



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

A report on

Ysgol Cwm Brombil

**Bertha Road
Margam
Port Talbot
SA13 2AN**

Date of inspection: October 2022

by

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

About Ysgol Cwm Brombil

Name of provider	Ysgol Cwm Brombil
Local authority	Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council
Language of the provider	English
Type of school	All Age
Religious character	*
Number of pupils on roll	1352
Pupils of statutory school age	1280
Number in nursery classes	39
Number in sixth form	*
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 All age is 20.4%)	26.8%
Percentage of pupils identified as having additional learning needs (a) (The national percentage of pupils identified as having an additional learning need in All age is 22.3%)	19.1%
Percentage of pupils who speak Welsh at home	1.8%
Percentage of pupils with English as an additional language	0.4%
Date of headteacher appointment	01/09/2017
Date of previous Estyn inspection (if applicable)	
Start date of inspection	10/10/2022
*	

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

Leaders and staff at Ysgol Cwm Brombil have successfully created a caring, inclusive community that ensures that nearly all pupils feel safe in schools and are supported to develop their mental and physical health. Leaders and governors have effectively managed the change to the new school and established a clear vision based on increasing aspiration, creating a sense of belonging and developing pupils' character. A particular strength is leaders' focus on creating strong values, based on a belief in inclusivity and the need to address inequity. Staff work in close partnership with families and communities and understand the specific social and economic challenges faced by their community. Staff and pupils are proud to be part of the school community and value the support that leaders provide.

In lessons, many pupils make suitable progress in their learning and build appropriately on their prior knowledge and skills. In a few instances, pupils make strong progress and are supported well by teachers through engaging and challenging activities. However, because of shortcomings in teaching, a minority of pupils across the school make limited progress in their learning. In these lessons, teachers provide too much support and do not have high enough expectations of what pupils can achieve. In addition, unstructured or independent activities in the primary phase are not planned sufficiently. As a result, pupils in this phase do not always make sufficient progress when engaging with these tasks. The majority of teachers use questioning suitably to check pupils' understanding. Only a few use their feedback to deepen and probe pupils' knowledge, understanding and skills. In addition, teachers do not always use their assessment information well enough to inform their planning and pupils' next steps in learning.

The school provides a broad and balanced curriculum for pupils with suitable opportunities for them to develop an understanding of their local community, Wales and the wider world. This curriculum offer is narrowed in Year 9 when pupils study fewer subjects. Whilst teachers are beginning to provide a few suitable opportunities for pupils to develop their literacy and numeracy and digital skills, the provision for the progressive development of pupils' skills at an early stage of development.

Leaders in Ysgol Cwm Brombil have been successful in promoting a positive safeguarding culture. Provision to support vulnerable pupils is strong. The attendance of pupils that are entitled to free school meals has improved notably since last year. The school provides a wide range of support for pupils with additional learning needs (ALN) and these pupils make sound progress from their starting points.

Whilst leaders have secured particularly high levels of well-being and care, they have not had enough impact on improving some important aspects of the school's work, such as the quality of teaching and the impact of leadership at all levels. Although they gather a wide range of suitable evidence to support their evaluations, they do not focus closely enough on the impact that teaching has on pupils' learning. As a result, leaders are too generous in their evaluation of teaching and learning and have not identified a few important weaknesses in middle and senior leadership.

Recommendations

- R1 Strengthen processes to evaluate and improve the quality of teaching, learning and leadership at all levels
- R2 Improve the quality of teaching so that pupils of all ages and abilities make consistent progress in their learning
- R3 Strengthen the provision for the progressive development of pupils' skills
- R4 Ensure that assessment, including feedback, informs teachers' planning and supports pupil progress

What happens next

The school will draw up an action plan to show how it is going to address the recommendations. Estyn will work with the local authority to review the school's progress.

Main evaluation

Learning

Many pupils start school with skills below those expected for their age, particularly in language and social communication. Pupils in nursery settle well into classroom routines and respond successfully to familiar adults.

