



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

**A report on**

**St Illtyd's Catholic Primary School  
Rocky Road  
Dowlais  
CF48 3BT**

**Date of inspection: October 2018**

**by**

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

## About St Illtyd's Catholic Primary School

St Illtyd's Roman Catholic Voluntary Aided Primary School is in Dowlais in Merthyr Tydfil local authority. There are 170 pupils on roll, aged from 3 to 11, including 17 nursery pupils who attend full-time. There is one single-aged class and five mixed-age classes at the school.

About 17% of pupils are eligible for free school meals, which is just below the national average. The school identifies around 14% of pupils as having additional learning needs. This is below the national average of 21%. No pupils have a statement of special educational needs. Around a half of pupils come from an ethnic minority background and around 45% have English as an additional language. No pupils speak Welsh at home.

In April 2016, the school joined in an informal federation with St Mary's Roman Catholic Primary School. This arrangement was formalised in September 2017 and a single senior management team and governing body oversees both schools.

The executive headteacher took up her post in September 2017 following a period as acting executive headteacher from April 2016. The school's previous inspection was in February 2013. This is the first inspection of the federated school.

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

Leaders place strong importance on ensuring pupils' wellbeing and providing a high level of care, support and guidance for all pupils. The executive headteacher has been successful in developing a collaborative ethos among staff in the school and across the federation. Leaders have developed and shared their clear vision very effectively and, as a result, everyone involved with the federation is committed to making identified improvements across both schools.

Most pupils make good progress in developing their literacy skills, but they make slower progress in developing their numeracy, information and communication technology (ICT) and Welsh skills. Nearly all pupils are happy, enjoy coming to school and benefit from positive working relationships with staff. Pupils have good opportunities to suggest improvements to school life and teachers and school leaders value and act upon their opinions.

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

## **Recommendations**

- R1 Accurately identify and address effectively the most important areas for school improvement
- R2 Improve standards of numeracy and Welsh
- R3 Improve foundation phase practice
- R4 Improve consistency in the quality of teaching to ensure that it challenges all pupils at a suitable level
- R5 Ensure that pupils have good quality access to all aspects of the ICT curriculum

## **What happens next**

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

## Main findings

### Standards: Adequate and needs improvement

Most pupils start school with literacy skills in English below the level expected for their age. This includes around 45% of pupils who have English as an additional language. As pupils move through the school, most make good progress in improving their literacy skills and appropriate progress in improving their mathematics and ICT skills. Many pupils with English as an additional language make strong progress. Pupils with additional learning needs generally make effective progress towards meeting their individual targets.

Across the school, many pupils make good progress in developing their oracy skills, particularly those with English as an additional language. In the foundation phase, they ask appropriate questions in their play. For example, in the role-play estate agent, Year 1 pupils ask about the client's housing requirements and request suitable information when arranging an appointment to view a property. As they move through the school, most pupils develop a more sophisticated vocabulary and use this effectively when discussing their work with their peers. For example, in Year 6, they explain what 'income' means when considering charges for a theme park to ensure that it makes a profit.

Pupils in the nursery and reception class enjoy sharing books with adults and talk about the pictures and their favourite characters. Many know how to handle books and behave as readers. As pupils progress through the foundation phase, they learn a useful range of strategies to help them to decode unfamiliar words and to read with understanding. In lower key stage 2, many pupils read fluently. More able pupils use expression and demonstrate a good understanding of grammatical features in the text. By the end of key stage 2, many pupils develop their higher order reading skills well. For example, they make inferences and deductions about how a character feels from the author's use of vocabulary.

Most pupils' writing skills develop effectively. Younger foundation phase pupils experiment eagerly with mark-making techniques and develop pencil control quickly. As they move through the foundation phase, pupils develop a range of useful strategies to improve their writing. For example, Year 1 pupils retell a story using actions before writing and this helps them to remember key features of a story and to produce extended writing of good quality. In key stage 2, most pupils continue to develop effective writing techniques in their English lessons and use these well in their work across the curriculum. For example, they use the novel 'Street Child' as a stimulus for their descriptive writing about the life of Victorian children. Most pupils use a range of punctuation correctly and many write neatly and present their work carefully.

