



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

A report on

Cwmbach Community Primary School

**Llangorse Road
Cwmbach
Aberdare
Rhondda Cynon Taf
CF44 0HS**

Date of inspection: June 2022

by

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

About Cwmbach Community Primary School

Name of provider	Cwmbach Community Primary School
Local authority	Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council
Language of the provider	English
Type of school	Primary
Religious character	
Number of pupils on roll	283
Pupils of statutory school age	206
Number in nursery classes	36
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%)	21.8%
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%)	25.2%
Percentage of pupils who speak Welsh at home	*
Percentage of pupils with English as an additional language	2.9%
Date of headteacher appointment	01/11/2017
Date of previous Estyn inspection (if applicable)	September 2013
Start date of inspection	27/06/2022

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

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

Overview

The headteacher provides outstanding leadership of the school. She makes bold decisions in the best interests of pupils and is supported very well by her deputy. They have been highly successful in improving the quality of teaching and assessment from a low starting point. In most classes, pupils now achieve well and make strong progress in developing their literacy, numeracy and digital skills. In a few classes, pupils make particularly impressive progress in their writing.

All staff benefit from the school's exceptional programme of personal and professional development. This has had a considerable impact on transforming the culture of the school and the ability of staff to carry out their leadership roles successfully. Self-evaluation and improvement processes are highly effective and all staff speak openly about the school's strengths and areas for development. For instance, they recognise the need to ensure pupils are challenged and supported appropriately in all curriculum areas. They welcome discussion with other professionals and there is a healthy culture of self-reflection within the team.

The school provides sensitive and effective support for the well-being of pupils and their families. This includes pupils with additional learning needs and those who are vulnerable. Teachers often provide interesting, real-life contexts for pupils' learning. They welcome pupils' suggestions about what they would like to learn more about and encourage them to make decisions about how to present their work. This contributes much to pupils' overall sense of well-being and happiness.

Most pupils enjoy school, behave well, and have good independent learning skills. They regularly improve their work and understand their next steps in learning. Learning support assistants are highly effective and make a notable contribution to pupils' progress and well-being. In a few instances, however, teachers do not match learning tasks to pupils' stages of development well enough. This means that pupils, including a few with the most complex learning needs, do not always make as much progress as they could.

Overall, the role of the governing body is underdeveloped. It does not fulfil its roles and responsibilities well enough, including ensuring that the school's arrangements for safeguarding pupils are sufficiently robust.

Recommendations

- R1 Address the safeguarding issues raised during the inspection
- R2 Improve the effectiveness of governance, ensuring all governors understand and discharge their roles and responsibilities
- R3 Ensure that teaching consistently provides the appropriate level of support or challenge across the breadth of the curriculum

What happens next

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

Estyn will invite the school to prepare two case studies on its work in relation to professional learning to develop effective self-evaluation and improvement processes, and developing pupils as effective writers, for dissemination on Estyn's website.

Main evaluation

Learning

During their time at Cwmbach Primary School, many pupils, including those who are vulnerable and those with additional learning needs, flourish. They make strong progress in learning from their starting points, particularly in developing their literacy, numeracy and digital skills. A few pupils with more complex learning needs benefit from individual specialist intervention plans and make sound progress.

Many pupils start school with lower-than-expected communication skills and relatively poor personal and social skills. Benefiting from the school's full-time nursery provision, they respond well to daily routines and make rapid progress. Most quickly become confident and speak coherently about their learning activities and how they access them independently. They listen attentively to adults and each other, and concentrate for long periods, for example when designing and building a house in the construction area with a partner.

As they move through the school, nearly all pupils develop their listening and speaking skills effectively. Pupils in the complex learning needs classes respond well to the range of strategies, such as signing, that staff use to successfully develop their listening and understanding. By Year 2, pupils confidently deliver presentations to their class on topics of personal interest. Older pupils communicate freely and fluently with adults. They talk enthusiastically about their learning experiences and share thoughtful, honest views about their school. For example, they lead governors and parents on a guided tour of classrooms during an open day, explaining how the school's new curriculum is developing and the changes this has brought for their learning.

