



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

**A report on**

**Blaengwrach Primary School**

**Heol Wenallt  
Cwmgwrach  
Neath  
SA11 5PS**

**Date of inspection: May 2023**

**by**

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

## About Blaengwrach Primary School

Name of provider	Blaengwrach Primary School
Local authority	Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council
Language of the provider	English
Type of school	Primary
Religious character	
Number of pupils on roll	150
Pupils of statutory school age	121
Number in nursery classes	10
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%)	23.6%
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 16.1%)	9.9%
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	01/09/2015
Date of previous Estyn inspection (if applicable)	17/03/2015
Start date of inspection	09/05/2023

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](http://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

Blaengwrach Primary School is a happy and caring school where the well-being of all is a priority. Pupils benefit from the many interesting and varied experiences staff provide to help them to develop into thoughtful and well-rounded citizens.

During their time at the school, most pupils make good progress and apply the skills they learn effectively across the curriculum, particularly in numeracy. This includes pupils with additional learning needs, who receive valuable robust support from staff. Across the school there is a strong focus on developing pupils' thinking skills and provision to develop pupils' ability to speak Welsh is effective. However, the quality of feedback to pupils to support their next steps in learning is at an early stage of development and does not always support progress as well as it could.

The school works hard to foster a sense of place and identity among pupils and they benefit from numerous trips and experiences to understand the culture and heritage of Wales and to develop their sense of belonging. For example, pupils enjoy learning about the history of their village and why it is named the Valley of the Witches. The school plays a pivotal part in the village and pupils work hard to contribute positively to the life of the community. Parents appreciate the guidance the school provides to help them to support their child's learning at home and the information they receive about important news and events at the school.

Over time, leaders have worked to ensure that the school continuously improves and the headteacher is beginning to develop leadership at all levels across the school. This enables a positive approach to evaluation to drive forward leadership across the school, for example by involving staff beneficially in evaluation and improvement work. However, while evaluation work ensures that leaders have a good overview of the school's main strengths and areas for improvement, leaders do not always evaluate well enough the difference that teaching and learning experience make to pupils' progress. The school's governing body is proactive and has a sound knowledge of its strengths and areas for development, as a result of frequent visits to work with staff and pupils. Together, leaders, staff, pupils and parents work for the benefit of their school, which is at the heart of its community.

## Recommendations

- R1 Ensure that monitoring and evaluation focuses more sharply on developing teaching and assessment to bring about further improvement in pupil progress
- R2 Improve the quality of assessment and feedback to pupils to inform next steps in learning

## What happens next

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

## Main evaluation

### Learning

During their time in school, most pupils make sound progress in developing their knowledge, understanding and skills from their starting points. This includes pupils with additional learning needs. Most pupils recall previous learning, acquire new knowledge and develop new skills successfully.

When pupils first join the school's nursery class, many have relatively low speech, communication and personal and social skills. However, they settle into school life quickly, develop positive relationships with staff and their peers and make strong progress. They respond well to routines and engage positively with learning experiences.

Most pupils in nursery and reception develop their communication skills well. They quickly develop confidence to participate in discussions with their peers and adults and begin to take turns to speak and listen. By the time they reach Year 2, pupils listen attentively and when talking about a walk around their village they share interesting points about their observations. Older pupils provide thoughtful reasons for their choice of belongings to take in their rucksack on an adventure. In Year 6 they talk confidently when presenting to their peers about matters/things/topics/issues that interest them.

Overall, pupils develop their reading skills very well. The youngest pupils are enthusiastic when learning initial letter sounds and link them to words they know. In Year 1, most pupils recount a story about a bear hunt, acting out swishing through long grass. In Year 4 most pupils start to become more fluent readers. By Year 6 most pupils have strong reading skills. For example, they decode new words independently and explain with sufficient detail the plot of the books they are reading and the roles and features of different characters within the stories. They develop an enjoyment of reading a broad range of books from a variety of authors.

From a young age, many pupils show enthusiasm for writing. In the nursery and reception classes, they experiment with mark making activities and begin to form recognisable letters and write simple words. By Year 1, they attempt to use their knowledge of sounds to spell unfamiliar words. As they move through the school, most learn how to write with increasing freedom and independence for a range of purposes, for example when persuading others of the importance of going on adventures. Older pupils develop a good understanding of genres and purposefully apply their skills, for example when recounting a visit to a museum. Overall, the majority of pupils write legibly and present their work well.

