



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

A report on

Markham Primary School

**Pantycfn Road
Markham
Blackwood
NP12 0QD**

Date of inspection: November 2022

by

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

About Markham Primary School

Name of provider	Markham Primary School
Local authority	Caerphilly County Borough Council
Language of the provider	English
Type of school	Primary
Religious character	n/a
Number of pupils on roll	185
Pupils of statutory school age	148
Number in nursery classes	16
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%)	37.6%
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%)	25.7%
Percentage of pupils who speak Welsh at home	*
Percentage of pupils with English as an additional language	0.0%
Date of headteacher appointment	02/04/2018
Date of previous Estyn inspection (if applicable)	03/02/2014
Start date of inspection	07/11/2022

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

Markham Primary School provides a safe, nurturing and vibrant place for pupils and staff, where pupils are proud to be a part of such a supportive learning community. Staff are ambitious for their pupils and help them develop positive attitudes to learning. There is a strong focus on developing literacy, numeracy and digital skills in all classes. Teachers and support staff work effectively together to make sure that all pupils achieve well in using these skills, including those with additional needs. A strength of the school is how leaders, staff and pupils promote the school's Welsh identity and language.

The school has created a stimulating and resourceful learning environment in all classes which inspire pupils to engage well with their learning. The outside learning space however is underdeveloped.

The 'RISE' curriculum approach enables all pupils to make very good progress from their baselines, providing a strong and embedded system for ensuring effective differentiation across the school. Pupils are empowered to make informed decisions and set their own level of challenge. This approach provides pupils with ownership of their learning whilst ensuring they fully understand where they are, what their next steps are and how they can be effectively challenged.

Pupils have a strong voice in the school and contribute well to a variety of groups and committees, where their influence has had a positive impact on school life. Nearly all pupils enjoy attending school, however attendance has slipped due to the pandemic and holidays being deferred.

The school has successfully established and embedded a comprehensive programme of support. This includes parental and family engagement as well as developing a wide range of agency and community involvement. It provides a 'team around the school' approach, which effectively meets the needs and enriches the lives of many pupils and their families.

The headteacher provides strong and supportive leadership. She engages and empowers teachers and support staff to work and learn together. All staff see school improvement as everyone's responsibility. Governors are knowledgeable about the work of the school. They know the community well and are supportive of the school's actions to raise pupils' aspirations.

Recommendations

R1 Improve outdoor provision to enrich all pupils' learning experiences

R2 Improve attendance

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 securing strong differentiation through effective curriculum design and effectively engaging the school community, for dissemination on Estyn's website.

Main evaluation

Learning

Most pupils enter the school with skills below those expected for their age. Overall, most pupils, including those with additional learning needs, make at least good progress, with some making very good progress in their learning from their individual starting points.

Nearly all pupils progress well over time and interact confidently and respectfully with adults and other children and talk with pride and enthusiasm about their school and their learning. For example, pupils enjoy the experience of using the school radio station to interview their peers and visitors. Many older pupils develop a mature vocabulary and listen respectfully to others. Nearly all pupils speak confidently and express themselves clearly, for instance when explaining how the school reward system is organised. Many pupils' reading skills are developing well. The younger pupils use an appropriate range of phonic strategies to read familiar and unfamiliar words. They discuss the books that they have read and explain why they enjoyed them. Most older pupils read more complex texts accurately with good understanding when researching topics, for example when imagining life as a soldier during the second World War. As they move through the school most pupils use their reading skills independently to support their learning in other areas of the curriculum successfully.

Across the school, most pupils make good progress in developing their writing skills. The youngest pupils develop their fine motor skills appropriately and start to form letters correctly. They begin to use their knowledge of letter sounds to help them read and write a few familiar words, such as their names. As they move through the school, most pupils write with increasing confidence for different purposes, both in their literacy lessons and across the curriculum. Pupils in Year 6 use relevant texts as a stimulus for their own writing. In many cases, pupils' writing is grammatically accurate and correctly punctuated. Many older pupils organise their work into paragraphs, using a variety of sentence types whilst spelling a wide range of common words correctly. Most pupils have neat handwriting and present work to a very high standard.

Across the school, most pupils' Welsh speaking and listening skills are consistently good. Most of the younger pupils respond to simple instructions and questions effectively and can read and write basic sentences well. Many older pupils can hold more detailed conversations independently, confidently using the past tense. They read and write a range of materials based on a variety of learned patterns.