In lessons, many pupils across the primary and secondary phases make steady progress in developing their knowledge, understanding and skills. They recall prior learning suitably and the majority apply it well in more challenging situations. A few pupils make strong progress in their learning. However, there is considerable variation in how much progress pupils make across the school. A minority of pupils make only limited progress in their learning. They have difficulty recalling prior learning and do not develop their knowledge, understanding or skills sufficiently. This is often as a result of weaknesses in teaching. In the primary phase, pupils do not always make enough progress when engaging in unstructured or independent activities. In the secondary phase, a minority of pupils do not concentrate sufficiently and are not challenged well enough to make the progress that they should. Most pupils with ALN, make sound progress from their starting points.

Many pupils listen with attention and respect and are happy to answer questions. The majority, when encouraged to, provide detailed responses, for example when Year 6 pupils build on each other's contributions while discussing whether money or beauty is more important. However, a minority of pupils offer only brief and underdeveloped responses using a limited range of vocabulary and are not challenged or supported well enough to improve them.

Many pupils develop their reading skills appropriately as they move through the school. They locate information from texts suitably. Many older primary pupils read confidently and can infer meanings appropriately from simple texts. A minority of pupils use their inference and deduction skills suitably, for example, when pupils in Year 9 consider how the author creates empathy for different characters. Where this is particularly effective, pupils take on roles in group reading tasks confidently. These pupils develop sophisticated vocabulary when asking and responding to questions about different texts. However, other than in English lessons, a minority of pupils do not use a suitable range of reading strategies independently to support their learning.

The majority of pupils produce well-structured writing using an appropriate range of vocabulary. A minority use well-chosen vocabulary to engage their audience, for example when pupils in Years 5 and 6 write to the local council to encourage them to provide more information for tourists. Many younger primary pupils develop their early writing skills suitably. However, as they move through the primary phase, they do not consistently build on these skills well enough. This is mainly due to the lack of suitable opportunities afforded to them. Periods of lockdown have impacted on pupils' writing skills. A minority make frequent and careless errors in spelling, punctuation, and grammar. However, too often, these pupils are not provided with the feedback and support to address these aspects of their work.

Many pupils have suitable basic number skills relative to their age and ability. Older primary pupils and pupils in the secondary phase use the four operations competently and work confidently with basic fractions and decimals. Many younger primary pupils have a suitable grasp of number bonds and confidently measure and compare lengths using non-standard measures, such as when they measure fairies using sticks. The majority of pupils across the school construct accurate graphs, although only a minority analyse these sufficiently. A few pupils have weak recall of basic number facts and rely too heavily on the support that teachers provide. As a result, they do not develop their independent learning skills well enough.

As pupils move through primary, they make suitable progress in developing their digital skills. For example, they use green screen technology successfully to create and edit videos. Throughout the secondary phase, pupils make good progress in developing their digital skills. Many produce a range of spreadsheets and use databases successfully, such as when they use 'mail merge' to create card games. In addition, these pupils develop their coding skills well and the majority use these skills to complete more advanced tasks successfully.

A minority of pupils show independence and flair in their creative work, for example in drama, where pupils use voice and gesture imaginatively to convey emotion and atmosphere. Younger primary pupils make solid progress in developing their gross motor skills and they build well on their physical skills as they move through the school. In the secondary phase, many pupils engage positively in physical education and develop their coordination appropriately, for example when improving their balance and control in badminton. However, a majority of pupils do not develop their fine motor skills well enough to enable sufficient fluency in handwriting.

Many pupils engage well in Welsh lessons and have a positive attitude towards learning the language. They make good progress from their low starting points. By the end of the primary phase, many convey personal information about themselves verbally. As they progress in the secondary phase, they understand and begin to use an increasingly varied vocabulary linked to a range of topics, using prompts where necessary.

Well-being and attitudes to learning

Nearly all pupils feel safe in school and know who to turn to if they have any problems. They settle well into the school day, and most feel cared for and valued and feel that teachers and other adults treat them fairly. Nearly all pupils across the school treat each other with respect and celebrate diversity in a positive manner.

Most pupils understand how to become healthy and confident individuals. Nearly all younger pupils participate enthusiastically in the 'daily mile' and produce healthy recipes for distribution within the community. Many pupils across the school take advantage of the wide range of extra-curricular opportunities available during and after school. This helps them to develop social skills as well as improving their physical fitness. In addition, pupils have established a 'Belonging+' group that provides valuable support for LGBTQ+ pupils, for example when they invite guest speakers to address the group.