Most pupils make good progress in developing their mathematical skills and understanding. In the youngest classes, they learn to count objects up to 10 and begin to interpret tally charts and bar graphs. By Year 2, they identify numbers up to 100 and describe the properties of shapes and objects. Older pupils use measuring tools appropriately to work out the size of their playground while pupils in Year 6 work with negative numbers, understand fractions of numbers and use 24-hour digital time accurately.

Most pupils make good progress in developing their Welsh language skills. They become confident when speaking in Welsh. For example, they take turns to take on the role of 'helpwr heddiw' and speak confidently when leading the development of Welsh language skills in their class. Younger pupils use simple greetings and phrases to discuss the weather, and older pupils communicate comprehensive information about themselves and their interests.

Younger pupils are confident when selecting and using educational games and apps to support their learning. They are beginning to understand the importance of not sharing their passwords with others. Most older pupils develop and use an appropriate range of digital skills to create presentations, write reports and share the data they gather. These pupils are confident when working together to complete pieces of work digitally. However, their modelling and control skills are at an early stage of development.

Generally, pupils apply their literacy, numeracy and digital skills well in other areas of the curriculum. For example, there are frequent opportunities to research and present work to a range of audiences orally, on paper and digitally as part of self and peer assessment tasks. In addition, they apply their mathematical skills well when solving problems, such as upscaling ingredients to make Welsh cakes.

When the opportunity arises, pupils enjoy using their creative and artistic skills. Younger pupils enjoy exploring painting with different textures while pupils in Years 3 and 4 draw pictures of their interpretation of belonging. Older pupils learn about a local artist and draw their own still-life objects in that style. Across the school, pupils develop and use their thinking skills well. For example, younger pupils consider similarities and differences between light sources. Older pupils explain the meaning of their word of the week and consider how they will use it in different contexts. Pupils benefit from opportunities to develop their physical skills, including developing specialist skills for playing cricket by evaluating their performance from recordings they make of themselves in action.

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

Nearly all pupils enjoy school, feel safe and have a deep sense of belonging to its community. They trust adults in school and know who to turn to for support when needed. The extremely positive relationships that pupils develop with adults at school generally enhance pupils' well-being considerably.

Most pupils behave well in lessons and around the school. They settle quickly to tasks and are ready to learn. They show consideration for others, for example when taking turns to speak or to listen to what others have to say. Nearly all pupils demonstrate positive attitudes towards learning. They are enthusiastic and ask

purposeful questions, to find out about things that interest them. Most pupils show confidence, perseverance and resilience in their work. For example, pupils in the nursery and reception classes persist when trying to sound out new words, while older pupils rehearse and refine their presentations.

Nearly all pupils take an active part in the life of the school and are well represented by the Eco Committee, Criw Cymraeg and School Council, all of which make an important contribution to school improvement. For example, the school council works with staff and governors to offer advice on how to improve feedback in books, as well as creating a purposeful child-friendly version of the school's anti-bullying policy. Pupils value that adults in the school listen to their views and take them into account when considering decisions that affect them.

Nearly all pupils are developing very good personal and social skills because of the school's emphasis on well-being. They know the value of friendship and how this can be nurtured, through friendship recipes that contain respect, sharing and laughter. Throughout the school, pupils co-operate well in various projects and activities and regularly help each other to improve their learning. Nearly all pupils know how to keep safe online and encourage each other not to be 'mean on screen'.

Most pupils learn how to manage their emotions and resolve difficulties in suitable ways. For example, older pupils understand how to reduce tensions by speaking calmly and talk about the importance of compromise in relationships. Pupils develop an awareness of care and empathy through a wide range of experiences, such as recycling shredded paper to use as bedding for animals and fundraising for victims of earthquakes.

Most pupils understand the need for regular exercise and healthy eating. Pupils in Year 6 are efficient when managing the school's daily fruit shop and help leaders to reduce the number of sugary snacks pupils have at breaktimes and in their lunch boxes. Younger pupils know physical exercise is good for their hearts and muscles. They enjoy moving as Mr Slow, Mr Fast and Mr Jelly and move well in time with the teacher's instructions.