Most pupils make good progress in their mathematical development and enjoy the investigative tasks they undertake. In the nursery class, pupils engage enthusiastically in practical activities that support the development of their mathematical vocabulary and their number skills. In Year 1, most pupils order numbers related to temperatures from coldest to warmest to compare the habitats of animals. By the end of Year 2, most pupils have a secure grasp of appropriate number facts. Pupils in Years 3 to 5 sustain this progress well and most pupils carry out a range of calculations confidently. Most pupils in Year 6 show a good

understanding of decimals and percentages and can transfer their mathematical skills to a variety of contexts successfully, for instance when creating graphs to show how military exercises from the Second World War affected their heart rates.

Most pupils are developing their digital skills well across the school. Many younger pupils use devices confidently to take and use photographs. Year 2 pupils use devices to take pictures outside and record themselves to support their writing. For example, pupils record themselves using the mangle in the Victorian washroom role play area to help them with their instructional writing. Most older pupils use their digital skills well. They select and use resources confidently to enhance their learning, such as when using spreadsheets and data bases to support their research.

Across the school most pupils make good progress in developing their physical and social skills. For example, younger pupils develop cooperation and coordination through activities in the indoor and outdoor forest areas effectively. Most pupils use their communication and thinking skills purposefully, such as when considering their needs and wants, caring for each other or to contribute ideas to their learning themes.

Well-being and attitudes to learning

Nearly all pupils are happy and enjoy coming to school. They are polite towards each other and greet visitors with a friendly 'croeso'. Pupils move calmly and purposefully between different activities and areas of the school. They begin lessons with a 'ready to learn' attitude.

Most pupils have a secure understanding of how to lead a healthy lifestyle. Many pupils buy bananas, apples and oranges from the school's tuck shop and explain clearly how fruit and vegetables are an important part of a healthy diet.

Most pupils understand how to keep themselves safe online. They talk confidently about not sharing passwords and only using recommended websites when researching information for their learning. Pupils recognise and understand the importance of talking to adults if they have any concerns.

Most pupils enjoy physical activities. They develop their stamina by running a 'daily mile' on the playground. Younger pupils improve their flexibility when they take part in a 'dance song'. A majority of pupils participate enthusiastically in the wide range of after school clubs and residential visits, which benefit them physically, as well as contributing to their general sense of well-being. They enjoy attending a darts club and apply their numeracy skills accurately by doubling numbers and adding up totals.

The wide range of pupil groups work effectively and provide opportunities for pupils to use their leadership roles. For example, the 'Super Ambassadors' lead an assembly on the right for everyone to have shelter and food and members of the Junior Leadership team work closely with the headteacher and governing body to improve the school by choosing appropriate play equipment.

Most pupils develop a beneficial understanding of how they can care for the environment. Year 3 pupils participate in a litter pick at a local area and use a tally chart to record the amount of rubbish collected. Year 5 and Year 6 pupils develop

their understanding of sustainability and their entrepreneurial skills effectively through an enterprise project. They work with a local farmer and sell 'plastic free' milk shakes to parents.

Most pupils have a sound understanding of their rights and the school's values. They are beginning to appreciate how they can improve people's lives. Many pupils think carefully about how they can be kind to each other, for example, by sharing playground equipment and helping at home with the washing up.

Most pupils have a growing understanding of diversity and the wider world. They learn about the impact of people from different cultures. For example, older pupils explore the life of Mary Seacole, an African nurse who helped Florence Nightingale during the Crimea War. Year 2 pupils write a biography about a well-known football player and learn about the work that he initiates for families in need.

Most pupils are proud to be Welsh and have a strong understanding of their identity and heritage. A range of visitors and purposeful trips successfully enhance their experiences. For example, ex miners share their memories of working in the South Wales mines and a visit to Caerphilly castle. This inspires older pupils to write creative stories about Welsh giants and castles.

Many pupils engage purposefully in lessons and concentrate well. They develop their skills of perseverance and resilience in a number of ways. For example, younger pupils work effectively as a team to move different lengths of guttering to allow water to flow to a 'well'.

Most pupils work well as individuals, in pairs or in small groups. They give support and encouragement sensitively about each other's work. Many pupils understand the feedback given by their teachers and respond to it positively, which supports their progress and learning.

Nearly all pupils understand the importance of attending school regularly and punctually. However, school attendance has fallen over the past three years owing to the pandemic.

Teaching and learning experiences

The school has a clear vision for learning which aims to inspire and challenge learners. 'Nurtured and inspired we are Ready to Inquire, Succeed and Excel' is embedded in all aspects of school life and influences the ethos and culture of this inclusive and nurturing environment.

All staff have warm and positive working relationships with pupils. They create stimulating and safe spaces for effective learning to flourish. Staff have high expectations of their pupils and, as a result, behaviour of nearly all pupils is excellent. Teaching 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.

