



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

**A report on**

**Miskin Primary School**

**York Street  
Miskin  
Mountain Ash  
RCT  
CF45 3BG**

**Date of inspection: December 2022**

**by**

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

## About Miskin Primary School

Name of provider	Miskin 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	104
Pupils of statutory school age	82
Number in nursery classes	13
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 23.0%)	35.0%
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 16.1%)	11.0%
Percentage of pupils who speak Welsh at home	0.0%
Percentage of pupils with English as an additional language	0.0%
Date of headteacher appointment	January 2011
Date of previous Estyn inspection (if applicable)	14/01/2014
Start date of inspection	05/12/2022

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](https://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

This is a school at the heart of its community. Staff know their pupils and their families well. They provide a high level of care, support and compassion, particularly for those pupils and their families experiencing difficult circumstances. As a result, pupils feel safe and well looked-after, and enjoy coming to school.

Most pupils make steady progress from low baselines during their time at the school. By the time they leave most can read well and write appropriately. They speak confidently and generally listen carefully. This is because their teachers plan systematically to ensure that pupils develop their literacy skills well. However, when teachers over-direct tasks, pupils do not always have enough opportunities to work independently. Most pupils enjoy learning Welsh and make strong progress. They are proud to be Welsh and are effective ambassadors for the Welsh language. However, inspectors identified that too many pupils do not make the progress they could in mathematics, particularly in developing their mental arithmetic skills.

The headteacher leads the school well. Leaders monitor the school's work robustly, for example to check that everyone complies with the agreed procedures, but their monitoring does not always focus tightly enough on the impact of the provision on improving pupils' outcomes.

The staff work together as a team to provide pupils with the opportunities and challenges that they need to succeed in life. The range of trips, visits and memorable experiences that staff plan for their pupils is particularly noteworthy and helps to broaden pupils' horizons and raise their aspirations. The school makes worthwhile use of the school grounds, for example developing an allotment garden and wildlife pond, and creating a dedicated area for STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) activities.

## Recommendations

- R1 Improve pupils' independent learning skills
- R2 Improve pupils' achievement in mathematics
- R3 Ensure that monitoring, evaluation and review focus tightly on pupils' outcomes and progress
- R4 Ensure that the school complies with the Welsh Government's requirements for healthy eating and drinking

## What happens next

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

## Main evaluation

### Learning

Most pupils join the school with skills and standards below those normally expected for their age. Over their time at the school, most pupils make at least the progress they should in English and many make steady progress in mathematics. Boys and girls achieve equally well over time. However, pupils who are eligible for free school meals achieve less well than their peers.

Most pupils make strong progress in developing their oracy skills, often from low baselines. By Year 6, most speak confidently, and many adjust the tone of their conversation to suit the occasion, such as speaking in formal and informal situations. For example, they ask their peers questions about their imaginary experiences as evacuees, and their peers respond thoughtfully. Many listen carefully to their peers and adults and understand how to be an 'active' listener.

In reading, nearly all pupils make at least the expected progress from their starting points. This progress is consistent across the school so that, by Years 5 and 6, nearly all pupils can read at or above the expected level. They understand and infer from the text, and predict what might happen next. Older, more able pupils especially enjoy a broad range of children's literature and develop a love of reading.

Many pupils make steady progress in writing. Most younger pupils get off to a good start learning the sounds that letter strings make and blending them to spell simple words correctly. By the end of Year 2, many pupils write in short sentences that are correctly punctuated. By Year 6 many write appropriately in a range of genres, both in English lessons and in other areas of learning, such as their topic work. More able pupils write with flair and enjoyment. For example, they use emotive language and rhetorical questioning effectively when writing a letter from an imaginary evacuee home to Swansea. However, a few pupils in each cohort find the writing process laborious. They struggle to form their letters and to hold a pencil correctly.

Across the school, most pupils develop their skills in communicating in the Welsh language well. From an early age, most pupils respond well to questions from the teacher, answering instinctively in Welsh when the question is asked in Welsh. They follow simple commands and sing Welsh songs with understanding.

By Year 6 many pupils have well-developed Welsh language skills. They understand and respond to a wide range of language patterns and talk enthusiastically about the Welsh language and why it is important to learn it. They communicate in the present and past tenses and recall prior learning and vocabulary well. For example, they can talk about their favourite television programme and what they watched last week.

