



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

A report on

**St Francis V.R.C. School
Priory Road
Milford Haven
Pembrokeshire
SA73 2EE**

Date of inspection: February 2020

by

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

About St Francis V.R.C. School

St Francis Voluntary Aided Catholic Primary School is in Milford Haven in the Pembrokeshire local authority. There are 133 pupils aged 3 to 11 years at the school, including 19 part-time children in the nursery.

The three-year rolling average of pupils eligible for free school meals is around 17%, which is below the average for Wales (21%). Most pupils are of white British ethnicity, with a very few pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds. A few pupils speak English as an additional language. No pupils speak Welsh as a first language at home. The school has identified around 19% of pupils as having special educational needs, which is below the national average of 21%.

Estyn does not inspect religious education or the religious content of collective worship when it is a school with a religious character. Instead, the governing body is required by law to arrange for religious education and collective worship to be inspected separately.

The headteacher took up her post in April 2011. At the time of the inspection, the headteacher had been seconded to another local school and the deputy headteacher was appointed acting headteacher in March 2019. The substantive headteacher returned to the school for the period of the inspection. The last inspection was in January 2015.

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

The school is a welcoming community that provides a stimulating environment for its pupils. Many pupils have positive attitudes to learning and speak with enthusiasm about the experiences the school provides. Many pupils make good progress from their starting points and develop a broad range of skills successfully as they move through the school.

Staff have positive working relationships with pupils and support them well. Many teachers deliver lessons and plan learning experiences that engage and motivate pupils well. The school's systems for tracking and monitoring pupils' progress are effective and help to ensure that pupils make good progress over time. The school's provision for wellbeing is strong and provides sensitive support for vulnerable pupils.

The headteacher and acting headteacher provide strong leadership and the staff work within a clear set of values and aims. Many staff have taken up their posts in the current school year and have begun to work as an effective team to maintain the good standard of provision for pupils.

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

Recommendations

- R1 Share the best teaching practices throughout the school to ensure that teaching is as effective as possible in all classes
- R2 Give pupils more opportunities to decide how and when to use the skills they have acquired
- R3 Improve attendance

What happens next

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

Main findings

Standards: Good

As they move through the school, many pupils make good progress from their starting points, including those with special educational needs and those with English as an additional language.

Many pupils develop their listening and speaking skills well in the foundation phase. They respond appropriately to questions and follow instructions quickly. Many talk sensibly about the activities they are completing. In key stage 2, many pupils listen attentively during lessons and they discuss their ideas with partners enthusiastically, for example when older pupils engage in debates about the possible existence of aliens.

Many pupils develop their reading skills successfully as they move through the school. By Year 2, many use their knowledge of letters and sounds well to read an increasing range of unfamiliar words. Most know when to use appropriate punctuation, such as exclamation and speech marks, to aid their reading comprehension. Many pupils make good progress in building their reading skills throughout key stage 2. They express opinions about books and describe the main characters in stories purposefully. By Year 6, many pupils read accurately and a few begin to understand various authors' techniques, for example, when they discuss the works of Jacqueline Wilson.

Across the school, many pupils produce writing of a good standard. By Year 2, many write at length, for example, they produce interesting paragraphs based on the life cycle of a frog and how a new butterfly starts its life. In key stage 2, many pupils write for a suitable variety of purposes and develop a mature understanding of the appropriate style to use. For example, many research Greek myths and legends and produce interesting stories about Robin Hood. Many pupils develop their handwriting skills well and present their written work neatly.

Throughout the school, many pupils make good progress in learning Welsh. In the foundation phase, they describe colours, foods and the weather successfully. In key stage 2, many have positive attitudes towards the language. By Year 6, many pupils hold extended conversations with one another, using sentence patterns they have rehearsed in lessons. Many write short sentences about their favourite celebrities and produce engaging letters as visitors to Patagonia. Pupils' reading skills in Welsh are developing well.

In the foundation phase, many pupils respond enthusiastically to mathematical tasks and use numbers, measurements and shapes well. They develop their numeracy skills effectively and apply them in other areas of learning with increasing confidence. For example, during a creative development session, pupils in Years 1 and 2 turn quarter and half-turns clockwise accurately. In key stage 2, many pupils continue to make good progress and display a sound understanding of numeracy strategies. They apply their measuring and data-handling skills successfully and collect information in a suitable variety of ways. They present their conclusions accurately in the form of tables and graphs, for example when measuring the effect of climate change in the Arctic and Antarctica.

Most pupils in the foundation phase develop their information and communication technology skills (ICT) well across the curriculum. Most are able to use word-processing software to combine words and pictures effectively. They create graphs and use software with increasing confidence to present their work. In key stage 2, many pupils use ICT confidently in various subjects across the curriculum. They create graphs and use communication programs successfully. Most use the internet purposefully to search for information and to carry out research tasks on a weekly basis. By Year 6, most pupils are able to create a database successfully and extract information from it purposefully. Nearly all pupils understand the importance of e-safety.

Wellbeing and attitudes to learning: Good

Nearly all pupils feel safe and secure within the school's inclusive environment. They are happy to discuss any concerns with staff and they are confident that the staff will listen to them and act appropriately to address any issues that arise.

