



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

A report on

Blaenavon Heritage Voluntary Controlled Primary School

**Blaenavon Community Campus
Middle Coed Cae Road
Blaenavon
NP4 9AW**

Date of inspection: October 2022

by

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

About Blaenavon Heritage Voluntary Controlled Primary School

Name of provider	Blaenavon Heritage Voluntary Controlled Primary School
Local authority	Torfaen County Borough Council
Language of the provider	English
Type of school	Primary
Religious character	Church in Wales Voluntary Controlled
Number of pupils on roll	478
Pupils of statutory school age	332
Number in nursery classes	82
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%)	37.5%
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%)	31.3%
Percentage of pupils who speak Welsh at home	0%
Percentage of pupils with English as an additional language	0.2%
Date of headteacher appointment	01/09/2022
Date of previous Estyn inspection (if applicable)	03/03/2014
Start date of inspection	03/10/2022
The headteacher took up her post on 01/09/2022.	

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

Pupils enjoy learning and they are enthusiastic during lessons and in activities around the school. Teachers promote a positive and inclusive atmosphere, and the pupils embrace the opportunities to develop positive working relationships with their teachers and other staff.

Overall, the extensive school environment promotes beneficial learning opportunities. Learning is particularly successful where the teaching is purposeful and challenges pupils to perform at their best. However, the quality of teaching is inconsistent and the quality of teachers' feedback to pupils does not help them to improve their work effectively.

Pupils make good progress in developing their listening, speaking, reading, digital and numeracy skills, and they achieve well from their starting points. Additionally, pupils' Welsh oracy skills are developing adequately. However, teachers do not plan well enough for pupils to write at length in English, to demonstrate their true abilities.

All staff promote a positive ethos of support for pupils. This motivates pupils to care for each other's feelings and it encourages nearly all pupils to behave well. This contributes to pupils' positive attitudes to learning. It promotes resilience and perseverance when attempting challenging tasks as individuals, in pairs and in groups. As a result, the school helps pupils to become confident, whilst also respecting the feelings of others.

Leaders evaluate the school's work to plan for improvements rigorously. The new headteacher provides strong and effective leadership. Recent changes to monitoring and evaluation processes highlight her determination to ensure success for the pupils and the community. The senior leadership team, the staff and the governors share her clear vision, and they work together cohesively to ensure that the school improves.

The headteacher shares responsibilities effectively among the senior leadership team and she is beginning to develop purposeful professional learning opportunities for staff. This is at an early stage of development; however, it ensures that staff feel valued for their contributions to school life.

Recommendations

- R1 Improve pupils' extended writing
- R2 Ensure that the quality of teachers' feedback targets the next steps in pupils' learning effectively
- R3 Challenge all pupils through consistent and effective teaching
- R4 Ensure that relevant professional learning improves provision and pupils' outcomes

What happens next

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

Main evaluation

Learning

Most pupils enter the school with literacy and numeracy skills lower than the expected level for their age. As they move through the school, many pupils make significant progress from their low starting points. Pupils who are eligible for free school meals make progress at least in line with their peers, and most pupils with additional learning needs (ALN) make good progress in their learning and achieve well.

Most pupils listen well to adults and each other. The youngest pupils' oracy skills are developing successfully and, by Year 2, they speak confidently about their work and experiences. For example, pupils in the nursery class communicate effectively with each other when planning and building a house using model bricks and tools. Most older pupils develop their oracy skills well in English. They communicate effectively and contribute purposefully to class discussions, expressing their views maturely. For example, Year 6 pupils explain their findings sensibly following a science investigation on the length of shadows on the moon.

Most pupils' Welsh language skills are satisfactory, and many develop a positive attitude to speaking Welsh. However, most pupils' progress slows from Year 3 to Year 6 and they have limited recall of simple sentence structures and relevant vocabulary.