In mathematics, younger pupils get off to a good start understanding numbers. For example, many learn to count to ten with understanding and use their skills, for example to record the nocturnal animals they identify on a 'treasure hunt'. However, over time, pupils' progress in mathematics is inconsistent. Generally, more able pupils achieve the expected standards by Year 6. However, many older pupils do not manipulate numbers well enough, or know their times tables and number facts. This

makes it difficult for them to use and apply their mental mathematics skills, for example to solve problems involving other aspects of mathematics such as shape and space. In addition, pupils do not use their numeracy skills progressively and systematically in their work across the curriculum.

Many pupils across the school develop their skills in IT (information technology) well. Older pupils particularly use a broad range of software confidently, for example using a coding package to create their own games, and entering formulae on spreadsheets. Most across the school use IT to communicate information well, for example making movies and presentations to share with their class.

Overall, pupils develop their creative skills appropriately. For example, Year 5 and Year 6 pupils apply their Welsh language skills to sing Nadolig Llawen tunefully and sensitively, in readiness for the annual carol service.

### **Well-being and attitudes to learning**

Well-being is at the centre of the schools' work and nearly all pupils feel extremely well cared for. As a result, they have a strong sense of pride in their school community. Nearly all pupils are very happy in school and feel safe and secure. They have a strong sense of trust in the adults around them, and they know who to turn to for support. They are confident that they will be listened to, and that staff will manage any concerns quickly and effectively.

Most pupils are polite and treat each other and adults with respect. Most show consideration for the needs of others, for example the older pupils show particular care for younger pupils on the yard, helping them to play and supporting them with activities. Most pupils behave extremely well most of the time during lessons and they behave sensibly when moving around the school.

Most pupils develop as responsible, ethically informed citizens who are able to show compassion for others. For example, playground leaders support pupils of all ages who are feeling anxious at playtimes or need some quiet time. Most older pupils are aware of how to stay safe online and understand the dangers of sharing personal information. Pupils from all groups proudly carry out their roles and responsibilities, such as being digital leaders, members of Criw Cymraeg, and house captains. However, these groups rely heavily on teacher direction, and this limits their thinking and creativity.

Most pupils engage positively in the range of experiences provided for them, and many strive to be ambitious and capable learners. For example, they settle quickly to work and have a strong desire to learn. They speak positively and with confidence about their learning, such as when discussing the space race and how evacuation affected children during the second World War. Most pupils engage well in paired work, and this supports them to share their ideas and learning. They collaborate very well on tasks, such as creating a space rocket or solving mathematics problems to crack a code. Younger learners, when given opportunity, collaborate to improve work highlighted by the teacher. A majority of older learners respond thoughtfully to feedback questions posed by the teacher and improve their work as a result.

However, in lessons, pupils often rely too heavily on teachers to direct their learning, and this means that they do not develop the skills to work independently or take the initiative in their learning. For example, pupils are overly reliant on instructions from an adult when problem solving or setting out their ideas and responses when tackling 'missions'.

Most pupils have an awareness that some foods are healthier than others, for example that fruit would be a healthy option for their lunchboxes, and younger pupils especially enjoy tasting different fruits such as strawberries, plums and pears during daily fruit snack. However, pupils are not always able to apply the knowledge to their own eating choices. Most pupils enjoy physical activity, at break and lunchtimes such as the new climbing frames, football and basketball pitches, as well as school sports clubs.

Pupils are attending school more regularly this year compared to last year, when the COVID-19 pandemic had a negative impact nationally on school attendance. The attendance of pupils who are eligible for free school meals has improved and these pupils currently attend as regularly as their peers. However, despite leaders' best efforts, the number of pupils who are persistently absent continues to be a concern for the school.

### **Teaching and learning experiences**

Teachers and leaders have worked to create a curriculum that aligns with the Curriculum for Wales and successfully meets pupils' needs. At a strategic level, close working with the local cluster of schools has helpfully ensured that all local schools share a vision for the curriculum. However, the Miskin curriculum is well focused on what leaders know pupils in the school need to experience and learn. Adults choose the topics that each class covers but there are appropriate opportunities to include pupils' and their parents' ideas.