The school has planned systematically and purposefully to develop their Curriculum for Wales. There is a collaborative culture which creates beneficial opportunities for pupils to have a direct influence on the termly theme and the content of their

activities. This motivates them to play an active part in their learning. The curriculum is broad, balanced and innovative, based on a range of interesting themes and include a wide range of real-life learning opportunities. These develop pupils' skills effectively in all areas of learning, in addition to motivating a desire to learn. The school develops its curriculum to reflect the nature of its context. This includes planning learning activities that reflect the nature of Markham, Wales and the wider world. This raises pupils' awareness of their local area as well as its place globally.

Leaders use their own reading and research-based inquiry to inform the school's decision making about teaching approaches and curriculum planning. Close cluster collaboration has supported the development of long-term planning for the new curriculum and as a result, several areas of learning have been mapped out to ensure coverage and progression of skills. This work is recent and further collaboration for the remaining areas of learning have been identified by leaders.

Staff encourage pupils to learn about their Welsh identity through projects, such as their 'Cynefin' theme and termly Welsh heritage topics. The school effectively promotes the use of Welsh language. As an additional language, Year 6 pupils are learning British Sign Language and older pupils have also participated in a 'European languages' day. Year 4 pupils were introduced to Flamenco dancing and Year 6 pupils have been investigating German numbers as part of their project on the second world war.

The learning environment is stimulating, attractive and contemporary. This encourages pupils to produce work of a high standard. Displays celebrate pupils' work well and are visually engaging. However, the quality of the outdoor learning environment is under developed and does not contribute as effectively as the interior of the building to enrich the learning experiences of the pupils.

Provision for personal and social education is effective in promoting the school's values and in encouraging pupils to think about their own and others' safety and wellbeing. Pupils learn about how to stay safe online and discuss their global footprint, considering how they can live sustainably. Staff work well together to plan learning which will prepare pupils for their adult lives.

Assessment for learning is a very strong feature of the school. All staff review pupils' work carefully, providing prompt and useful feedback to help them to improve. They encourage pupils to assess their own work and consistently set their own targets for improvement. Time for pupils to review their learning is systematic. Pupils assess their progress daily, participate in 'reflective Friday' and, at the end of a topic, engage in purposeful reflection time. Those outcomes inform future planning and targets for improvement for pupils. The 'Ready, Inquire, Succeed and Excel' (RISE) strategy is understood by all stakeholders and is fundamental to the teaching, learning and assessment culture. Pupils need to be 'Ready to' learn and then tasks are based on an Inquiry, Succeed and Excel approach. The way that tasks are differentiated within this model is an outstanding feature of the school. It encourages independent learning and pupils are inspired to learn.

Tracking of pupil achievement is robust and staff know their pupils well. There are a suitable range of intervention strategies in place and, as a result, most pupils make significant progress in their learning.

Care, support and guidance

The school is welcoming and inclusive and provides high quality care and provision. Staff work effectively with pupils and parents to create a supportive learning culture and ethos. The targeted support that the school provides for all pupils, especially those with additional learning needs (ALN) is a strong feature.

Early identification of pupils' needs enables staff to target relevant strategies, interventions and resources effectively. Staff use an online system to record the provision for pupils with ALN as well as track the progress they make. This is monitored closely by the headteacher and Additional Learning Needs Co-ordinator (ALNCo) for consistency. This process is robust. Nearly all pupils make good progress against their personal targets. Emotional support is used effectively to improve the resilience and confidence of pupils in a nurturing way when required.

The ALNCo works productively with other agencies and colleagues from local schools. They share good practice effectively. For example, they work together to create 'handy boxes' containing bespoke stationery to support pupils fine motor skills.

A strong feature is the highly effective partnerships that the school has with parents and the community. The school employs a family support officer who works tirelessly to support families and build on the effective communication between parents and the school. Informative newsletters provide parents with key dates and important information. Staff and pupils send photos electronically to parents celebrating their achievements in school.

Teachers use a 'personal and social education scheme of work' effectively with pupils. This helps to develop pupils' empathy and makes them aware of the impact of their decisions on others. The school provides an opportunity for pupils to discuss concerns and worries with identified staff in the 'Cwtch' (wellbeing room). This benefits pupils' social and emotional needs so that they arrive for lessons relaxed, alert and ready to learn.

The police liaison officer works effectively with pupils encouraging them to make right choices in a variety of situations. For example, Year 5 pupils learn about the consequences of anti-social behaviour.