Many pupils' reading skills are developing well. Nursery and reception pupils show an interest in books and other reading materials and they enjoy sharing and handling them as developing readers. Most reception pupils become familiar with the relationship between letters and sounds quickly and they use an appropriate range of phonic strategies to read familiar and unfamiliar words confidently. By Year 2, they use their reading skills well, for example when reading a story book. Many older pupils read intelligently in various contexts. They vary their tone of voice and use punctuation correctly to show their understanding. They develop their higher-order reading skills purposefully to gather information from different sources, such as finding information on the challenges faced by explorers climbing Mount Everest.

Many pupils' early writing skills are developing well. By the time they reach Year 2, many write suitably with appropriate punctuation and grammar as they begin to edit and improve their writing. For example, they use alliteration and adjectives effectively when writing a poem about chocolate as part of their topic on weddings. Many older pupils develop their writing skills appropriately and show a solid grasp of familiar spelling patterns, paragraphs and punctuation. They adapt the style and structure effectively for different topics, for example when writing a factual report on the wildlife of the Galapagos Islands. However, pupils do not build on the skills they have learnt well enough and they do not work independently to produce extended pieces of writing.

Most pupils develop effective mathematical skills. Many pupils in Year 2 partition and compare three- and four-digit numbers well. Older pupils develop their number skills competently and most use an appropriate range of skills such as four rules of

number, place value, decimals and percentages purposefully. They measure and draw angles accurately and are beginning to use algebra confidently to understand how numbers can be represented by symbols. Many pupils transfer their mathematical skills to a variety of contexts successfully. For instance, they examine the time it takes for objects to sink when investigating the viscosity of different liquids, and they plot co-ordinates in four quadrants to draw cartoon characters.

Many pupils have good digital skills, which they use across the curriculum successfully. For example, many younger pupils programme robots to travel around a course efficiently. Most older pupils manipulate text effectively, such as adapting and creating fact files and preparing presentations, for example, when persuading tourists to visit wildlife sanctuaries. However, many pupils do not create and interrogate databases and spreadsheets confidently.

Nearly all pupils' physical skills are developing successfully through a variety of experiences and activities. Most develop their fine motor skills well, such as when nursery pupils place pairs of toy animals in Noah's ark. By Year 2, most pupils make good progress by practising their skills in practical tasks, such as building houses for dragons using construction kits. Most older pupils develop their physical skills well by participating in a variety of sports activities arranged by the school, such as in the dance studio and when using fitness equipment in the gym.

Well-being and attitudes to learning

Nearly all pupils' well-being and attitudes to learning are a strength. Most pupils show great pride in themselves, their school and their work. They feel a strong sense of belonging to the school and its staff and articulate clearly that the school is an important part of the community.

Nearly all pupils have a sound understanding of the values that underpin the school rules and this helps to develop the school's nurturing and caring environment. Nearly all pupils feel that they are treated fairly and are listened to by staff. As a result, they show a high level of respect for their peers and adults in the classrooms and in the extensive outdoor areas. Most pupils embrace the warmth of the school ethos and the culture of inclusivity that exists across the school. Nearly all pupils feel safe and secure at school and in most cases, their behaviour is exemplary in lessons and at breaktimes. They move around the school calmly and respectfully and demonstrate care for each other in the stairwells and the enclosed outdoor play area.

Nearly all pupils are polite, welcoming and courteous to visitors and are happy and confident to engage in conversations about their learning. As they progress through the school, most pupils develop attitudes and behaviours that help them to become successful learners. Many pupils are resilient and determined to do their best. They share their workbooks confidently with each other and adults and many are ambitious to succeed in tasks. They understand that persevering in their learning will benefit them in later life. For example, Year 2 pupils are eager to show and discuss their biographies and to demonstrate how they edit them.

Many pupils make good progress in developing their knowledge and skills and respond positively to questioning during lessons. They are capable learners, and they extend and develop their explanations well to convey a deeper understanding of

their work. For example, following their diligent investigations, they conclude that some of their lunar modules are less successful than others due to design faults. Most pupils show pride in their work and react positively to feedback from adults and their peers.