Many pupils take on a range of leadership roles that have contributed to securing important changes in the school. A particular strength is the junior safeguarding board which has supported school leaders to set up an anonymous reporting system that makes it easier for pupils to raise any concerns. Younger pupils actively fund-raise to purchase outdoor equipment to enhance their learning environment.

In general, pupils develop skills in citizenship and enterprise suitably. For example, younger pupils identified that local websites are not user friendly for young children and collaborated with 'Friends of Margam' to successfully adapt the website to improve this.

Most pupils build positive relationships with their peers and the wider community. Many behave well in lessons, listening respectfully and participating suitably in activities. A majority of pupils engage well with their learning, sustain concentration and show resilience and commitment to improving their work. However, a minority are passive in their learning or can be slow to begin tasks. A few pupils demonstrate challenging behaviour, although there are effective systems in place to support them.

Pupils are attending school more regularly this year compared with last year, when the COVID-19 pandemic had a negative impact nationally on school attendance. Considerably fewer pupils are persistently absent this year compared with last year. During the first half term of the school year, the attendance of pupils who are eligible for free school meals has improved notably.

Teaching and learning experiences

Across the school, most teachers foster positive working relationships with their pupils. They have secure subject knowledge and consider carefully how they can engage pupils and take account of their interests.

Many teachers create a calm, purposeful learning environment and have high expectations of pupil behaviour. They establish effective routines that ensure that pupils are engaged in learning suitably at the start of lessons. These teachers provide clear explanations and instructions and use questioning appropriately to check for progress with activities. They regularly provide praise and encouragement, along with helpful verbal feedback. In many cases, teachers are good language models and suitably encourage younger pupils to develop their vocabulary. Generally, teaching assistants are used effectively to support individuals and small groups of pupils.

The majority of teachers plan their lessons well, ensuring tasks enable pupils to make sound progress. They set an appropriate level of challenge and use modelling effectively to support pupils to succeed.

In a few cases, teachers have high expectations of what pupils can achieve. They consider carefully how pupils learn best in their subject and phase and plan lessons that support pupils to make strong progress. These teachers ask probing questions that encourage pupils to think and develop their understanding. In these lessons, teachers closely monitor pupils' learning and adapt their teaching skilfully.

In a minority of lessons across the school, there are shortcomings in teaching. In these cases, teachers do not have high enough expectations of what pupils can achieve. They place too much emphasis on what tasks that pupils will complete rather than considering sufficiently the planned impact on learning. In the secondary phase, these teachers provide too much support and hinder pupils' learning. In the primary phase, independent learning tasks do not always support pupils to make progress in their learning. This is either because pupils do not develop the knowledge, understanding and skills to support them or tasks are not demanding enough to enable them to make meaningful progress.

Across the school, the effectiveness of written feedback is inconsistent. In the best examples, teachers provide pupils with specific advice on how they can improve their work, particularly with regard to their literacy skills, and ensure that pupils act on this advice. However, they do not always use their findings well enough to adapt or amend activities to better match pupils' needs. Teachers provide whole-class feedback and suggest a menu of possible amendments to use in dedicated improvement and reflection time. These activities are useful in helping pupils to review aspects of their work. However, they do not always help pupils to identify important errors or improve the quality of their work.

Ysgol Cwm Brombil provides a broad and balanced curriculum. The valuable emphasis on health and well-being in the curriculum is a notable feature of the provision throughout the school. The school support pupils well to know how best to promote positive mental and physical health. For example, pupils in Year 6 develop their knowledge about the causes of anxiety and how to alleviate it. Members of the school's healthcare team contribute effectively to enriching the curriculum throughout the school. The personal and social education (PSE) programme in the secondary phase meets pupils' needs well.

The primary curriculum is based on stimulating topics and there are beneficial opportunities for pupils to influence what they learn. Teachers make effective use of the local area to enhance pupils' learning. In the main, outdoor provision for the youngest pupils provides suitable opportunities for pupils to develop their physical and communication skills.

The secondary curriculum provides opportunities for pupils to develop knowledge and skills in a broad range of subjects. The breadth of this curriculum is reduced in Year 9 to allow fewer subjects to be studied over a longer period of time. The school has a suitable range of academic and vocational courses for older pupils and provides helpful information about next steps in their learning and future careers.

