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

A report on

St Thomas Community Primary School

Grenfell Park Road
St Thomas
Swansea
SA1 8EZ

Date of inspection: March 2023

by

Estyn, His Majesty's Inspectorate for Education

and Training in Wales

About St Thomas Community Primary School

Name of provider	St Thomas Community Primary School
Local authority	City and County of Swansea
Language of the provider	English
Type of school	Primary
Religious character	*
Number of pupils on roll	435
Pupils of statutory school age	307
Number in nursery classes	78
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%)	29.0%
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%)	12.4%
Percentage of pupils who speak Welsh at home	*
Percentage of pupils with English as an additional language	10.7%
Date of headteacher appointment	01/09/2013
Date of previous Estyn inspection (if applicable)	01/09/2014
Start date of inspection	27/03/2023

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

St Thomas Community Primary School is warm and welcoming. The senior leadership team, staff and governors share a clear vision and work well together to ensure that the school is an inclusive learning community that promotes positive opportunities for pupils.

The headteacher is a strong role model and provides effective and purposeful leadership. They are highly committed to the well-being of their pupils and the wider community. They work alongside the leadership team to carefully consider ways to combat disadvantage and to provide outstanding support for pupils and for families in the local community. The headteacher effectively leads a team of dedicated staff who work hard to ensure that the needs of pupils are met. As a result, pupils demonstrate a strong readiness to learn and a desire to achieve the best they can.

Pupils enjoy coming to school and are proud to be a part of such a reassuring learning community. They feel safe and listened to, and nearly all show a positive attitude towards their learning. They develop high levels of respect for the staff that take care of them and trust that they will always act in their best interests. They behave well and engage positively with the varied range of learning experiences and opportunities that the school provides. Many pupils make good progress and achieve well across all curriculum areas.

Provision for pupils with additional needs is well planned. The school involves parents, staff and outside agencies to ensure that planning for individual needs is effective. Many pupils with additional needs make good progress in their learning and improving their well-being.

Teachers plan literacy, numeracy and other skills through well-established routines and structured sessions to support pupils to make progress. However, these sessions can sometimes be over-directed and a greater emphasis on the provision for purposeful independent learning and more meaningful teacher feedback would further challenge pupils of all abilities.

Overall, leaders keep the work of the school under review appropriately. They evaluate lessons and the pupils' learning in books. However, self-evaluation does not always identify areas that need improving, for instance on the way teachers support pupils to improve their work or how their planning might improve pupils' numeracy skills.

Recommendations

R1 Sharpen self-evaluation to focus more clearly on improving teaching and pupils' learning

R2 Ensure that feedback and assessment support pupils to make meaningful improvements to their work

R3 Refine the provision for independent learning across the school to challenge pupils suitably

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 a case study on its work in relation to building a culture of well-being within the whole school community.

Main evaluation

Learning

The majority of pupils start school with literacy and social skills generally below those expected. As they move through the school, most pupils, particularly those with additional learning needs (ALN), make good progress from their starting points. Younger pupils develop their speaking and listening skills quickly and share their thoughts and ideas with adults clearly. Nearly all older pupils willingly join in with group and class discussions and interact confidently and articulately with adults to discuss their learning and thoughts on school.

As they move through the school, most pupils develop strong reading skills. Younger pupils develop a clear understanding of letter sounds and how they relate to the written word. By Year 2, many pupils read well using a range of skills, such as breaking words down into smaller parts and 'sounding out' using their phonics knowledge. By Year 6, most pupils' reading skills have developed well and they read expressively, showing a developing understanding of the key ideas within texts. They talk with enthusiasm about their favourite authors and books and take a genuine pleasure in reading.

Most pupils' writing skills develop well across the school. Many pupils present their work to a high standard and handwriting is fluent and legible. Many pupils spell words with increasing accuracy as they move through the school. For example, younger children use their knowledge of sounds to spell simple words while older pupils make plausible attempts to spell more complex words. In Year 2, most pupils consistently use full sentences, capital letters and full stops correctly. Most older pupils write confidently in different styles and for different audiences. In Year 6, pupils write accurately in a range of interesting contexts across the curriculum, for example writing speeches on climate change.