Most pupils are developing well as healthy, confident individuals who understand the importance of healthy eating and drinking. Nearly all pupils delight in 'Tutti Frutti Tuesday' activities, where they have the opportunity to sample a range of fruit to encourage them to make healthy choices. They appreciate the importance of regular exercise and show great enthusiasm for developing their physical and creative skills in the school's sports hall, gym and dance studio.

Many pupils, including those eligible for free school meals and pupils with additional learning needs, relish opportunities to take on leadership roles through joining a variety of pupil voice groups at the school. These include Pupil Leadership, Criw Cymraeg, Heddlu Bach and the Eco Council. As a result of the work of these groups, most pupils speak positively about the impact of their work and their support to the school community, including organising the collection and disposal of litter around the town. This enables most pupils to show a clear understanding of their responsibilities within their community. It also gives them valuable opportunities to play a developing role in making decisions, which have a positive effect on the school's provision. A good example is deciding collectively that the school needed new play equipment and bikes for the younger pupils to support their physical development.

Most pupils develop as ethical and informed citizens. For example, the pupils' Values Team worked with staff to secure a grant from the local authority. This led to a whole school art project focused on community cohesion that celebrated equality and diversity. They also created a banner to celebrate the Christian values of the school, which they presented to the local church community.

Attendance figures for the school dropped significantly after the pandemic. The school has an action plan to improve attendance and the actions have already raised the attendance in the new academic year from 88% to over 90%.

Teaching and learning experiences

Teachers and support staff provide stimulating activities that encourage pupils to apply themselves fully to their learning. The school community embraces and contributes beneficially to the school's vision of 'Opening the Door to Your Future', which enables pupils to become ambitious and confident learners through a broad range of learning experiences.

All members of staff have highly positive working relationships with pupils, which support their well-being and learning successfully. They encourage respect and courtesy, which promotes the school's supportive and caring ethos. One of the school's most notable elements is the staff's thorough knowledge of pupils' individual needs, which contributes strongly to a positive and productive learning environment. This supports many pupils to overcome challenges, which helps to develop their emotional well-being effectively.

Teachers provide interesting and well-planned learning experiences. They include the pupils' ideas in their planning, which supports them to prepare a balanced and relevant curriculum. This cohesive approach develops pupils' numeracy and digital skills purposefully across the areas of learning. In literacy, the planned opportunities for speaking, listening and reading are purposeful, but the planning for developing pupils' extended writing skills is not as effective.

Preparation for the new curriculum is thorough and inclusive and takes account of the school's vision and values. Leaders are managing the transition well to equip the staff with the knowledge and understanding of how the curriculum is changing. An effective feature of the new approach to planning is that selected topics result in a celebration that pupils share with the wider community. For example, an art project culminated with an exhibition of pupils' work in the local church.

Teachers' sensible application of the principles of curriculum reform develops a clear understanding of how the curriculum creates a continuous learning journey for pupils. This leads to a wide range of experiences that are interesting and innovative. For example, older pupils blend their literacy and digital skills together to create television programmes, such as 'Amazing Body Show', using the digital studio.

The school demonstrates a positive attitude towards the Welsh language and the nation's culture and plans lessons appropriately to improve pupils' Welsh skills. However, there are not enough practical opportunities for pupils to practise and use their Welsh speaking skills in class and around the school. As a result, many pupils do not recall and use basic phrases and sentences well and do not speak confidently enough.

The school's provision for personal and social education develops pupils' understanding of their own well-being and identity successfully. For example, staff and pupils have developed successful links with a local residential home to promote intergenerational learning. Additionally, teachers integrate aspects of diversity into the planning skilfully, such as studying elements of racism in the early days of the space programme in America.

The school grounds enhance curriculum provision for games, physical education, and the development of pupils' creative skills. However, whilst all pupils up to the age of seven can access well-resourced, outdoor learning daily, planning for the use of the outdoor learning areas to enhance pupils' experiences is not consistent across all classes.