Pupils demonstrate creative and enterprising skills in a range of contexts. For example, nursery and reception classes make and sell clay hearts as part of their learning about Santes Dwynwen, while older pupils show growing financial responsibility and organisational skills as members of a well-established savings club. The Eco Committee help to keep the village clean by creating dog waste bags.

Most pupils are developing well as ethical and well-informed citizens by drawing up together their own class charters to help them act with fairness and responsibly. They have an appropriate understanding of their rights as a child and explain clearly what this means in their lives. For example, nursery and reception classes know it is important to share their toys, while older pupils explain their right to relax and play by taking part in activities inside and outside the school. Pupils also understand the importance of treating others equally and respecting differences.

Pupils are attending school more regularly this year compared to previous years when the COVID-19 pandemic had a negative impact on school attendance.

## Teaching and learning experiences

The headteacher works with staff, parents and governors work to provide a curriculum that is engaging for pupils. They ensure that it has a clear focus on developing pupils' sense of place and identity. Teachers provide a broad and balanced curriculum with a strong focus on improving health and well-being, developing thinking skills and nurturing creativity. In addition, pupils have plenty of opportunities to apply their skills across the curriculum, in particular their numeracy skills.

Across the school, staff collaborate when planning whole-school topics around interesting concepts to ensure that pupils have sound opportunities to progress their skills, knowledge and understanding. Through the development of the curriculum, staff are keen to engage pupils and incorporate their interests purposefully and regularly evaluate their approaches.

Staff place a high priority on developing pupils' language and literacy skills. They ensure that there are regular opportunities for pupils to read a broad range of literature. This includes works by classic and modern authors. In addition, there are many opportunities for pupils to develop and refine their writing skills through a focus on developing spelling, grammar and punctuation. However, pupils do not always have sufficient opportunities to write in a variety of styles or for a wide enough range of purposes. This includes opportunities to write independently creatively and at length.

Nearly all teachers set purposeful learning objectives and link these well to the success criteria they create, often with pupils. These ensure that pupils have high expectations to work towards. Most pupils respond well to these expectations and use them effectively to draft or refine their work. This links very well to the opportunities pupils have to self and peer assess their work. Many teachers use the success criteria effectively to provide positive feedback. However, this feedback does not always provide sufficient focus on the next steps in learning and, as a result, teachers miss opportunities to improving important aspects of learning.

Most staff use questioning effectively to clarify pupils' understanding and effectively to move the learning on. Many lessons move at a good pace and pupils engage enthusiastically in their learning. However, on a few occasions, where the pace of learning slows or an adult takes too long introducing activities, pupils do not always maintain engagement in their learning.

Across the school, most staff provide thoughtful opportunities to promote pupils' independence in their learning. There are initiatives, such as the word of the week, and most staff encourage pupils to access the additional resources they need to support their learning without asking an adult. However, on too many occasions, pupils wait for too long for help or for their teacher to explain to them what they have to do next.

Teachers regularly plan purposeful activities for learning outside of the classroom. For example, older pupils use the open space for drama sessions. Younger pupils have opportunities to learn through exploration and they frequently use the school's garden area to explore the wildlife and act out familiar stories.

Teachers contribute well to the school's tracking system and together with leaders they evaluate the progress pupils make during each term. They regularly review pupils' progress and, where they identify insufficient progress, they adapt their plans appropriately to address these needs.

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

The school is an inclusive and welcoming community. This is because staff work closely with parents and carers to ensure that their children's well-being is a priority. As a result, pupils enjoy coming to school and trust staff to help them when necessary. Staff place a strong emphasis on knowing pupils as individuals. This enables them to provide tailored care and support.

The school's provision for additional learning needs is strong and very well co-ordinated. Leaders track pupils' progress closely to identify strengths and when specific support is needed. They also liaise well with outside specialists, such as the education psychologist and speech therapist, who provide further expertise. Staff make effective use of individual learning passports to summarise for parents what their children can do well, their interests, where they need more help and how this can be achieved. A range of well-timed interventions ensure that pupils make appropriate progress in their learning from their varied starting points.