Many foundation phase pupils make good progress in developing their Welsh language skills. Year 2 pupils communicate confidently, using a range of simple language patterns. They write a basic play script with adult support and read this with good understanding and pronunciation. In key stage 2, pupils do not build on these language skills and, as a result, they find it difficult to respond to simple questions about daily events or what they like doing. Pupils do not use Welsh around the school except for simple greetings.

Many pupils develop an appropriate knowledge of mathematical concepts and more able pupils are generally confident mathematicians by the time they reach Year 6. In the foundation phase, many lack confidence when applying their knowledge of mathematics to new situations across the curriculum and are not always secure in their understanding of mathematical concepts. In upper key stage 2, pupils' progress in developing their problem-solving skills increases and many apply these effectively to real-life situations, such as when they plan a timetable and the costs of a trip to the Roman baths at Caerleon. As they move through key stage 2, pupils increasingly apply their numeracy skills across the curriculum at an appropriate level.

Many pupils develop suitable ICT skills. Most pupils from Year 2 to Year 6 understand how to save and retrieve their work online. Many pupils in Year 2 create and upload content to an online platform independently. For example, they add short video clips to share with their teacher and peers. In key stage 2, pupils use word processors and presentation software regularly as part of their topic work. For example, pupils in Year 6 produce short biographies of themselves, integrating digital photographs. However, across the school, most pupils do not use a wide enough range of ICT skills at a high enough level. In particular, they do not develop their skills well enough in the use of spreadsheets and databases.

### **Wellbeing and attitudes to learning: Good**

Most pupils have positive attitudes to learning and engage in tasks readily. They move easily between different activities and lessons and settle quickly to their work. They sustain concentration to complete tasks. For example, in Years 4 and 5, they time activities precisely when completing a science investigation into the effect of exercise on the body. Throughout the school, most pupils have a good understanding of what they need to do to improve their work. For example, they respond positively to teachers' 'power prompts' by making additions to, or editing, their work.

Most pupils' behaviour in lessons and around the school is good. They are considerate when listening to the views of others and confident to share their own thoughts and ideas. Most work co-operatively and effectively in a range of group and class situations, showing respect for the opinions of others. Nearly all pupils understand and aspire to the school's values of resilience, determination, excellence, sharing, pride, equality and tolerance. They show kindness and consideration to each other and are respectful of the different cultures within the school. They are well mannered and welcoming to visitors.

Most pupils feel safe in school and believe that all staff treat them fairly and with respect, showing a high degree of concern for their wellbeing. As a result, they have confidence that adults will deal well with any concerns they express. Nearly all pupils have a suitable understanding of how to keep safe online.

Most pupils have a good understanding of how to live a healthy life. Many younger pupils enjoy taking part in the playground games organised by the Year 6 play leaders and understand the importance of exercise. Year 6 pupils take responsibility for the school fruit tuck shop at break time and many pupils purchase fruit. They discuss the importance of diet and exercise maturely.

Pupils are beginning to have an effective voice through their involvement in established and more recent pupil representative groups. The established school council is made up of democratically elected representatives from across the school, and is influential in making changes. For example, it has improved conditions in the dining hall by creating a behaviour charter and introducing music during lunchtimes. Across the school, pupils have a say in the activities they would like to undertake when planning topics.

Through the work of a national initiative for encouraging pupils to become responsible citizens, pupils organise intergenerational activities with the local elderly community and regularly raise money for local and national charities. These opportunities help pupils to develop a good understanding of their immediate community and of people less fortunate than themselves.

Pupils' attendance shows a trend of improvement. However, rates of attendance have not compared favourably with those of similar schools over the past four years. The majority of pupils arrive in school on time.

### **Teaching and learning experiences: Adequate and needs improvement**

Teachers and support staff have effective working relationships with pupils and use positive behaviour management strategies that help them to settle quickly to their tasks. Many teachers make sure that pupils understand the success criteria for activities and this helps pupils to focus on what they need to do in their work. A majority of teachers ask suitably challenging questions that develop pupils' thinking skills well and encourage them to make effective links between what they are doing and prior learning. Where teaching is strongest, teachers have high expectations of what pupils can achieve, question effectively and engage all pupils successfully in improving their own learning. In a minority of classes, the pace of teaching is too slow and this means that pupils often have to listen for long periods and become restless. In a few classes, teachers do not always match tasks well enough to the ability of pupils. They find the work either too difficult or not challenging enough, and do not make enough progress. Support staff work purposefully in lessons and intervention groups to help pupils learn effectively.