Most pupils make good progress in developing their Welsh language skills and many are comfortable initiating conversations. Younger pupils recall familiar Welsh songs and older ones use their Welsh skills successfully in different contexts, such as during a virtual gaming session with pupils from other schools. The Criw Cymraeg leads by example and models language patterns effectively, for example when selling eggs from the school's chickens to parents and the wider community.

Across the school, pupils' reading skills develop very well. Younger pupils love listening to stories and many quickly develop a secure knowledge of sounds and blends. By Year 2, most read age-appropriate texts fluently and talk animatedly about the chapter books they read as a class. As they progress through the school, most older pupils read from a wide range of contemporary and classic texts with appropriate accuracy, expression and understanding. The oldest pupils infer, deduce and retrieve information efficiently, when reading to support their learning across the curriculum. Many read for pleasure, recognising the different type of reading experience to be had when reading from a digital device, compared with a book. For example, they identify the benefit of a digital device providing the definition of a word when you click on it but how turning the pages of a paperback helps to immerse you in the story.

The youngest pupils take pride in their early attempts at independent writing, and from here, most pupils' writing skills progress rapidly. For example, pupils in the reception class, write simple sentences with correct punctuation and spelling to create a fact file about caterpillars. By Year 2, many pupils have an exceptional level of technical knowledge about language that enables them to use various sentence structures for effect, when writing in a wide variety of genres. They spend a lot of time talking and exploring language. They explain their choices and often edit their work to improve its vocabulary, or to correct spelling and punctuation. As they move through the school, pupils understand what it takes to be an effective writer and they value the planning and redrafting process. Consequently, most older pupils produce engaging, well-structured pieces of writing, such as imaginative diary entries and balanced arguments about whether Egyptian tombs should be excavated. They demonstrate the same rigour and quality in their work, when applying their writing skills across the curriculum.

Most pupils make strong progress with their mathematical knowledge and numeracy skills. In the nursery class, most pupils develop their understanding of mathematical concepts successfully in the different areas of provision. For example, they use language correctly to compare the size of model spiders they make in the creative area, identifying which is bigger and which is smaller. By Year 2, they progress to applying their skills to calculate the cost of a survival holiday and measure, in standard units, the length of rope needed for the rigging on their classroom pirate ship. Older pupils apply the range of mathematical skills they have become competent in, to solve problems. For instance, they calculate accurately percentage reductions of items on sale, and round decimals to find the price paid. They apply their data handling and measuring skills well in real-life contexts across the curriculum. However, on occasions, because mathematical concepts are introduced too early to pupils with complex learning needs, they do not always develop a secure enough understanding to build their skills progressively.

Nearly all pupils are competent in using a wide range of digital skills. Younger pupils use technology naturally to record their learning and share this with their parents by uploading files to an online platform. Most pupils navigate Hwb, the national learning platform, with ease, to use tools for word processing and to develop databases and e-books, linked to their topic work. Older pupils apply their digital skills effectively, when collaborating to build a version of the Principality Stadium to scale, in a virtual digital world.

Pupils develop their artistic skills effectively across the school. They create good quality artwork and take pride and care in their model making, drawing and painting, for example when studying the work of a controversial graffiti artist. They also develop their physical skills suitably. This ranges from the youngest pupils developing finger strength by using large tweezers to 'rescue' objects from a deep-water tray, to older pupils developing good co-ordination and balance by creating sea shanty dances and climbing apparatus during their outdoor learning sessions.

Well-being and attitudes to learning

Nearly all pupils feel safe in a caring and nurturing environment where their well-being is a priority. Most pupils treat each other, staff and visitors with respect, and behave well within lessons and around the school. The very few pupils who need

help to manage their emotions benefit from the effective support they receive. Nearly all pupils listen attentively to their peers and teachers. They are confident any worries they share with staff, will be dealt with swiftly and sensitively.

Most pupils have positive attitudes to learning. They are considerate and kind to each other when working in pairs or small groups, and develop as capable, enthusiastic learners. They settle quickly, engage well with their tasks, and show resilience when completing them. For example, when learning about pollution, Year 3 pupils persevere to control a robot around a floor map of a waste water system to locate a 'fatberg', when their first attempts are not successful.