Teachers and support staff work together diligently to provide activities that meet the needs of all pupils. The classrooms and outdoor areas are stimulating and promote the development of pupils' skills well. Many teachers offer learning activities that support pupils to learn and to apply their skills effectively. However, teaching is inconsistent and not all teachers have high enough expectations of pupils, preventing them from demonstrating their true abilities, especially when writing.

Most teachers provide verbal feedback during lessons, that encourages pupils to remain on task and focus on improving some aspects of their work. However, the quality of feedback, is inconsistent and does not always help pupils with to know how

to improve their work. As a result, it does not target the next steps in pupils' learning well enough.

Teachers and support staff make good use of assessment tools to track pupil progress and to monitor learning efficiently. There are also regular pupil progress meetings that include leaders, class teachers and the additional learning needs manager. These help to ensure that all staff are aware of the progress pupils are making and the support that they need.

Care, support and guidance

The school knows its pupils, their backgrounds, and the needs of the local community well. All staff place a high priority on the well-being of pupils and this strong focus on improving pupils' well-being is a key aspect of the school's provision.

All staff work effectively with pupils to develop a positive awareness of the school's values. As a result, nearly all pupils develop a clear understanding that respect and tolerance towards others is an important feature of a caring society. Staff ensure that pupils consider the importance of values, such as honesty, sustainability and respect regularly, through a varied and rich pastoral curriculum. Additionally, the school provides beneficial opportunities to develop pupils' moral and spiritual understanding during vibrant assemblies and well-planned classroom activities. Staff deal with issues sensitively during these sessions and encourage pupils to take part and to lead worship sessions.

Leaders and staff have developed a range of effective systems to ensure that pupils and their families receive beneficial support, which encourages them to trust the school and to play a full part in school life. For example, the school employs staff to deliver specific support to identified pupils, which includes involving their parents. This includes home visits and attending meetings with health professionals and external agencies, both during and outside school hours.

Pupils recognise the care and support from staff as a strength of the school. For example, they state that during the pandemic, staff ensured that a wide range of learning experiences were available for pupils. This maintained the pupils' sense of belonging to the school and they remained connected to the staff and their peers through these activities. Staff also provided additional sessions to reduce pupils' anxiety to ensure that they felt safe. As a result of the staff's care, and sensible guidance, most pupils returned to school confidently, and they were eager to mix with their peers and to learn productively.

The school's approach to providing and drawing upon a wide variety of pupil voice groups is effective. For example, pupils arrange visits, alongside staff, to sing to the residents of a nearby nursing home. This type of purposeful provision creates valuable learning opportunities to enhance pupils' independence and their understanding that making sensible decisions will improve their school community. Overall, it generates positive attitudes to learning amongst pupils and ensures that they experience a powerful sense of achievement when their plans succeed.

The school is making effective progress towards the national approach to ALN reform. Leaders have ensured that there are robust procedures in place to identify pupils' additional needs and they monitor the impact of regular interventions thoroughly. There is swift identification and support for pupils with ALN and tailored provision to meet their individual needs in the classroom and in support groups. The school provides a wide range of beneficial support to help pupils emotionally and in their learning. For example, pupils experience the calming effect of counselling sessions and they have access to the 'Sunshine Room' and 'St Peter's Room', where staff support emotional and behavioural needs effectively. Additionally, the school engages successfully with a wide range of external agencies to address the needs of the pupils and their families.

Staff create a warm and caring learning environment where pupils feel valued and safe. They provide a range of successful nurture programmes that support pupils' emotional and well-being needs effectively, such as drawing and talking sessions. Staff ensure that pupils with more specific needs have bespoke care plans and packages, which personalise the support effectively. All pupils with ALN have purposeful one-page profiles and these contain important information about their personal qualities, their needs and how best to support them. Teachers and support staff use the profiles effectively in class to support pupils' learning.

Staff promote pupils' sense of belonging to their local community well by taking advantage of opportunities to draw upon and celebrate their local Welsh heritage. Learning opportunities based on the local area are a common feature in the school. For example, older pupils create videos about the town's rich cultural heritage and how this local history links to Wales and the wider world.

