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

A report on

St Michael's C.I.W. School

Kerry
Newtown
Powys
SY16 4NU

Date of inspection: June 2022

by

Estyn, Her Majesty's Inspectorate for Education

and Training in Wales

About St Michael's C.I.W. School

Name of provider	St Michael's C.I.W. School
Local authority	Powys County Council
Language of the provider	English
Type of school	Primary
Religious character	
Number of pupils on roll	89
Pupils of statutory school age	80
Number in nursery classes	
Percentage of pupils eligible for free school meals over a three-year average (The national percentage of pupils eligible for free school meals over a three-year average in Primary is 21.3%)	14.2%
Percentage of pupils identified as having additional learning needs (a) (The national percentage of pupils identified as having an additional learning need in Primary is 22.2%)	17.5%
Percentage of pupils who speak Welsh at home	
Percentage of pupils with English as an additional language	
Date of headteacher appointment	2017
Date of previous Estyn inspection (if applicable)	05/02/2013
Start date of inspection	28/06/2022

Data reported is sourced from the latest available Pupil Level Annual School Census. These figures may be slightly different to those observed during the inspection.

Further information is available from the Welsh Government My Local School website: mylocalschool.gov.wales

a. The term 'additional learning needs' is being used to describe those pupils on the SEN/ALN register of the school.

Overview

Nearly all pupils enjoy school, have positive attitudes to learning and behave very well. They show high levels of care and respect for others and develop positive relationships with friends and adults. Most pupils have a high level of influence over how and what they learn and use these opportunities well. Overall, they develop a good range of skills and knowledge during their time at the school but do not always have the challenge or support to apply these as well as they might. Pupils' Welsh language skills regressed during the recent pandemic and have been slow to recover.

Teaching and learning experiences engage pupils' interests well and promote an enthusiasm for learning. Teachers' use of pupils' strengths as a starting point for learning is a positive feature of the school's approach to developing confident and independent learners. They draw on a variety of interesting contexts for learning and pupils respond well. Teaching supports pupils to make good progress overall but sometimes opportunities to challenge pupils to improve their work further are missed. Arrangements to provide care, support and guidance for pupils are effective. They ensure that pupils receive timely support when needed, and they feel safe in school.

Leaders provide clear strategic direction to the school's work. They promote teamwork and innovation successfully and use resources well. Overall, leaders show the capacity to implement change successfully. They work proactively to address national priorities such as curriculum and additional learning needs (ALN) reform. They also address school-based priorities, such as the improvement of pupils' reading skills successfully. However, leaders do not always evaluate the difference that teaching and learning experiences make to pupils' progress well enough. Monitoring activity is generally too broad and does not focus sharply enough on specific elements of the school's work.

Recommendations

R1 Improve pupils' Welsh language skills

R2 Ensure that teaching and feedback support and challenge pupils effectively

R3 Ensure that pupils have opportunities to develop and apply a full range of skills progressively across the curriculum

R4 Improve monitoring and evaluation processes

What happens next

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

Main evaluation

Learning

Most pupils start the school with skills, knowledge and understanding that are at or above the level expected for their age. They make good overall progress from their starting points. Pupils with ALN make good progress towards their learning goals whilst at the school.

Nearly all pupils listen well. They show consideration to adults and their peers and focus attentively, for example, when listening to the views of others or responding to questions. Younger pupils listen intently to stories and enjoy opportunities to discuss them. For example, when listening to a story about a dog and his family, they point out important details in the pictures in response to questions about the action and recall the main points from memory. As they move through the school, most pupils develop as confident and articulate speakers. They describe clearly particular experiences they enjoy, including details of independent activities they undertake. Pupils express their thoughts and opinions sensitively when discussing how different groups might respond to the arrival of an alien in the local community.