The curriculum includes a broad range of exciting and memorable experiences, such as preparing a pretend pharaoh's body for burial or experimenting with sugary drinks to see their effect on pretend teeth. In addition, there are regular trips and visits, for example to St Fagan's open-air museum, the Daerwynno outdoor centre and a residential trip to Dol-y-Gaer. Leaders and teachers plan these visits with particular care to negate the impact of poverty and disadvantage. They are successful in broadening pupils' horizons and engaging them in their learning.

The curriculum makes valuable use of local environment. In addition, worthwhile links with local employers and workplaces, along with the University of South Wales, raise pupils' aspirations and expectations for the future.

A notable feature in classrooms across the school is the warm, supportive professional relationships between adults and the pupils. Staff know their pupils and their individual needs exceptionally well. Teachers direct the work of skilled learning support assistants effectively, to create seamless provision that benefits all pupils.

Lessons proceed at a good pace to ensure that no time is wasted. Teachers remind pupils of their expectations for work and behaviour. As a result, pupils concentrate and behave well. Teachers ask well-chosen questions that encourage pupils to

engage in the learning. Generally, teachers provide useful verbal feedback or written comments to help pupils to improve their work, for example using a highlighter to indicate 'pink for think'. Pupils in turn want to please their teachers and work hard for well-earned praise.

On occasions across the school, teachers over direct pupils' learning, for example by talking for too long, providing too many worksheets and prompt sheets, or setting success criteria that the pupils have not fully understood. When this happens, pupils become too reliant on the adult and do not develop their independence well enough. For example, when pupils complete 'missions' as independent tasks, often the activity is too heavily scaffolded by their teacher. This limits the opportunities for pupils to think for themselves. In turn, this slows the progress that pupils could make in learning independently and applying their learning subsequently in different contexts.

Reading has a high priority in the school and there are worthwhile initiatives to encourage pupils to read. These include encouraging parents to come in and use the parent reading area. The school shares books with homes that may not have a wealth of reading material. This develops a strong culture of a love of reading at the school.

Teachers and other adults promote the development of pupils' oracy skills well. They model language patterns well, for example telling animated stories that captivate their audience, and encourage pupils to follow their lead. Adults develop pupils' vocabulary, using new and unusual words linked to the topic. For example, pupils in the reception and nursery class explain confidently which animals are nocturnal. Importantly, adults provide enough time for pupils who are reluctant to speak to think about their response to any questions. In addition, there are many opportunities for pupils to talk purposefully with a partner, for example about their learning or to rehearse an answer to a question.

There are worthwhile and systematically planned schemes of work to develop pupils' reading, oracy and Welsh language skills. Recently, leaders have introduced new resources for mathematics that have begun to improve the outcomes for younger pupils. However, the provision to develop pupils' skills in the expressive arts is at an earlier stage of development. Leaders have begun to develop the provision for personal and social education, in line with the most recent guidance from the Welsh Government.

### **Care, support and guidance**

Across the school, staff know and respect the pupils, their families and the local community very well. The provision supports all pupils to develop a strong sense of belonging to a community. This starts with pupils being encouraged to show care, compassion and respect for each other and adults within the school community.

The school is highly effective in supporting all pupils' emotional, health and social needs and responds effectively to each individual circumstance. This makes a valuable contribution to pupils' personal development. For example, it enables pupils who are experiencing turbulence in their lives to engage with school in a very positive manner and benefit fully from the wide range of experiences that are provided.

The school is a very inclusive learning community. Pupils who have additional needs are identified in a timely manner. The school caters well for their specific needs. Social and emotional support is provided both in small group interventions with a focus on creative activities, as well as through a supportive and caring ethos in all classes. In addition, there is worthwhile provision to support pupils with healthcare needs.

The additional needs co-ordinator identifies where additional learning support is required and arranges additional support where appropriate. She monitors its delivery and effectiveness well. The school has very good relationships with external agencies who are used effectively to provide additional support and advice when needed.

Teachers make good provision for pupils with additional needs within their classes. Staff work effectively with pupils and parents to set appropriately challenging targets for pupil progress. Leaders track and review progress in meeting these effectively. Most pupils with additional needs make good progress in meeting their targets.

As part of the inclusive provision, nearly all pupils, including those with additional needs, attend the daily after-school clubs such as Lego club or film club. This helps to support the development of their wider skills, including their social skills. All pupils across the school are encouraged to take on roles and responsibilities such as playground leaders, librarians and house captains. This supports them to learn to become active citizens.