Any persistent absences are monitored thoroughly, and instances of bullying are addressed well by the school. The school has robust arrangements in place to safeguard pupils. Staff ensure that learning experiences help to develop pupils' understanding of how they can keep themselves safe, for example, when they are working online and whilst making blogs and podcasts.

Leadership and management

The headteacher, who began her role in September 2022, has worked diligently with the school's senior leadership team to implement improvements in the school's strategic and day-to-day practices. In a short space of time, she has identified important areas to develop in the school's monitoring and evaluation practices and in the school's provision.

The headteacher and senior leaders focus on placing the school at the centre of its community and set the well-being of pupils and their families at the heart of this vision. The governors and staff support this philosophy and implement it into their roles effectively. As a result, leaders ensure that a caring and supportive ethos exists throughout the school, which the pupils embrace wholeheartedly. This promotes inclusivity successfully, which has a positive effect on pupils' attitudes to learning and their care for each other.

Leaders allocate roles of responsibility effectively and the headteacher is beginning to hold staff to account effectively for the quality and impact of their work. Leaders

and staff use the findings of detailed monitoring and evaluation practices to improve provision. Leaders focus specifically on refining the quality of teaching and instilling a common understanding of professional values among staff. As a result, they can ensure that many pupils make effective progress from their individual starting points.

Leaders' processes to evaluate the effectiveness of provision are thorough and based on a wide range of first-hand evidence. Since the beginning of this term, systems to improve quality include detailed scrutiny of pupils' books and analysing internal and external data on pupils' progress. Additionally, in recent weeks, leaders gather the views of other stakeholders about the school to inform their practice. For example, they consider the views of parents and carers and act on any findings purposefully, such as making the school more accessible to parents so that they can attend social events with their children.

The evaluation and review of the school, conducted by the headteacher and senior leaders since her appointment, provide leaders with a clearer picture of the school's strengths and areas for development. The link between self-evaluation activities and improvement planning is purposeful. As a result, leaders prioritise their findings effectively and set reliable and challenging targets to move the school forward. In addition, leaders share the school's safeguarding culture with all staff robustly and adaptations to the school's entry systems to manage risk are effective.

Governors ensure that pupils eat and drink healthily and advise parents and carers on the importance of nutritious food in their lunch boxes. Leaders keep in close contact with the wider school community and with vulnerable families. They build on the strong relationships that exist with parents and carers and support them empathetically. This includes accompanying them in meetings with health workers and other support agencies.

Leaders ensure that staff make the best use of the premises. This includes stimulating outdoor spaces such as the woodland and planting areas. However, the use of outdoor spaces to stimulate effective learning is not consistent across the school. Leaders allocate resources in the classrooms effectively and use the pupil development grant wisely to provide specific interventions across the school by adults. As a result, the support staff provide beneficial support to move pupils forward with their learning.

Governors are knowledgeable and their regular input creates systematic improvements throughout the school. They are very supportive of the new headteacher and work with her and other senior leaders sensibly, questioning the impact of their work as critical friends. The headteacher informs governors about pupils' learning regularly and since her appointment, advises them realistically and candidly on how to improve provision, such as the need to improve pupils' writing skills and the quality of feedback to pupils. Governors develop a first-hand understanding of the school's activities and they undertake learning walks and discuss pupils' work to measure its quality alongside teachers. Governors monitor the budget carefully and ensure that spending decisions are in line with the school's priorities for improvement, such as investments in digital reading and mathematics programmes.

The headteacher ensures that staff are beginning to access effective learning opportunities to support their professional development and match their individual needs. These link closely to school improvement priorities. However, well-planned and purposeful professional learning opportunities for staff are at an early stage of development. The school shares effective practices with local schools and this supports the school's capacity for continuous improvement appropriately. It provides valuable opportunities for teachers to compare and share their effectiveness with other professionals.

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:

Publication Section

Estyn

Anchor Court, Keen Road

Cardiff

CF24 5JW or by email to publications@estyn.gov.wales

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