Across the school, nearly all pupils demonstrate a positive attitude towards reading and use their skills well to support their overall progress. The youngest pupils develop their knowledge of letter sounds quickly and by the end of reception most blend and chunk sounds to read longer regular words accurately. Many also confidently read a suitable range of the most frequently used words by sight. This helps them to progress and to apply their skills to learning rapidly. By the end of Year 2, nearly all pupils read suitably challenging stories accurately. They check for meaning as they read and self-correct successfully by sounding-out or using picture cues when needed. Most older pupils enjoy reading and readily discuss the sort of books that they read in school and at home and their favourite authors. Many read confidently with good pace and expression that convey the writer's purpose clearly. They use their prior knowledge well to infer meaning when they encounter unfamiliar words. Many enjoy collecting books they have read on their virtual bookshelf when using the school's online reading resource and respond positively to the way the system records how much they read.

Most pupils make good progress in developing and applying their writing skills as they move through the school. Most younger pupils build these skills systematically, showing improved control and accuracy in letter formation and using their developing phonic knowledge to write an increasing range of unfamiliar words independently. By the end of Year 1, many pupils begin to organise their writing into clear sentences and to produce longer pieces of written work. For example, they recount their personal experiences such as their participation in events to celebrate the Queen's Platinum Jubilee. Most older pupils make effective use of planning guides and success criteria to organise their writing, and to include relevant features appropriate to its purpose. Many older pupils present their independent research findings in engaging formats, for example combining hand drawn images and text to communicate their learning effectively. They invest considerable effort and imagination in these tasks and clearly value the opportunity to enquire and to present

their ideas creatively. However, pupils do not routinely edit and develop their written work and lack guidance to support them to enhance its quality and accuracy.

Most pupils' ability to work with number is developing well. Younger pupils use a suitable range of practical resources to support their learning, for example, they use coloured bead strings to count more quickly in multiples of 5 and 10. They carry out hands-on investigations of mathematical concepts, for instance by filling a range of containers with water to measure and compare their capacity. By the end of Year 1, pupils also begin using standard written conventions to record simple calculations and to present data in tables and bar charts correctly. Older pupils build on their operational knowledge effectively, applying a range of mental and written methods to solve more complex calculations accurately. They are less confident in identifying patterns in their answers and applying their mathematical reasoning to develop strategies that support them to work efficiently.

Nearly all pupils respond positively to the extensive opportunities to express creativity in their learning. Most pupils use a range of different techniques, media and skills to create pictures and models in response to a broad variety of stimuli linked to their topic themes. For example, pupils in Year 2 and Year 3 use pastels and textiles to create imaginative portraits of themselves as Celts. Older pupils work with papier-mâché skilfully to replicate the china used by first class passengers on the Titanic. Many pupils use a design app to create detailed virtual environments such as a new national stadium complex. They develop their models from initial plans to final versions with impressive sophistication.

Pupils' progress in developing their Welsh language skills was hampered during the pandemic. Since their return to school, progress in improving pupils' use of spoken Welsh remains slow.

Most pupils use their digital skills for a variety of purposes effectively. For example, younger pupils program a toy to navigate a planned route. Across the school, pupils communicate their research on a range of themes through lively and informative presentations. Older pupils use spreadsheets to record information and display data in a variety of graphical formats. Overall, pupils' skills in using data bases and handling digital information are limited and pupils do not interrogate these sources to identify patterns or draw conclusions.

Well-being and attitudes to learning

Nearly all pupils feel happy, safe and cared for at school. The positive relationships between staff and pupils are highly effective and are built on firm foundations of mutual trust, warmth, kindness and respect. Pupils are confident that adults will respond to requests for help effectively and with care. These relationships support pupils to develop a strong sense of belonging to the school and encourage them to develop as confident learners and members of the community. Pupils with ALN are respected and are valued members of various school groups. Nearly all pupils are excellent role models for behaviour. They are extremely polite, friendly and supportive towards others during lessons and at breaktimes.

Most pupils have very positive attitudes to learning. They generally show good levels of concentration and perseverance when collaborating with others and during

independent, self-directed activities. Within self-directed activities, pupils have considerable influence over how and what they learn and make good use of these opportunities to apply their skills. This is an effective example of pupil voice in action. Teachers and other adults facilitate this independent learning well overall and encourage pupils to be creative and take risks. However, they do not always challenge pupils to use a wide enough variety of skills or support them to reach the standards of which they are capable, especially with older pupils.