Most pupils across the school make sound progress with their mathematical skills. A majority of pupils in the reception class begin to develop their concept of number appropriately, and many recognise, count and write numbers to 10 and develop their understanding of mathematical concepts, such as addition and subtraction, successfully. In Year 2, many pupils identify odd and even numbers and solve simple problems including calculating different combinations of vehicles to total 20 wheels. In Year 6, many pupils use the four rules of number competently when multiplying two digit and three-digit numbers and use these skills to solve two- and three-stage problems. They have a good understanding of place value and work independently using their preferred methods for solving problems. Many older pupils have a good understanding of basic geometry and calculate areas of triangles and circles accurately. However, pupils do not always apply their numeracy skills well enough across the curriculum.

Many pupils make a sound start in developing their basic skills in Welsh. A majority of younger pupils sing songs in Welsh with enthusiasm and a few respond well to simple questions, for example 'Sut wyt ti?' A majority of older pupils respond appropriately to familiar Welsh phrases and commands from adults. However, many lack confidence in using a range of more complex language patterns independently.

Most pupils develop their digital skills well as they move through the school. Younger pupils become confident in using digital tools and apps to support their learning, for example in reading and mathematics. By the end of Year 6, nearly all pupils develop strong digital skills. They create presentations linked to their topics and combine a range of texts and digital images skilfully. For example, they create eye catching posters on how to stay safe online.

Across the school, most pupils develop their thinking and problem-solving skills well. For example, younger pupils think carefully about the properties of 2D shapes when sorting. Older pupils carefully consider and debate topical issues such as the plight of refugees and climate change.

Most pupils' physical skills develop appropriately across the school. Nearly all younger pupils develop their fine motor skills successfully through a good range of practical activities, for example manipulating playdough imaginatively and using a range of tools when making Easter hats. Nearly all older pupils effectively develop their physical skills through a range of play-based and team games.

Across the school, most pupils develop their creative skills well. Pupils' drawings, paintings and clay work demonstrate good observation skills, thoughtfulness and care. For example, pupils in Year 5 create intricate portraits of an artist they studied, and Year 6 produce detailed clay models based on their class novel.

Well-being and attitudes to learning

Nearly all pupils feel safe and happy at school. They have positive and trusting relationships with adults and, as a result, they feel listened to, safe and supported. Pupils have a strong sense of pride in their school and feel they belong.

Almost all pupils demonstrate high levels of respect for adults and each other in classrooms and around school. Pupils show genuine warmth and consideration towards others. During discussions and group work, pupils take turns and show respect for each other. For example, they listen carefully to others' opinions and talk with sensitivity when expressing their own thoughts. Pupils are confident enough to consider and challenge different ideas and attitudes in a considerate and mature way.

Nearly all pupils demonstrate positive attitudes, which help them approach their learning with enthusiasm and determination. For example, they recognise the importance of resilience when working on more challenging tasks. Nearly all pupils identify these attitudes and values as being included in the school's identified character strengths for being a good learner.

Across the school, nearly all pupils behave in an exemplary way. This is a strength of the school. Pupils work together to agree their own inclusive class rules, and this helps them to understand the importance of treating others well. While a very few pupils occasionally require additional support to regulate their behaviour, they respond positively. For example, pupils choose to visit a safe space in the school such as the sensory room, prayer room or the 'hangout room'. The supportive relationships between pupils and staff create a calm and purposeful learning environment that is highly effective in preparing pupils for their lessons and activities.

Across the school, nearly all pupils engage with effective strategies to support their health and well-being. For example, pupils make informed choices about what they eat and understand the importance of being physically active. Pupils take part in a range of after-school clubs such as football and netball. In addition, pupils attend other activities such as board games, chess and art clubs that help them practise and develop a range of other skills.