Many pupils across the school display positive attitudes towards their work. They listen attentively to teachers' instructions and concentrate well during lessons. They are enthusiastic learners and many work together harmoniously. Many show high levels of motivation and interest in their work and this contributes successfully to the ethos of effective learning in the school and has a positive impact on pupils' standards.

Pupils' behaviour is good in many classes. Many pupils are courteous and show respect for other pupils, staff and visitors. Many care for each other sensitively and support the school's family ethos, for example by showing empathy for each other's needs on the schoolyard during break times. Many pupils accept and follow school rules well and they understand and talk maturely about the system of rewards and consequences.

Many pupils take on additional responsibilities conscientiously and they are active in a variety of committees, for example, as members of Y Llais, Y Cyngor Cymraeg, faith ambassadors, e-safety committee and sports ambassadors. Each committee has a positive influence on school life. For example, the head boy in his manifesto suggested that the school should introduce a snack shack to support healthy break times, and this is now a notable feature of the school. Most pupils understand the importance of healthy eating and making positive lifestyle choices. For example, younger pupils participate eagerly in the daily jogging sessions 'Amser Saib a Symud'. Many pupils enjoy the activities offered by the school on Wednesday afternoons, which include swimming, games and yoga. However, only a minority of pupils take part in after-school sports clubs.

Many pupils develop a good understanding of the importance of effective citizenship through their awareness of the values promoted by the school. For example, they refer to this term's values of compassion and loving and understand how these can contribute to their own lives. They are aware of their rights as children and older pupils explain the importance of these maturely.

Many pupils understand the importance of attending school regularly. However, pupils' attendance rates over the last few years do not compare well with those of similar schools.

Teaching and learning experiences: Good

Teachers use a variety of stimulating teaching methods to engage pupils' interest. They link their lessons well to previous learning and explain new concepts clearly. They give clear instructions and share learning objectives successfully with pupils. Many set an appropriate pace for pupils' learning and ask thoughtful questions in lessons to deepen pupils' understanding and extend their thinking skills.

Staff establish strong working relationships with pupils and this promotes positive attitudes to learning. Successful co-operation between teachers and support staff ensures that learners with specific needs make effective progress. Teachers give pupils purposeful oral feedback on their work and make effective use of success criteria to help pupils to know what they need to do to improve their work. Teachers assess pupils' work accurately and use the information well to set targets for individual pupils. Teachers use an effective range of techniques to promote positive behaviour in many, but not all, classes. In a few instances, where teaching is less effective, teachers over-direct the pupils, the pace of learning is too slow and teachers' expectations of what pupils can achieve are not high enough.

The curriculum links pupils' learning to the four purposes of the new curriculum for Wales well and places an appropriate emphasis on pupil-led activities. Teachers plan topics carefully following discussions with pupils to ensure that pupils' learning experiences build on their current knowledge and interests successfully.

Throughout the school, the wide range of valuable learning experiences motivates pupils to succeed and to improve their knowledge and understanding. The school promotes pupils' literacy, numeracy and ICT skills effectively across the curriculum. There is a strong emphasis on developing pupils' creative skills through art and music. However, teachers do not always plan well enough to ensure that pupils have enough opportunities to contribute their own ideas for what and how they learn.

Staff offer a wide range of extra-curricular activities for pupils and they ensure that pupils have the opportunity to benefit from additional learning experiences, such as netball, gardening, Welsh, ICT, art and craft clubs. These have a positive impact on their personal and social skills.

The school promotes the history and culture of Wales well and arranges for pupils to visit many places of interest. For example, they regularly visit Castell Henllys and Cardiff Castle. The school celebrates St David's Day and Dydd Miwsig Cymru, and pupils take turns as helpwyr heddiw and ninja Cymraeg. In addition, Year 5 pupils participate in a two-day residential course at the Urdd centre in Cardiff. The provision for pupils to develop their Welsh language skills is effective and there are many opportunities for pupils to use and improve their Welsh oracy skills outside of designated Welsh lessons.

Care, support and guidance: Good

The school is an inclusive, welcoming community where staff give pupils a high quality of care and support. The provision for developing pupils' personal and social skills, including their confidence and engagement in learning, is effective. Pupils have worthwhile opportunities to develop an understanding of moral and social issues during classroom activities. The school promotes pupils' cultural development well through art, music and drama.

There are effective systems to track and monitor pupils' progress. Staff know the pupils well and they have rigorous arrangements to assess their achievement and attainment. Teachers use the information from these systems successfully to plan and provide support to address the needs of individuals and specific groups of pupils.

The special educational needs co-ordinator monitors and supports pupils with learning needs effectively. There are regular reviews of pupils' individual education plans, which reflect pupils' needs well. The school works closely with various external agencies, such as the speech and language specialists, to provide effective support for pupils.

The school ensures that pupils have many opportunities to participate actively in the local community. For example, they work with the local theatre and art gallery. This helps to develop their understanding of citizenship and their sense of responsibility.