From an early age, most pupils develop good independent learning skills. Most are happy and confident to engage in conversations about their learning and progress. They enjoy making decisions about how to present their learning in their topic books or on classroom displays. They show pride in their work and respond diligently to teachers' verbal and written feedback which helps them to improve. Many use subject-specific terms accurately when assessing their writing, or evaluating how well they have applied their numeracy skills in other subjects. Overall, pupils have a secure understanding of their next steps in learning, and this helps many to make consistently good progress.

Most pupils value highly the school's reward system and celebrate each other's successes from within and outside school in weekly assemblies. Pupils are encouraged to display the 'Cwmbach characteristics' including, resilience, kindness and curiosity and, as a reward, a pupil in each class is chosen to receive a golden coin to spend in the book vending machine. This contributes beneficially to the school's culture of reading, where many pupils value reading as a pleasurable past time that supports their well-being.

Nearly all pupils feel that they are treated fairly and are listened to by their teachers and school leaders. Pupils feel able to influence school life to make positive changes. For example, older pupils made a successful proposal to the governing body, to redevelop an area of the playground with new climbing apparatus and sports equipment, to support the development of their physical skills. The Criw Cymraeg and digital leaders play an active role in the life and work of the school. This includes promoting use of the Welsh language in the local community by teaching local fire fighters simple Welsh phrases, and leading an after-school training session for staff on how to code using hardware available to the public.

Nearly all pupils are aware of the importance of making healthy choices and being physically active. Many pupils benefit from opportunities for exercise and enjoy other extra-curricular activities such as Welsh club, digital club, football and guitar lessons, some of which are led by pupils. Nearly all pupils understand how to stay safe online and the importance of not sharing personal information.

Owing to the coronavirus pandemic, inspectors will not report 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

Most staff foster purposeful and respectful relationships with pupils. They create positive conditions for effective learning, such as playing music to establish a calm atmosphere at the start of the school day. Most staff manage pupils' behaviour well and many have high expectations of what pupils can achieve. Learning support assistants have a strong understanding of their roles and work very effectively with teachers to provide high-quality support for pupils' learning and well-being.

In most lessons, teachers establish a clear focus for pupils' learning and plan exciting 'hooks' for introducing topics. They take good account of pupils' prior learning when introducing skills or concepts in literacy and numeracy. They sequence and scaffold learning well and provide appropriate opportunities for pupils to consolidate their learning, addressing any misconceptions before pupils move on. However, in a few cases, teachers do not meet individual pupils' needs well enough. They do not consistently provide the appropriate level of support or challenge when teaching across the breadth of the curriculum, with activities at either too high or low a level at times. This means pupils do not always make as much progress as they could.

In the few classes, where teaching is particularly effective, teachers use their strong subject knowledge skilfully to scaffold and extend pupils' learning. For example, most pupils in Year 2 develop a deep understanding of grammar and apply their knowledge impressively to make effective language choices in their independent writing. In Years 5 and 6, teachers make strong links to real-world scenarios when teaching numerical concepts, such as percentages. They refer to challenging contemporary issues as the context for older pupils' learning, engaging them successfully in high-quality discussion through effective questioning and response. For instance, pupils consider the prejudice and discrimination the scientist and mathematician Alan Turing experienced.

Most staff review pupils' work carefully, providing prompt and useful feedback to help them to improve. They encourage pupils to assess their own work and, in most classes, pupils engage well with 'challenge questions' that help them to reflect and improve their responses. Many teachers use their assessments well to build up an accurate picture of each pupil's progress and to inform their planning for pupils' next steps in learning. However, in a few instances, teachers' assessments of learning are not secure and they plan activities that are not matched well enough to pupils' stages of development.

The school's approach to curriculum design carefully considers the overarching principles of the Curriculum for Wales. Leaders use their own reading and research to inform the school's decision making about teaching approaches and curriculum planning that best support the needs of their pupils.