Safeguarding is at the core of the school's work and everyone in the school understands the importance of keeping pupils safe. The culture of safeguarding is a strength of the school.

Pupils learn about healthy eating and drinking as part of the curriculum, and there is an allotment area where classes enjoy growing vegetables such as pumpkins. However, overall, the provision across the school does not meet the Welsh Government's requirements. For example, teachers provide chocolate and sweets as rewards and comfort food, and pupils are provided with squash at lunchtimes.

Teachers celebrate the traditional culture and heritage of Wales. Across the school, staff communicate confidently in Welsh, interspersing Welsh and English seamlessly as they speak. As a result, pupils are proud to be Welsh and are effective ambassadors for the promotion of the Welsh language and heritage. Staff support pupils to develop strong ethical values such as showing respect for others and being inclusive purposefully across the school. However, currently the provision for pupils to learn about the diversity of modern Wales is at an early stage of development.

The school provides an extensive range of experiences for pupils. These include visits to the cinema and theatre, regular visits to the Hay Festival and a weekend train trip to the Millennium Stadium to watch Cardiff Blues play. There are valuable opportunities for performances within the community, such as a carol service in the local church and the local eisteddfod. This provision effectively broadens pupils' horizons and promotes their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development appropriately.



## **Leadership and management**

The headteacher has a clear vision for the school, which is shared by all staff and governors. She is passionate about making a difference to her pupils' life chances and has a good understanding of their home circumstances and what will make a positive difference to their outcomes. She is aspirational for her pupils and eager to provide them with the best start in life and an awareness of the opportunities available to them. For example, she makes sure that girls have equal access to science and engineering projects and involves a large regional technology company in the school's ICT work.

Leaders value the partnership with parents and develop a culture of trust where parents are confident to visit the school and talk about their worries or concerns. Parents appreciate the regular communication they receive about school events on social media. They enjoy joining their children in lessons on 'grab a grown-up' days. There is a strong emphasis on the well-being of pupils and their families throughout the school, together with a strong culture of safeguarding.

Governors know the school and its pupils, parents and the local community well. They are very supportive of the school and, through monitoring activities, have a good understanding of many of the challenges the school faces. However, their role in contributing to the strategic direction of the school and providing a suitable level of challenge to leaders is at an early stage of development. For example, governors do not ensure that the school has appropriate arrangements to promote healthy eating and drinking.

Leaders pay good attention to local and national priorities and have made beneficial progress in designing the curriculum for Wales, addressing ALN (additional learning needs) reform and negating the impact of poverty on educational attainment. They make effective use of grants to support pupils whose circumstances make them vulnerable to under-achievement, including by subsidising opportunities that they may otherwise struggle to take advantage of, such as school trips and visits.

There are effective processes to evaluate the school's performance and to plan for improvement. All teaching staff are involved in this activity and make worthwhile use of first-hand evidence to inform these processes. This helps them to identify improvement priorities and over time there have been notable improvements to pupils' standards in Welsh, oracy and reading. Monitoring activity is robust and regular. However, too often it focuses on compliance rather than the progress pupils make, particularly in developing their independent learning skills.

The school has adopted agreed strategies to improve the quality of teaching and to ensure that there is consistency in approach across the school. This is beginning to have a positive impact, for example on the quality of the teaching of mathematics.

There has been a focus over time on developing the learning environment both indoors and outside. This has led to very comfortable surroundings for the pupils and includes areas where they can go when they feel stressed or need some quiet time. Making good use of the outdoor area is challenging, as the school is built into the side of a steep hill, but staff have developed this environment well to meet pupils' needs and to provide a wide range of learning opportunities.

Arrangements for the management of staff performance are appropriate. Targets link well to the school's priorities and ensure a collaborative approach to improvement among staff. There is a comprehensive offer for professional learning and a positive culture to promote this across the school. Professional learning links clearly to self-evaluation findings and improvement priorities. For example, staff are all working towards improving pupils' standards in maths and have received plentiful in-house training to support them. Staff are committed to developing their own skills and collaborate with their cluster to do this. For example, teachers have developed a partnership with teachers from a local school to see how they can benefit from sharing their practice and experience.

## 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](http://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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