Most teachers give regular feedback about how well their pupils are doing, for instance by praising specific contributions in class. Overall, feedback is purposeful and efficient and, in the best cases, indicates clearly what the pupils need to do to improve. Many teachers use a range of self and peer assessment effectively to help pupils to understand what they need to do to improve their work. For example, pupils check their work against a jointly produced success criteria. Many teachers provide appropriate opportunities for pupils to set their own targets for improvement.

A majority of teachers provide a wide range of valuable learning experiences that engage and motivate many pupils to succeed. Recent improvements in planning ensure that the curriculum builds systematically on pupils' existing knowledge, understanding and skills as they move through the school. Increasingly, teachers plan collaboratively across the federation to ensure appropriate coverage of the curriculum. However, teachers do not address all aspects of the national curriculum for ICT well enough.

In the nursery and reception class, teachers provide a stimulating environment for learning. There are good opportunities for pupils to make choices about how and what they want to learn. However, in other foundation phase classes, there are too many occasions when adults over-direct tasks, and provision that supports pupils' independent learning does not always provide enough challenge. Across the foundation phase, there are not enough opportunities for pupils to learn in the outdoor environment.

Teachers plan effectively to develop pupils' literacy skills and there are good opportunities for pupils to write in a broad range of genres. However, there are not enough opportunities to develop pupils' numeracy skills across the curriculum in all classes.

To enrich the curriculum, the school arranges stimulating opportunities for pupils to visit local places of interest linked to class topics. For instance, a study of the Egyptians in Year 6 started with a visit to the Egyptian Centre in Swansea, and pupils in Year 5 visited an education centre to enhance their technology skills.

The school provides a beneficial range of activities that promote Welsh history, culture and the local environment well, for example through the study of the area's coal mining heritage, including visits to Big Pit, Cyfarthfa Castle and St Fagan's National Museum of History. Across the school, opportunities for pupils to develop their Welsh language skills in lessons are appropriate. However, in key stage 2, most teachers do not provide pupils with enough opportunities to speak and practise language patterns. As a result, most pupils lack the ability and confidence to communicate in Welsh.

### **Care, support and guidance: Good**

The high level of care, support and guidance that staff provide for pupils is a strength of the school. The school is a safe community where staff place a high priority on pupils' wellbeing. Staff know pupils well and provide a nurturing environment that builds pupils' confidence and self-esteem. They teach pupils effectively about important values and how to respect and appreciate others. Daily meditation and curriculum activities develop pupils' spiritual awareness well. There is a clear emphasis on developing pupils' understanding of their rights and responsibilities and this has a positive influence on their moral and social development.

The school has very good monitoring, tracking and reporting systems and early identification of underperformance is strong. Provision for pupils who need additional support is good and the school uses a wide range of programmes that meet their needs effectively. Leaders and teachers analyse data and use assessment information well to plan effective support in classes and through withdrawal groups. The additional needs coordinator supports the teachers and support staff well to tailor effective provision to meet the needs of individuals. Well-trained staff deliver a range of intervention programmes to improve pupils' literacy and numeracy skills, such as reading and numeracy catch-up programmes. There are beneficial programmes to support vulnerable pupils, including those with emotional needs. For example, wellbeing groups and individual counselling sessions have a positive impact on raising pupils' self-esteem and, as a result, these pupils demonstrate improved levels of confidence and engagement in school life. All pupils with additional learning needs have an individual education plan that includes measurable, challenging and achievable targets.



Staff offer a range of good opportunities for parents to engage with the school and to learn how to support their child's learning. For example, they have held workshops to explain how they teach phonics, which has helped parents to work with their children at home.

Pupil voice is developing appropriately throughout the school. Staff provide useful opportunities for pupils to have an increasing role in decision-making. For example, there is an active school council and eco council, and Junior Road Safety Officers monitor traffic safety around the site. Leaders have identified the need to improve standards of Welsh across the school and the new Welsh coordinator has begun to involve pupils suitably in this process.