In the primary phase, teachers plan suitable opportunities for pupils to develop literacy and numeracy skills in their work across the curriculum. However, they do not plan systematically enough for pupils to develop the full range of digital skills. In the secondary phase, in a few cases, teachers use effective whole-school strategies to develop pupils' skills, such as when providing regular opportunities for structured group reading. Overall, however, planning to develop secondary pupils' cross-curricular skills is at an early stage.

Teachers provide valuable opportunities for pupils to experience Welsh culture. Along with support staff, they encourage use of the Welsh language suitably. Staff

promote diversity effectively through a range of activities, often led by the school's influential 'International Club'. For example, pupils in the secondary phase contribute to creating a 'Same But Different' film aimed at combatting prejudice.

The school provides many opportunities for pupils to learn about Wales and the wider world. For example, in the primary phase pupils explore cultural festivals such as Chinese New Year. Older students enjoy visits to Llangrannog and international club also promotes cultural diversity effectively through assemblies and regular club activities. Links with schools in other countries are purposeful and gradually developing following the pandemic. For example, as a result of hosting students from Spain, many students are gaining an understanding of Spanish language and culture.

The school enriches the curriculum with a range of activities that inspire pupils. This includes valuable opportunities to take part in offsite visits, ranging from walks to the local post box for the youngest pupils to international visits for the oldest pupils. In addition, there is a wide and beneficial range of extra-curricular activities. For example, the darts club provides worthwhile opportunities for pupils to develop numeracy and Welsh language skills in a recreational context.

The school provides pupils who have high levels of emotional need with effective learning support. For example, older pupils have a bespoke alternative curriculum and personalised timetables adapted to meet their needs. This ensures that nearly all pupils who have access to this provision are engaged in learning and make suitable progress.

Care, support and guidance

Ysgol Cwm Brombil is an inclusive, welcoming community, which provides pupils with effective care and support. Provision for pupils' well-being is a strong feature. A team of dedicated staff respond sensitively to pupils' social and emotional needs. A wide range of support includes the employment of two nurse practitioners who support pupils with a range of health needs. They provide a worthwhile monthly sexual health outreach service for older students in collaboration with the local health board. Arrangements to develop pupils to develop their spiritual, moral and cultural awareness are sound.

Engagement officers build strong relationships with pupils and families. They provide highly effective support to tackle a range of issues including the impact of poverty. Leaders carefully evaluate provision for vulnerable pupils, including those eligible for free school meals. They work collaboratively with pupils, families, and outside agencies. For example, a recent survey of the cost of the school day has enabled staff to explore ways of reducing family costs. This has led to free transport for after school clubs, free specialist music tuition for older pupils and support for families through the school food bank.

Provision to support pupils with ALN is effective. These pupils have worthwhile one-page profiles which support effective intervention planning. Staff monitor the progress of pupils with ALN effectively and know their pupils well. They use this information purposefully to ensure that any additional provision is tailored to meet the needs of these pupils. Staff involve pupils, parents and outside agencies effectively to plan

pupils' next steps in learning. The ALN co-ordinators provide beneficial professional learning for all staff.

The school provides good opportunities for pupils to develop an understanding of their own identity. This helps them to be confident in their own identity and develop a sense of belonging to their school community. For example, students in Year 11 run their own 'Belonging+' group, which supports and celebrates LGBTQ+ pupils.

The school provides many opportunities to introduce pupils to the world of work. Primary pupils are introduced to this through thematic work and through visitors to the school or classroom. Secondary pupils are given suitable careers advice which ensures that most have a beneficial understanding of future choices. The school also ensures that all students in Year 10 have a period of work experience which enables them to have a good insight into the world of work.

The school promotes a strong safeguarding culture. Staff respond to safeguarding concerns promptly and effectively. They provide timely and effective support and make the necessary referrals to outside agencies. The joint working with police and social services is a notable strength.

The school promotes good attendance well and adopts a suitable range of strategies to monitor and address poor attendance.