Nearly all pupils understand their rights and responsibilities through their work on the United Nations Rights of the Child. They refer to these as their 'Roaring Rights' and apply these in their approach to school life. Pupils represent their peers in leadership groups and have an active voice in shaping their school, for example through the school council and 'Healthy Helpers'. Here, they confidently share ideas and opinions to influence whole school decisions, such as raising funds for local charities.

Most pupils become increasingly independent in making decisions about their learning. They concentrate on their tasks and persevere when solving problems before asking adults for help. This leads to a culture of independence as pupils progress through the school.

Pupils understand the importance of attending school regularly. However, pupils' levels of attendance are below those expected and have not yet recovered sufficiently from the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Teaching and learning experiences

Leaders have worked with the school community to develop a shared vision for the school in response to the Curriculum for Wales. This aims to nurture pupils' curiosity, confidence, and resilience and enable them to lead rewarding and fulfilling lives. The school has developed useful long-term plans by mapping out an overview of each area of learning and experience. Leaders and staff have carefully considered how to ensure that the curriculum builds systematically on pupils' existing knowledge, understanding and skills over time. A range of appropriately engaging topics capture pupils' interest effectively. For example, older pupils enjoy sharing the facts they have learned about Mount Fuji during a topic about mountains.

Overall, the school has effective provision in place for the development of pupils' numeracy, digital and literacy skills in both English and Welsh. A recent focus on improving the quality of provision for developing pupils' reading skills has been particularly effective. For example, the school provides regular opportunities for pupils to access the onsite community library and older pupils routinely support younger pupils during reading sessions. As a result, most pupils improve their reading skills well and develop a strong enthusiasm for reading. However, opportunities to develop pupils' numeracy skills across the curriculum are less well developed.

Leaders have established beneficial links within the community to enrich the curriculum, such as building partnerships with local businesses and a museum. For example, older pupils develop their coding skills well when creating a simple programme to control model traffic lights during a visit to a local factory. The curriculum is enhanced effectively through a range of visits and visitors. For instance,

local police liaison officers visit the school to share information with older pupils about the dangers of drug and alcohol misuse.

The school provides beneficial opportunities for pupils to develop their understanding of the history and culture of Wales. For example, younger pupils learn about local history such as the heroic story of Swansea Jack. Older pupils begin to develop an understanding of the local area's industrial past effectively through activities such as taking a boat ride to view the local copper works.

Teachers and support staff have positive relationships with pupils that enable them to feel relaxed and ready to learn in class. Nearly all manage pupils' behaviour sensitively and provide beneficial additional support when needed. Support staff have a thorough understanding of their roles and work effectively with teachers to provide high-quality support for pupils' learning and well-being. They use a unique approach to help pupils recognise positive characteristics in themselves, for example 'resilience' and 'courage'. This supports the school's strong provision for personal and social development successfully.

In most cases, teachers plan suitably interesting learning activities that engage pupils well. In a few instances, lessons are highly engaging. For example, in Year 1, staff set up imaginative scenarios related to an engaging story on good versus evil. As a result, many pupils become highly motivated to retell the story and write about the characters.

Many teachers provide clear explanations in lessons that enable pupils to approach their work confidently. Lessons proceed at a good pace and staff use a variety of effective strategies to maintain pupil interest. Overall, resources support learning well. For example, teachers in Year 5 use a soundtrack successfully to engage pupils and ignite their imagination when learning about atmosphere and plot. Most teachers model technical vocabulary well. For example, they use subject specific vocabulary, such as 'blending' and 'perspective', during a creative arts lesson.

In most cases, teachers and support staff know their pupils' strengths and areas for improvement well. Regular pupil progress meetings focus effectively on pupils' learning and enable staff to identify individuals who may not be progressing as well as usual and need additional support.