Pupils have good opportunities to take part in cultural experiences, for instance through visits to the literature festival in Hay on Wye and to local museums, such as the National Museum of Wales in Cardiff. Older pupils have the opportunity to attend a residential course where pupils undertake a range of outdoor pursuit and team building activities.

There are good opportunities for pupils to learn how to be healthy within the curriculum and through a wide range of extra-curricular clubs, such as tag rugby, netball and sports club. These promote the importance of physical fitness well. The school has appropriate arrangements to promote healthy eating and drinking. There are useful arrangements with local police to ensure pupils are aware of issues around staying safe on line. The school's arrangements for safeguarding pupils meet requirements and give no cause for concern.

### **Leadership and management: Good**

The executive headteacher and senior leaders have worked successfully to develop a vision for the federation based on collaborative working and high expectations. They engage with staff and governors effectively to develop consistent policies and systems across the two schools. For example, collaborative work on planning for the development of pupils' skills in literacy has led to improvements in the curriculum across the federation. However, staff do not deliver all aspects of the curriculum equally well in both schools.

The executive headteacher has established a leadership structure that supported the smooth introduction of the federation and encourages the development of leadership skills at all levels. For example, the newly-introduced role of assistant headteacher in both schools is key to developing common approaches and acting as a first point of call for staff, parents and pupils on both sites. Similarly, arrangements that release members of the senior leadership team from class to work together at the same time, such as the leader of skills and the leader of learning, encourage effective inter-school working.

The newly-established governing body has managed the federation process with skill and sensitivity. For example, ensuring an equal number of parent governors from each school has led to balanced representation from both school communities. The governing body reflects thoughtfully on its performance and regularly seeks ways to improve its effectiveness. Recent work with a consultant governor has improved governors' understanding of the characteristics of effective governance and how to

ensure that they maintain high ethical standards. Through regular gathering of first-hand evidence, governors have a good understanding of the strengths and areas for improvement of both schools. This enables them to make valuable contributions to discussions with senior leaders about the quality of provision and the necessary actions to raise standards.

Senior leaders have extensive arrangements to evaluate the quality of provision and the standards achieved by pupils. This involves leaders undertaking regular learning walks and classroom observations, looking at pupils' work and meeting with pupils to gauge their opinion on the work of the school. Generally, they use the information from these activities well to draw conclusions about the work of the school that are broadly accurate. They increasingly identify and share good practice well across the federation. For example, the sharing of effective approaches to the teaching of reading skills through daily guided reading sessions has led to improvements in many pupils' reading skills in both schools.

However, leaders do not always use the outcomes of self-evaluation activities well enough to prioritise the most important areas for improvement. For example, not enough has been done to improve the quality of provision in the classes of the older foundation phase pupils or pupils' Welsh language skills across both schools, but particularly in St Illtyd's.

The outcomes from self-evaluation activities link appropriately to the federation's planned improvement actions. Senior leaders and staff are keen to improve provision and raise standards across both schools as rapidly as possible. The school implements many improvement activities at the same time. As a result, not all school improvement actions achieve the level of impact that leaders intend.

Both schools have been successful in addressing the national priority of reducing the impact of poverty on the achievement of pupils. Leaders have ensured good quality provision for the development of pupils' literacy skills across both schools and for ICT skills in St Mary's. However, leaders have not been successful enough in developing pupils' Welsh oracy skills or embedding the use of the language in both schools.

Senior leaders have high expectations of staff. They challenge robustly any underperformance they identify. Performance management procedures link well with identified actions for improvement in each school. Staff objectives link closely to their individual development needs and the current priorities of the school improvement plan. Senior leaders are beginning to introduce systems for cross-federation professional learning that impact positively on the quality of standards and provision. For example, the 'IMPACT Team' initiative enabled learning support assistants to work collaboratively to observe and reflect upon each other's practice and make improvements. This has enhanced the provision for the teaching of basic reading skills.

Senior leaders allocate resources to support school improvement priorities well. For example, they recently invested in improvements to the foundation phase outdoor learning environment in St Illtyd's. Both schools have large budget surpluses. Senior leaders and governors have realistic plans to spend this money in line with school improvement priorities and to reduce the budget surplus to acceptable levels.

## Copies of the report

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

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

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

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

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