Staff give pupils rich opportunities to undertake leadership roles that have a positive impact on their wellbeing. For example, the sports, faith, reading ambassadors, Siwpyr Criw and digital leaders play an active part in the school. This ensures that pupils have a strong sense of pride in their school.

The school gives pupils many successful opportunities to promote healthy living and there is a suitable range of sporting clubs for pupils to attend. The school offers a healthy breakfast and provides fresh fruit at break times. The school also enables pupils to develop the skills and knowledge to make healthy lifestyle choices. For example, the school has established Wellbeing Wednesdays, a snack shack and internet safety weeks.

There are beneficial links with parents, and the school uses a range of methods, including social media, to ensure that parents have up-to-date information about school events. The effective strategies to seek parents' views include, for example, regular coffee mornings where the school gives parents information on how they can support their children at home. The school has a range of suitable methods to emphasise the importance of regular school attendance. For example, individual pupils regularly update the attendance displays and there is a weekly assembly where the class with the highest attendance receives additional playtime as a reward. However, the attendance rates tend to be too low compared with other similar schools.

The school provides a suitable range of opportunities for pupils to learn the importance of staying safe, for example by discussing the dangers of substance misuse and internet safety rules. The school's arrangements for safeguarding pupils meet requirements and give no cause for concern.

Leadership and management: Good

The headteacher provides clear and purposeful leadership. She receives effective support from the acting headteacher, who has provided beneficial interim leadership for the school. They share a strong commitment to develop a school that values each child as an individual and promotes the wellbeing and achievement of all pupils. They are effective in communicating this vision to staff, governors, parents and pupils.

There have been a number of recent changes in staffing. Despite this, the acting headteacher has managed change effectively and encouraged staff to take on various roles and to develop these appropriately. As a result, staff are well placed to improve aspects of their own practice. For example, staff have benefited from a project to improve their skills in teaching literacy.

Senior leaders, teachers and support staff work well together. They respond positively to change and contribute to the strategic improvement of the school. Performance management arrangements are appropriate and the process gives all staff relevant targets for improvement and professional development, including support staff. These relate well to the needs of individual staff and align closely to the priorities in the school development plan.

The school's monitoring and self-evaluation processes are rigorous. School leaders evaluate and analyse information on the performance of pupils thoroughly to identify how they can improve standards and the quality of the school's provision. They use a broad range of information to inform their thinking, such as learning walks, data analysis, book scrutiny and listening to pupils. Consequently, leaders and staff know the school well, address underachievement and take forward improvements successfully. Improvement plans have measurable targets and have led to improvements, for example in pupils' writing skills and in their Welsh oracy. However, improving pupils' attendance rates, which is an area of concern for the school, does not appear as a target for improvement.

Governors are committed to the school and conscientious in undertaking their duties. The new chair of governors is a regular visitor to the school and all governors have designated links to specific curricular areas. Governors have a good understanding of the school's performance and play a prominent part in the self-evaluation and strategic planning processes. However, their role as critical friends is less well developed.

The school responds positively to national and local priorities. For example, it has introduced effective strategies to develop the digital competence framework and the Welsh Language Charter. It is also the first Cymraeg Campus Gold Award school in Wales. The school works closely with other schools in well-established networks. Staff visit schools locally and further afield to see effective practice, for example to see how other schools promote pupils' literacy, personal and social skills. This is having a positive impact on pupils' skills and wellbeing. The school is also helping other schools in Pembrokeshire and further afield to develop their strategies to improve pupils' Welsh oracy skills.

The school has a suitable number of qualified teachers and support staff. Leaders have managed resources successfully to support pupils and to meet school priorities. The school makes good use of the pupil development grant to provide extra support and to enrich the curriculum for pupils eligible for free school meals and vulnerable learners.

Evidence base of the report

Before an inspection, inspectors:

- analyse the outcomes from the parent and pupil questionnaires and consider the views of teachers and the governing body through their questionnaire responses

During an inspection, inspectors normally:

- hold a meeting with parents to hear their views on the school and its effectiveness
- meet the headteacher, governors, senior and middle leaders (where appropriate) and individual teachers to evaluate the impact of the school's work
- meet pupils to discuss their work, to listen to them read and to gain their views about various aspects of their school
- meet groups of pupils in leadership roles, such as representatives from the school council and eco-committee
- visit a broad sample of classes, including learning support groups and undertake a variety of learning walks to observe pupils learning and to see staff teaching in a range of settings, including classrooms, support groups and in outdoor areas
- where appropriate, visit the specialist resource base within the school to see pupils' learning
- observe and speak to pupils at lunch and break times and at a sample of after-school clubs, where appropriate
- attend assemblies and daily acts of collective worship
- look closely at the school's self-evaluation processes
- consider the school's improvement plan and look at evidence to show how well the school has taken forward planned improvements
- scrutinise a range of school documents, including information on pupil assessment and progress, records of meetings of staff and the governing body, information on pupils' wellbeing, including the safeguarding of pupils, and records of staff training and professional development

After the on-site inspection and before the publication of the report, Estyn:

- review the findings of the inspection alongside the supporting evidence from the inspection team in order to validate, moderate and ensure the quality of the 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.

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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