To support their understanding of pupil progress, most staff are beginning to use aspects of day-to-day assessment suitably. For example, they often question pupils purposefully to check for understanding and challenge their thinking. Many teachers and support staff use verbal feedback well during lessons to help pupils take their next steps and move forward in their learning. However, overall feedback processes do not focus well enough on the purpose of the lesson or ensure that pupils have meaningful opportunities to make improvements to their work.

Pupils appreciate suitable opportunities to contribute to what and how they learn through daily 'cool challenges' and 'rainbow challenges'. For example, during British Sign Language week, older pupils choose to learn a few signs such as 'thank you' and 'sorry'. However, throughout the school these independent challenges are not always effective in deepening and extending pupils' learning.

Teachers plan a few beneficial outdoor learning experiences for older pupils such as a visit to a nearby wooded area where they make animal shelters and take time to appreciate the panoramic views. The environment for younger pupils provides a range of outdoor learning experiences accessible from classrooms. However, these are not always used well enough and overall, across the school, outdoor learning is underdeveloped.

Care, support and guidance

Leaders and staff work with dedication to provide high levels of care, support and guidance for all pupils at St Thomas Community School. They take the time to get to know their pupils well and work thoughtfully to provide the support that best meets their individual needs. The school has high expectations for its pupils, and staff work well to develop pupils' 'character strengths' such as 'zest' and an 'appreciation for beauty'. The provision for supporting pupils' social and emotional well-being is very effective. Almost all staff use a wide range of strategies to ensure that children feel safe and secure, and know who to turn to for help. For example, all pupils identify a trusted adult they feel safe talking to.

The additional learning needs co-ordinator (ALNCo) leads an effective team of staff, who ensure that there is high-quality provision for pupils with ALN across the school. There is a strong culture of collective responsibility and collaboration between teachers and support staff, who work with commitment and energy. Together they share expertise, support each other and continually reflect on the progress pupils are making. This is further strengthened through the robust systems that help staff identify pupils with ALN and ensure that they have access to the support they need to make progress. The ALNCo works effectively with outside agencies to provide additional support for pupils with ALN, for example to support pupils with a visual impairment or those requiring help with their speech and language.

Nearly all pupils have a one-page profile, which helps staff to understand their individual needs. These contribute to the effective sharing of information between classes and transition to secondary school. Pupils who require additional support have clear educational plans, which identify suitable targets that are specific and achievable. A skilled team of teaching assistants provide an extensive programme of high-quality interventions that support pupils' well-being, literacy and numeracy skills. Support staff and teachers ensure that these interventions are responsive, and monitor their impact on pupil progress carefully. As a result, most pupils with ALN make strong progress over time.

A particular strength of the school is the support and guidance they provide for all families, including those of pupils with additional learning needs. Staff keep parents well informed about their children's progress and encourage them to attend workshops and drop-in sessions that provide help for them to support their children's learning at home. The school also holds regular 'Wellbeing Wednesdays' for parents and pupils that successfully bring families together. For instance, pupils engage in a range of activities that support their well-being and parents access help from a wide range of community-based organisations, including housing and Women's aid. This practice has been shared more widely across the local authority.

The school works well to provide opportunities for pupils' spiritual and moral development. There are strong links with the local church and pupils develop as active citizens with a strong sense of being part of their community. For example, they recently raised money for those in need in their local area. School assemblies provide valuable opportunities for pupils to think about important issues such as developing friendships.

Thoughtful provision supports pupils' understanding of equality and diversity across the school, for example by sharing flags of all the different nationalities that make up the school family. The school develops pupils' understanding of the history and cultural diversity of Wales, for example by visiting local landmarks such as Kilvey Hill as part of their work on taking care of the environment.

There are good opportunities for pupils to join leadership groups, including the school council, 'Rights Ambassadors' and 'Healthy Helpers'. Staff make sure that these groups are inclusive and represent the wide range of pupils in the school. Pupils in these groups have meaningful impact on school life. For example, they meet with governors to state their case for calm spaces inside the school.