The pupil-named 'dazzle curriculum' prioritises the development of pupils' literacy, numeracy and digital skills, to enable them to access knowledge and the breadth of the school's curriculum successfully. They benefit from developing these cross-curricular skills through a variety of real-life contexts, such as writing online to a local Member of Parliament about the impact of poverty on young people's life chances. The school's 'writing journey' approach helps pupils to understand the importance of

developing and thinking as a writer. It increases the technical accuracy of their writing, and their ability to refine their work, as they move through the school.

Provision for the development of pupils' Welsh language skills is good. Teachers use Welsh language lessons and informal situations to promote to pupils the benefits of being multilingual. In the best instances, Welsh lessons help pupils to become secure in using language patterns to talk about themselves and the Cwmbach Cymraeg is effective in ensuring the Welsh language has a high profile in the school.

The school is developing a positive culture of reading in English and Welsh. Pupils benefit from regular opportunities to develop their reading skills in different meaningful contexts and staff are effective role models. For example, all staff are part of the school's 'book club', where they read texts to help them in their professional roles, and they talk to pupils about books they are reading for enjoyment.

At the start of each curriculum topic, pupils engage in 'dazzle days', which often include visits to places of interest or workshops from visitors. Staff immerse pupils in practical and inspiring activities that motivate them to share their ideas about what they would like to learn. For example, younger pupils generate ideas for 'our wonderful learning' challenges, that help them to develop their independent learning and creative skills inside and outdoors. Nearly all pupils welcome these exciting opportunities to help shape their learning and create useful resources for their classroom.

Whole-school planning includes opportunities for pupils to learn about important global events, such as the current conflict in Ukraine. Flexibility in planning processes enables staff to respond to pupils' interests and curiosity about world issues, though opportunities for them to develop their understanding of their local heritage and that of Wales more broadly are at an early stage of development.

Care, support and guidance

The school provides a caring environment, which supports all pupils and their families well. This was a particular strength during the pandemic when the strong relationship between families and school was crucial in protecting pupils' well-being and learning. Staff support the emotional and social needs of pupils effectively. For instance, they have helped pupils to develop valuable strategies to overcome anxiety and build their confidence following the pandemic. Learning support assistants provide effective individual and small group sessions for identified pupils that are tailored closely to their needs. These help them to manage their emotions by becoming more aware of others' feelings. Most do this successfully when working in pairs and groups.

Leaders and staff take good account of suggestions from pupils to address their areas of interest or concern. For example, older pupils have recently explored the topic of 'identity' and how individuals may define themselves as cis, trans or non-binary. They also reflect on the negative impact social media can have on an individual's self-esteem and mental health, such as when a well-known footballer received racial abuse for missing a penalty in an international match. This helps pupils to understand right and wrong, equality and inclusion, and develops the values

of respect and empathy. School assemblies encourage pupils further to reflect on issues, such as being unique, and help them to explore spiritual and ethical beliefs.

Through their curriculum planning, staff enable pupils to make worthwhile contributions to the life of their community and these experiences help them to develop confidence, self-expression and the ability to work as a team. For instance, they plan and lead 'community days' to mark the end of their learning in a topic, where they share their new knowledge, skills and experiences in creative ways, for example through exhibiting artwork, performing dances and giving presentations to parents and members of the public. The provision of an easily accessible food and clothing bank helps families and members of the community in need. This encourages pupils to be compassionate and sensitive to others' circumstances.

The school broadens pupils' cultural and artistic experiences successfully by providing opportunities that they may otherwise not be able to access. For example, older pupils attended a performance of The Nutcracker by an international ballet company and also engaged with a local Welsh artist, writing to her to seek advice on how to recreate her watercolour paintings. Subsequently, they shared their images with her, explaining how they were inspired by her work.

