved in the strategic development of the school. There have also been considerable improvements to the outdoor environment, especially at the foundation phase. The whole self-evaluation process ensures that outcomes for pupils are good, which in turn, demonstrates that the school has good prospects for further improvement. The school seeks the views of parents and carers, pupils and the community appropriately. There are well-established professional learning communities in the school and good links with other schools in the local authority and the school's 'family'. These networks of professional practice make a good contribution to the school's overall provision.

Partnership working: Good

Partnership activities make a strong contribution to improving standards and wellbeing. The school takes a leading role in developing joint working practices especially through the partnership with another local primary school. Staff plan together well and make good use of shared resources. This builds a good capacity for continuous improvement. The school has strong links with the community, good liaison and communication with parents and carers. It seeks continually to further improve the involvement of parents and carers. Effective use is made of a network of external agencies. This enables staff to provide co-ordinated programmes to improve pupils' outcomes and wellbeing. The school works effectively with the local secondary school to ensure that pupils are ready for the next phase of their education.

Resource management: Good

The school manages its resources well and there are good levels of efficiency and cost effectiveness. There are clear established procedures in place to ensure that the allocation of resources meet identified priorities. Spending is clearly planned and monitored. Staff are appropriately deployed to support learning and there are effective arrangements in place to ensure that the statutory requirements of the workload agreement are met. The school provides good value for money because outcomes for pupils are good and effective use is made of all resources.

Appendix 1

Stakeholder satisfaction report

Responses to parent questionnaires

Thirty-two parents/carers returned questionnaires. They all agreed that their children were safe at school and that staff expected their children to work hard and do their best. They also all agreed that their children were helped to settle in when they started school; all parents/carers agreed that their children made good progress. Nearly all parents/carers agreed that the school was well led and managed. A very few parents/carers disagreed that behaviour was good and a few also did not think there was a good range of activities.

Responses to learner questionnaires

There were 67 questionnaires returned by pupils in key stage 2. All pupils agree that they feel safe in school. They also agree that the school teaches them to keep healthy and there are plenty of opportunities to take regular exercise. All pupils agree that their teachers help them make progress and they know who to ask if they find work difficult. A minority of pupils disagreed that behaviour in the school was good and that they could get on with their work in class.

Appendix 2

The inspection team

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Kevin Hart	Peer Inspector
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A report on Pontlottyn Primary School
March 2011

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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' (R) refers to the year group of pupils in a primary school who reach the age of five during the academic year. Year 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	R	Y1	Y2	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:

Key stage 1	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