Pupils are developing well as independent learners, for example they use a range of strategies to find solutions to challenges before asking an adult for help. Nearly all pupils listen very well to others, they are confident when discussing work, treat contributions from others with respect and respond positively to suggestions to improve work. However, their ability to improve their own work is limited by the feedback provided by teachers.

Most pupils explain how they can stay keep healthy by making sensible eating and drinking choices. During break and lunchtimes, they engage in a range of physical activities and games. They know the importance of taking care of equipment and the environment to enable all to enjoy the benefits they bring. Nearly all pupils understand the importance of keeping safe online.

Most pupils are becoming ethically informed citizens through various projects. During Refugee Week, Syrian refugees visited school to share their experiences of moving from their homes. Pupils took time to reflect on what they had learnt from this experience and subsequently decorated a tree in the school grounds with messages of kindness and prayers for those affected by such challenging circumstances. They have also written prayers for the Ukrainian people that are displayed prominently in St Michael's Church.

The work of pupil voice groups such as the school and eco councils has been modified in response to the coronavirus pandemic. Each class has taken responsibility for a specific group so that pupils continue to have appropriate influence over matters that affect them. For example, the eco council has carried out a review of the use of paper towels and plan to purchase air dryers to reduce paper waste. The Criw Cymraeg are working towards the Cymraeg Campus silver award.

Pupils across the school have worked collaboratively with Montgomeryshire Wildlife Trust to enhance the outdoor environment. Work has included calculating the age and size of trees, making bird feeders and exploring issues of flooding caused by deforestation. Within the school and community, pupils are becoming increasingly aware of ways to care for the environment through recycling clothing and litter picking events.

The recent 'enterprise week' was highly successful in developing pupils as enterprising and creative contributors. Pupils talk with confidence, enthusiasm and in detail about the event. Pupils researched, planned, developed and created various products, such as wooden plant pots which they sold at a school event. Pupils enjoyed and took great ownership of this project.

Owing to the coronavirus pandemic, inspectors will not report on pupils' rates of attendance during the academic years 2020-2021 and 2021-2022. Inspectors will,

however, consider the school's provision for monitoring and improving attendance as part of inspection area 4 (care support and guidance).

Teaching and learning experiences

The school is developing an engaging curriculum that responds to and reflects the interests and aspirations of pupils well. Staff have collaborated purposefully to develop an overarching vision that ensures this provision aligns closely to the ethos purposes of the Curriculum for Wales. As a result, all pupils have good opportunities to develop and use skills in literacy, numeracy and digital competence and to apply these imaginatively in self-directed tasks during their wider learning.

The youngest pupils enjoy pursuing and developing their individual interests during their 'lively learning' sessions. These provide valuable opportunity for pupils to respond creatively to open-ended challenges and to apply and develop their skills on tasks that hold genuine purpose for them. As a result, most younger pupils sustain their concentration well, work with focus and persevere to overcome obstacles. Adults monitor their progress carefully and contribute as a team to focused observations that record pupils' progress and identify next steps to extend their learning.

Teachers provide good opportunities for younger pupils to develop their social, physical and communication skills through periods of free play. These support pupils to work imaginatively together and to cooperate purposefully on shared goals. For example, pupils in reception and Year 1 use materials in the outdoor area to create a caravan for their family holiday, packing items they need for their stay and coordinating each other's actions as a group. Adults facilitate pupils' learning skilfully by modelling appropriate language and behaviour and supporting pupils to resolve difficulties without directing them towards specific outcomes.

Teachers build on these positive learning experiences successfully as pupils move through the school. From Year 2 onwards, they plan specific themes imaginatively that provide rich opportunities for pupils to develop their knowledge and to apply their skills in a range of stimulating contexts. Pupils contribute purposefully to the focus for their learning, for example by raising enquiry questions to investigate as part of their chosen theme. The school's approach to developing pupils' independent learning enables them to exercise choice about how they record and present their learning when completing self-directed tasks. These opportunities are highly valued by pupils and impact positively on their enjoyment of school and their agency as learners.