Provision to support pupils with additional learning needs is strong and there are effective, inclusive strategies to support pupils in all classes. The school's additional learning needs (ALN) co-ordinator and class teachers, ensure there is swift identification and tailored provision to meet the individual needs of pupils with ALN. Whilst recognising that high-quality teaching is the basis for strong progress, the co-ordinator works effectively with class teachers to devise a useful one-page profile of individual pupils and specific plans to support their progress. All staff have access to helpful online resources to support them in meeting the needs of these pupils. Experienced support staff, who know the pupils well, use carefully chosen resources to meet their needs and motivate them. As a result, most pupils are ready to learn and make good progress from their starting points. However, provision for a few pupils with the most complex needs does not always meet their needs well enough.

In most instances, arrangements to safeguard pupils meet requirements. Pupils' attendance is monitored robustly and contact is made swiftly on the first day of an unknown absence. In addition, the school has identified barriers to attendance, such as the expectation to dress up for immersion days at the beginning of new topics, and has implemented sensitive strategies to mitigate these. There is a well-understood system to report safeguarding concerns relating to pupils and the school makes referrals to outside agencies, when appropriate. However, not all staff know who they should report to if they have concerns about the designated safeguarding person.

Leadership and management

The headteacher provides exceptional, bold leadership of the school. She has high expectations of all members of the school community and communicates this successfully. The clear strategic vision she brings is focused sharply on improving the quality of teaching to ensure pupils are happy in their learning and understand what skills they will need to be successful in adult life. Senior leaders have established a purposeful team ethos at the school and raised expectations of what

pupils can achieve, and this has contributed strongly to improving many important aspects of the school's work, such as pupils' learning in literacy and numeracy. Leaders and staff know pupils and their families well. They continue to provide valuable support for those affected by the pandemic and use a range of platforms to communicate successfully with parents about school activities.

Following a turbulent period of significant change and challenge, a strong culture of self-improvement and reflection is developing well in the school. The headteacher and her deputy model behaviours, such as collaboration, challenge and support, very successfully. This helps to build staff confidence and trust, so they are able to question each other's practice and reflect critically on the learning experiences they provide for pupils. A key feature of the school's culture of continuous improvement is the development of teachers and support staff through its outstanding provision for professional learning. The 'people development strategy' is tied robustly to the school's improvement priorities and has been tailored skilfully to meet the needs of staff. This includes a high-quality programme of training on the pedagogy of grammar to support the development of pupils' writing skills, as well as opportunities to lead on whole-school priorities by working in small teams. As a result, staff feel involved and empowered, and value highly the wide range of experiences they have to develop their skills and knowledge.

Leaders use the school's robust self-evaluation and improvement planning processes to identify precisely, and in a timely manner, any areas in need of development in teaching and learning across the school. They know the individual issues in particular classes, and provide well-focused support for staff. In many instances, this has led to notable improvements in pupils' learning. Leaders are realistic about the improvements still required to ensure teaching across the breadth of the curriculum is of a consistently high quality. They welcome external challenge and review to support them in this work. Through coaching, mentoring and the 'hands-on' approach they have taken to modelling effective school improvement strategies, the senior leadership team has been successful in developing middle leaders' ability to evaluate the school's work accurately. The headteacher carries out quality assurance activities to ensure that senior and middle leaders provide effective feedback to staff and identify precise actions to support their ongoing development.

The school has taken a strategic approach to how it addresses national priorities, such as the Curriculum for Wales, prioritising those aspects that will have the greatest impact on the progress pupils make. It makes effective use of the pupil development grant to support vulnerable learners' progress and well-being, for example by funding residential visits for young carers, children who are looked after or those who have additional learning needs that may not otherwise benefit from such learning experiences.

Governors gather insight into the school's work through presentations from pupils and staff, for example about how school and national priorities, such as additional learning needs reform, are being addressed. They have suitable oversight of the school's arrangements to promote healthy eating and drinking. The finance committee monitors the school's budget appropriately and ensures that expenditure is tied closely to improvement priorities, although governors' knowledge of how grant funding is spent is limited. Except for a few committed members, the governing body's engagement with, and support for the school, is inconsistent. Governors'

attendance at committee meetings is generally poor and there are two longstanding governor vacancies. Although they receive appropriate information from the headteacher about safeguarding issues, not all governors, including the governor with responsibility for safeguarding, have received suitable training to fulfil their roles and responsibilities.

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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