Staff provide strong support for pupils' physical health and well-being through a range of activities. These include after-school clubs such as netball, dance and football, as well as opportunities to use the school garden. Teachers and support staff make effective use of the school building, resources and grounds to enable pupils to reflect and come together around common interests, such as gardening and music.

The school provides many valuable opportunities for pupils to learn about the culture and heritage of Wales. Pupils enjoy finding out about the history of the village and its name, Valley of the Witch. An inspirational programme of visits to places such as Castell Henllys, Margam Park, and a Hindu temple in Cardiff, alongside residential trips for older classes, enriches pupils' spiritual, moral and social development.

The school provides a wide range of opportunities for pupils to take on leadership responsibilities. For example, they provide opportunities for prefects and the Mini Police to reinforce positive behaviours around the school. There are also effective arrangements for pupils to teach their peers, as when the Criw Cymraeg use puppets to introduce new Welsh vocabulary to younger classes.

The school promotes understanding of diversity and inclusion very well. For example, staff make imaginative use of stories, visitors and visits to challenge stereotypes around disability, racism and gender. They provide regular opportunities for all pupils to excel. As a result, pupils feel confident and ambitious. Girls, for example, respond well to the opportunity to play cricket and represent the school at Sophia Gardens.

The school has a strong culture of safeguarding where everyone has a part to play. There are robust policies and procedures in place to ensure that pupils are kept safe. All staff understand their roles and know what to do and who to turn to should they have a concern. As a result, pupils are happy and feel safe. Parents value this aspect of the school's work.



## **Leadership and management**

The headteacher leads in the development of a strong vision for a happy and caring school at the heart of its community. There is a keen emphasis on inclusion and supporting pupil well-being as well as celebrating diversity. In addition, the well-being of staff is a high priority.

Over time, the headteacher has developed a strong and supportive team ethos and this permeates the work of the school. Staff collaborate very well together to create beneficial opportunities for pupils, for example through the development of curriculum and the wide range of extra-curricular opportunities on offer, both during the day and after school.

Leaders set high expectations for staff and pupils and invest in developing all aspects of school life. For example, staff collaborate with colleagues in nearby schools, including the local secondary school, to develop new approaches to teaching and delivering Curriculum for Wales. As a result, most pupils make good progress and are ready for the next phase of their education.

Staff understand their roles and responsibilities at the school and engage well in performance management activities to support their professional development and pupils' progress. For example, teaching assistants work with partners in the local authority to support pupils who are struggling to return to school following the pandemic. Teachers have opportunities to work together, for example, in triads to consider improvements to their teaching. However, opportunities for staff to visit other settings to further develop their teaching skills are at an early stage of development.

Leaders focus their improvement work appropriately, developing on important areas for the curriculum in need of development, such as improving spelling and developing pupils' Welsh language skills. A biennial programme for monitoring sets out the focus of activities to evaluate the school's performance. Through the headteacher's investment in the development of leadership at all levels across the teaching team, nearly all staff have a role in evaluating the school's performance. In addition, governors and pupils gather and reflect upon first-hand evidence. Together, they work to ensure that there is a positive approach to evaluating the work of the school. However, these activities do not always focus sharply enough on evaluating the difference that aspects of teaching, such as feedback, make to pupils' progress.

The school's governing body has a sound understanding of the school's performance. This is based on the comprehensive information the headteacher provides for them in addition to the evidence they gather through looking at books and going on learning walks. As a result, governors understand why the school's priorities for improvement are chosen and are able to describe the progress being made towards achieving these goals. There are suitable committees in place to hold the school to account and support its development. Governors monitor the budget and ensure that spending is appropriate, such as the use of the pupil development grant on music lessons and subsidising educational visits. Governors promote healthy eating and drinking appropriately, for example by encouraging pupils to bring in fruit to share, rather than birthday cake.

The school places an important emphasis on developing a secure culture of safeguarding and keeping pupils safe is a priority all at the school share. Leaders ensure that staff know how to apply the school's procedures when necessary.

Parents value the care and support the school provides for their children to support their development as rounded individuals. They appreciate the way in which the school provides them with important information to help support the learning at home, as well as communicating important messages in a timely way. In addition, the school uses social media positively to showcase beneficial experiences pupils have and the achievements they make. As a result, the school is very much at the heart of its community.

## 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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