Teachers plan for a range of activities that provide good opportunities for pupils to engage with the creative arts. For example, pupils visit and perform at local theatres as part of their topic work and draw inspiration from local artists and poets to create their own work in a similar style.

Provision to ensure that pupils attend school regularly are suitable. The school has appropriate procedures in place to monitor pupils' attendance and staff contact parents in a timely manner when there are concerns. The school attendance officer works closely with the Education Welfare Officer to identify areas of concern and provide support for parents and families when required. However, rates of attendance remain too low and have not yet recovered from the impact of the pandemic.

The school's culture of safeguarding and well-being is strong. All staff receive regular appropriate training and understand how to deal with concerns. The school procedures for dealing with incidents of bullying are effective and staff promote an effective anti-bullying culture. Pupils and parents report that incidents of bullying are extremely rare and, as a result, nearly all pupils feel happy and secure.

Leadership and management

Leaders share a clear vision for the school and its pupils. The headteacher leads a dedicated team of staff who strive to provide equity of opportunity for all pupils by prioritising their well-being and supporting them to achieve the best that they can. The headteacher is a strong role model who places the well-being of his staff above his own and works with commitment to create a culture of kindness, support and mutual respect across the whole school community.

Governors support the school well and are proud of the positive impact their school has on the well-being of its pupils. Overall, governors provide appropriate challenge to leaders and have a sound understanding of the strengths and areas for development of the school. They receive useful reports from the headteacher and

engage with school evaluation activities, such as learning walks and discussions with key members of staff. Governors ensure that there are suitable arrangements for promoting healthy eating and drinking and they have a secure understanding of the school's approach to safeguarding.

Leaders and staff have developed strong links with parents and, as a result, parents are firm advocates for the school and appreciate the support and guidance that staff provide for their children. Leaders work to ensure that families who are disadvantaged by poverty are well supported, for example by supplementing the cost of school trips or providing opportunities for them to access support in the community.

Overall, leaders plan effectively for school improvement. They identify suitable priorities that support the school's vision to improve pupil well-being and move forward with curriculum reform. The headteacher, supported by a strong leadership team, works well to ensure that progress towards improvement targets is monitored effectively and that approaches are adjusted as required.

Leaders gather a good range of information through regular evaluative activities to make judgements about the school's progress. Half termly learning reviews involve a range of staff, who gather and analyse evidence from a variety of sources, including pupils' work, interviews with pupils and learning walks. These learning reviews are comprehensive and identify a range of ongoing areas for development that staff work collaboratively to improve, such as the provision for writing or digital skills. Overall, however, self-evaluation does not have a tight enough focus on the quality of teaching and its impact on pupils' learning. As a result, whole-school improvement targets do not always identify well enough those aspects of teaching that need refining.

Leaders ensure that all staff have worthwhile opportunities for professional development and arrangements for performance management are beginning to support and challenge staff to reflect upon and improve their practice. Staff have good opportunities to develop their leadership roles in the school, for example through supporting ALN reform or leading an area of the curriculum. Leaders also encourage support staff to take up leadership roles, share their expertise and contribute to the wider understanding of ALN provision.

Leaders create opportunities for teachers to further develop their expertise as teachers by engaging in professional inquiry. Leaders work with the local university to provide training for staff on effective approaches to research. As a result, enquiry projects are thoughtful and beginning to have a strong impact on teaching and learning across the school. For example, staff establish effective approaches to developing pupils' early physical skills and improving the culture of reading across the school.

The school is a lead network school for initial teacher education (ITE) and offers valuable learning opportunities for students to develop and share their practice through events hosted at the school. The lead teacher works closely with the university to support students and provides mentor training across several schools.

The school manages its resources effectively. Classrooms are well equipped, and leaders use grants, such as the pupil development grant, effectively to ensure appropriate levels of staffing and support for pupils. For example, the school provides a subsidised breakfast club and after-school classes to support pupils' basic literacy and numeracy skills.

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.