Teachers plan for the development of pupils' literacy, numeracy and digital skills systematically. This ensures clear progression in pupils' competence as they move through the school. In particular, the recent whole-school focus on developing pupils' confidence and enjoyment in reading underpins their efficacy as learners. Appropriate training and the consistent use of effective teaching strategies ensure that pupils build quickly on their knowledge of letter sounds and use their reading skills with increasing sophistication to support their independent learning in other areas of the curriculum. However, the range of texts pupils access during their lessons and in their independent research does not provide a broad enough experience of literary narratives. Teachers do not ensure that pupils have regular opportunities to write creatively, for instance through stories and poetry. This limits

their opportunities to experiment with features of written language and to enrich their expressive vocabulary.

Teachers provide suitable learning experiences to develop pupils' confidence in using number. They plan effectively to develop pupils' use of mental and written calculation strategies as they move through the school. However, teachers do not provide regular opportunities for older pupils to use their mathematical reasoning to tackle more complex problems or to analyse data and raise questions about what it can tell them.

Arrangements to develop most aspects of pupils' digital skills are developing well. Pupils have regular opportunities to work with a range of apps, platforms and programs to support their learning. The school provides regular opportunities for pupils to learn Welsh. However, this provision is not effective enough in supporting pupils to build their Welsh language skills progressively.

In most lessons, teachers link planned learning to pupils' previous knowledge successfully and make useful connections between different aspects of the curriculum. They provide clear explanations and set appropriately challenging objectives. They identify success criteria that supports pupils to make progress in the learning and to know what they need to do to succeed. Where teaching is less successful, pupils and teachers are not always as clear about the intended purpose of learning and activities do not challenge all pupils to apply their skills as well as they could.

Teachers use a variety of worthwhile methods to monitor pupils' progress and to identify next steps in their learning. They question pupils to assess their understanding and to encourage them to stretch their thinking effectively. Teachers provide helpful verbal feedback during lessons that focuses pupils' activity on meeting relevant success criteria. However, teachers' feedback to pupils does not highlight precisely enough improvements pupils could make, particularly to enhance the quality and accuracy of their written work.

Care, support and guidance

The school has a highly caring and inclusive ethos where all pupils and adults feel valued. There is a strong emphasis on the importance of mutual respect and trust. This has a very positive influence on pupils' attitudes towards each other and their work. The staff know their pupils very well and interact positively with them. Where staff recognise that pupils are not presenting in their usual way, they provide various emotional support strategies successfully to help them to participate in learning and school life.

During the pandemic, staff delivered live lessons as well as providing work for pupils to participate at home. Pupils recognise the care and support from staff during this time and appreciate the learning experiences offered. This maintained their sense of belonging and they felt connected with staff and peers. Staff covered additional sessions to reduce anxiety and ensure that they felt safe. Overall, pupils have returned to school happy and confident.

The school provides purposeful opportunities to nurture pupils' spiritual development and sense of belonging to the community during lessons and whole school assemblies. Nearly all pupils participate with enthusiasm during these shared times; they listen carefully to stories and the views of others and often make thoughtful suggestions in response. They help pupils to develop a strong awareness of right and wrong and to show sensitivity towards others.

Pupils know how to stay safe online having received input from staff and other agencies. Staff ensure that pupils are confident to talk about sensitive issues such as bullying. They refer to regular lessons, videos and role play where they have learnt how to identify if bullying is taking place and what to do if they ever experience it. Overall, pupils feel strongly that it does not take place in their school.

Staff support pupils to develop a good understanding of issues relating to equality and develop their sense of empathy successfully in a range of situations. They ensure that pupils have equal opportunities to participate in all the experiences that school has to offer. The school is developing pupils' awareness of diversity in society appropriately, for example through their topic work about refugees. The provision for Sex, Relationships Education across the school is in early stages of development.

The school's approach to drawing upon pupil voice is particularly effective in the context of their learning and developing their independence. Overall, it generates highly positive attitudes to learning amongst pupils and ensures that they regularly experience a powerful sense of achievement. The school has ensured that pupil voice groups have continued to function throughout the pandemic and that pupils have some influence over decision making at school. In a few instances, however, pupils state that they would appreciate the opportunity to change aspects of the school's provision, such as having more influence over the books they read.

Staff promote pupils' sense of belonging to their local community appropriately by taking advantage of opportunities to draw upon local heritage. They also develop a wider understanding of pupils' Welsh heritage through a 'cynefin' project, which includes studies of the Welsh Not, Welsh castles, princes and kings.