Leadership and management

The headteacher has led the transition to the new school successfully. Ably supported by his senior team, he has established a strong team ethos and culture of collaboration across the school. Leaders and governors have developed and communicated effectively a clear vision that encourages aspiration, instils a sense of belonging and seeks to develop character. This vision is rooted in a strong understanding of the needs of the locality and an ambition to create a school that is at the heart of its community.

Leaders and governors place a high priority on promoting safeguarding across the school. Leaders have developed successful systems and approaches that benefit vulnerable pupils, including those from low-income backgrounds, to overcome barriers to their learning. This work has enabled leaders to build a firm foundation for school improvement. However, leadership has not had a sufficient impact on improving some important aspects of the school's work, particularly the quality of teaching and learning.

The distribution of leadership roles and responsibilities is generally clear and equitable. The school is beginning to develop leadership across phases, for example in areas such as well-being and ALN. However, structures to develop strategic working across phases is at an early stage of development.

Senior leaders and middle leaders work together positively. Middle leaders have a shared understanding of the overarching improvement priorities of the school and feel trusted to develop tailored approaches in their areas of responsibility. Although senior leaders recognise that there is variability in the quality of middle leadership, they have not identified clearly enough the strengths and areas for improvement in

middle leaders' work. This makes it difficult for senior leaders to hold individuals to account robustly and hinders the school's ability to make improvements in important areas.

Governors are experienced and very supportive of the school. They demonstrate a strong moral duty to make a difference to pupils' life chances and their local community. They are particularly mindful of the challenges many vulnerable pupils face and support the school's work to help families in need well. Governors ensure that arrangements for pupils' healthy eating and drinking are appropriate.

The school has suitable processes for gathering information and evidence to support self-evaluation through an annual cycle, involving all staff, parents and governors. Leaders place a high priority on gathering pupils' views about the school's work. They are beginning to involve older pupils in reviewing the school's approaches to teaching. Generally, leaders identify areas in need of improvement that relate to national priorities, such as placing a high priority on developing approaches to supporting pupils with ALN.

The coaching programme to improve teaching has brought about consistency in classroom routines. However, it does not currently allow leaders to identify precisely the aspects of teaching most in need of improvement across the school, within departments or for individuals. In the primary phase, leaders are overly generous in their evaluation of teaching. For instance, they have not identified the limited progress pupils often make during independent challenges. In the secondary phase, the school's quality assurance processes for evaluating teaching and learning focus predominantly on aspects of compliance, such as whether teachers are using agreed behaviour management strategies. Evaluations, across the school, do not focus well enough on the quality of teaching and learning in subjects, and there is an over-reliance on judging pupils' progress in terms of end of Key Stage 4 performance. Overall, senior and middle leaders do not have a clear enough picture of the specific strengths and weaknesses in the school. This makes it difficult for the school to prioritise its work and to plan effectively to bring about the improvements required in a timely way.

There are appropriate processes for performance management. Staff objectives focus suitably on the school's broad priorities and link well to the wide range of professional learning opportunities. Leaders recognise the importance of these activities in supporting individual needs, as well as those of the school, and have succeeded in creating a positive culture and ethos around professional learning. There are purposeful opportunities for staff to gain experience in leadership roles, including through secondment to the leadership team. The school is carrying out its role as a lead school for initial teacher education diligently and beginning to use its links to higher education as a source of relevant research to support its work. However, generally, professional learning for improving teaching and leadership is not linked well enough to self-evaluation findings. In particular, it does not support middle leaders' ability to evaluate the quality of teaching and learning in their areas of responsibility.

Senior leaders, including the business manager, manage the school's finances prudently. Generally, funds are directed suitably to school priorities and the pupil development grant is used appropriately to support vulnerable learners, for example

through considerable investment in pastoral systems. The school has worked effectively with the local authority to address the deficit budget and bring the school into a positive financial position.

Evidence base of the report

Before an inspection, inspectors:

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

During an inspection, inspectors normally:

- hold a meeting with parents to hear their views on the school and its effectiveness
- meet the headteacher, governors, senior and middle leaders (where appropriate) and individual teachers to evaluate the impact of the school's work
- meet pupils to discuss their work 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, where appropriate
- visit a broad sample of lessons, 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 publication. Any enquiries or comments regarding this document/publication should be addressed to:

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