The school provides exciting opportunities for pupils to demonstrate their performance skills. For example, the school choir sang with other schools at St David's Hall and Year 6 children enjoy using their acting skills when they dress up as characters from a story. A minority of pupils develop their music skills well by learning to play the violin and ukulele.

The school provides pupils with rich opportunities to develop their Welsh identity and their understanding of Welsh heritage. For example, Year 2 pupils explore the working lives of Welsh people during the late Victorian period in a trip to St Fagans.

Older children improve their teamwork by taking part in a range of physical activities during a residential visit at a nearby outdoors centre. Many pupils attend a range of extracurricular activities enthusiastically. Older pupils represent the school in local cross country and netball tournaments.

The school promotes pupils' understanding of key values such as respect and compassion successfully. There are monthly assemblies about values, in which pupils take part thoughtfully.

The school encourages all pupils to contribute to community events. Nearly all pupils take part in a Remembrance Day ceremony and lay a wreath at the local Cenotaph. Older pupils visit an elderly homecare facility and help residents to use electronic devices. Nearly all pupils celebrate Harvest and Christmas enthusiastically at local churches. This develops their confidence and spirituality in a meaningful way.

The school has effective arrangements to promote eating and drinking healthily. Many pupils attend the school's breakfast club and pupils are served a healthy breakfast.

The school's arrangements for safeguarding meet requirements and are not a cause for concern.

Leadership and management

The headteacher provides the school with strong, effective and purposeful leadership, which ensures a clear strategic direction and a culture that promotes sustained and continuous improvement. She has a clear vision for the school, including high aspirations for pupils' progress and achievement, which is communicated effectively to all stakeholders.

Senior leaders understand their roles well and contribute purposefully to shaping, refining and embedding change. Distributed leadership is effective in providing all staff with a meaningful way to influence the success of the school. The 'Ready, Inquire, Succeed and Excel' (RISE) approach created by the school has enabled considerable changes to the learning experiences provided. This has resulted in an enriched curriculum, which inspires pupils to engage well in their learning.

The school has a clear understanding of their strengths and weaknesses. Current priorities are clearly brought forward from effective school self-evaluation findings and are relevant and reflective of national priorities. All staff are involved in this improvement journey. They collaborate well in curriculum teams to improve provision. All teachers play an active part in the process of monitoring, evaluating and planning for improvements. They carefully analyse pupils' outcomes, scrutinise pupils' books and observe each other's practice.

The headteacher has a secure understanding of the quality of teaching and learning across the school and manages staff performance effectively. Performance management procedures link appropriately with identified actions for improvement. Leaders provide a good range of worthwhile opportunities for teachers and teaching assistants to extend their knowledge and skills. For example, effective use of training days to revisit and refine methods to teach numeracy, has impacted on the enhanced provision of relevant and real-life opportunities for pupils to use and apply number across the curriculum.

Leaders have created a positive culture and ethos to promote and support professional learning. All staff benefit from a variety of methods including attending

courses, whole school training, visiting other schools and the use of internal coaching and mentoring. Staff are encouraged to undertake their own inquiry. The school's provision benefits purposefully from whole school initiatives and innovations that emerge from that professional research.

Governors are fully involved in the life of the school. They discharge their roles and responsibilities well. They gather first hand evidence through activities, such as listening to learners and learning walks to help them carry out their roles as critical friends. They work with leaders and pupils to ensure that arrangements to promote pupils' healthy eating and drinking are effective. As a result, many pupils talk confidently about healthy eating habits and understand the importance of a balanced diet.

Leaders are fully aware of the community that they serve and make the school readily accessible for all pupils. The partnership between the school and parents is a strength, bringing the school to the heart of the community. The school operates an open-door policy and communicates effectively with parents to ensure that they are aware of day-to-day activities. Parents speak highly of the commitment leaders and staff show in supporting them and their children's learning, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic. The school provides rich learning opportunities for parents and community members to further develop their basic skills and learning experiences and is creative in finding ways to engage them meaningfully in their child's education. For example, 'Dads' Club' engages families to experience enjoyable activities, such as skateboarding, den building at a local reserve and making bath bombs.

Financial management of the school is effective. Leaders, including the governors, monitor expenditure closely making suitable adjustments in how they allocate funding. Leaders ensure that the funding supports the school's priorities and needs, for example using funds to enhance the well-being of pupils by creating a sensory reflection room and building a community library. Leaders ensure that the pupil development grant is used well to benefit eligible pupils, for example through employing skilful support staff that deliver focused provision and by providing educational visits or experiences. School leaders promote a robust safeguarding culture.

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 publication. Any enquiries or comments regarding this document/publication should be addressed to:

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