The school offers effective provision for pupils with ALN, which includes a wide range of purposeful support programmes for numeracy, literacy and emotional wellbeing. The school makes good use of skilled additional adults to enhance opportunities and support pupil progress. Staff identify pupils' additional needs early and provide focussed support to individuals and groups of pupils. They ensure that pupils with more specific needs have bespoke care plans and packages of highly personalised support. All pupils with ALN have useful one-page profiles and these contain important information about their personal qualities, their needs and how best to support them. Overall, the school is making good progress towards the national approach to additional learning needs reform.

The school's promotes positive rates of attendance successfully. Arrangements for safeguarding pupils meet requirements and give no cause for concern.

Leadership and management

Leaders have established and implemented a successful vision for the education and well-being of pupils. This underpins a friendly, caring ethos and a learning environment where pupils thrive. Leaders inspire good levels of trust and collaboration amongst staff. and support them well to work as a team. They ensure that pupils receive the support and experiences they need to make progress in learning and their development as confident individuals.

Leaders create a safe space for staff to try out new ideas and take responsibility for improvement in a supportive learning environment. This encourages innovation, supports staff to develop leadership skills and makes a positive difference to pupils' development as independent learners. This is exemplified in the school's recently developed approaches to support pupils to lead their own learning. Arrangements for the distribution of other leadership responsibilities are effective and support the school to respond positively to national priorities such as developing its interpretation of the Curriculum for Wales and ALN reform. In general, staff in these roles highlight some of the main differences that their improvement work has made to their practice in addition to the benefits this has brought to pupils' attitudes to learning and progress.

Since returning to school following the pandemic, leaders have identified broad and appropriate local priorities for improvement. These include improving provision for reading and mathematics. They have supported this improvement work with suitable professional learning, performance management arrangements and by allocating funding. This work has brought about improvements to the quality and consistency of teaching and supported most pupils to make sound progress.

Leaders undertake a suitable range of activities to monitor the school's work. This includes using information from assessments and gathering pupils' views about what they enjoy in school and to find out what they think about improvement initiatives, such as the strategy to develop reading skills. However, leaders miss opportunities to make direct links between the quality of teaching and learning experiences and the progress that pupils make. For example, leaders ask pupils what they think of and know about the school's marking process but do not evaluate the difference that feedback makes to improving the standard of pupils' writing. They also miss opportunities to evaluate progress in specific aspects of pupils' skills, such as data handling and writing. Consequently, they are unable to develop precise improvement strategies for specific aspects of pupils' work. Recent monitoring work has been too broad and has tried to cover too many aspects of the school's work at the same time.

There are regular and beneficial opportunities for staff to engage in professional learning, for example to learn how to deliver phonics programmes and to develop additional leadership skills. However, in a few instances professional learning has had less impact, for example on the development of pupils' Welsh language skills.

The governing body undertake their roles enthusiastically and have a good understanding of the school's context and its vision. Governors are familiar with the school's improvement priorities. Regular reports from the headteacher ensure that governors have a sense of progress towards improvement priorities. However, the lack of precision in the school's monitoring and evaluation processes means that

governors do not always have sufficiently detailed information about pupil standards and progress to support and challenge the school as well as they could. Governors meet with pupils to get their perspective on the life and work of the school. They also work with pupil voice groups, such as the healthy council as part of their work to ensure that they make appropriate arrangements for healthy eating and drinking. Leaders promote a positive safeguarding culture and governors contribute to this appropriately.

Leaders manage finances appropriately to support school improvement. They use specific funding such as the pupil development grant appropriately to fund additional staff and enrichment activities for the benefit of vulnerable pupils.

Leaders communicate effectively with parents to ensure that they know what is happening at school and have useful information about their child's progress. Parents contribute positively to the school's work, for example through the work of the Friends of the School who contribute valuable funds. Partnership work with the church and local agencies and trusts enriches pupils' learning experiences and their sense of belonging to the local community.

Evidence base of the report

Before an inspection, inspectors:

- analyse the outcomes from the parent/carer 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/carers 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' well-being, 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)

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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