



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

**A report on**

**Machen Primary School**

**Commercial Road  
Machen  
CF83 8NA**

**Date of inspection: June 2023**

**by**

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

## About Machen Primary School

Name of provider	Machen Primary School
Local authority	Caerphilly County Borough Council
Language of the provider	English
Type of school	Primary
Religious character	
Number of pupils on roll	176
Pupils of statutory school age	131
Number in nursery classes	25
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%)	5.3%
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%)	14.5%
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	05/06/2002
Date of previous Estyn inspection (if applicable)	09/11/2014
Start date of inspection	12/06/2023

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](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

Machen Primary is a warm, welcoming school that provides an engaging learning environment that supports all pupils. Staff are positive role models and share a vision to support pupils' well-being. Staff and pupils have a sense of pride in their school and what it has to offer. The Welsh language is celebrated throughout the school day, and is a prominent feature in daily activities, formal and informal situations.

Leaders know their school well and understand the actions they need to take to improve aspects of its work. They focus on developing pupils' literacy, numeracy and digital skills effectively and most pupils make good progress during focused sessions. However, independent learning tasks do not always enable pupils to deepen their understanding and apply their skills across the curriculum.

Teachers plan a good range of learning experiences and provide valuable interventions to support pupils with additional learning needs. They make effective use of assessment information to monitor the progress pupils make and to identify groups of pupils who may benefit from additional support. When given the opportunity, pupils enjoy talking about their work and the actions they follow to complete tasks. However, feedback does not always focus on the skills pupils are developing, and the actions they need to take to improve their work.

The school is beginning to develop its curriculum and consider how they can use the locality and Wales to enrich pupils' learning experiences. Teachers plan a range of engaging activities for pupils to develop their creative and problem-solving skills across the curriculum. However, the value and impact of these activities vary across the school, especially older pupils.

The headteacher values the contributions governors, staff and pupils make. There is a strong culture of supportive and caring leadership. Leaders at all levels work effectively to provide the best they can for all pupils. They reflect honestly on pupils' progress and accurately identify the school's strengths and areas for development. Governors are valuable members of the school community and offer appropriate support and challenge to the school.

## Recommendations

- R1 Improve opportunities to develop pupils' deeper understanding and application of skills across the curriculum, especially when engaged in independent learning
- R2 Ensure consistency in the quality and use of pupil feedback to support pupils to make improvements to their work
- R3 Extend opportunities for pupils to develop their creative and problem-solving skills in purposeful, real-life activities

## What happens next

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

## Main evaluation

### Learning

During their time at Machen Primary School, most pupils, including those with additional learning needs, make good progress. Nearly all pupils listen attentively, follow instructions and respond to questions appropriately. The youngest pupils engage well in conversations with adults and pupils in their class, developing a range of suitable vocabulary. For example, when talking about making mud cakes in the garden area, nursery pupils name the items they collect and explain how they mix these items to create 'cakes'. As pupils progress through the school, they develop their listening skills effectively and increased their vocabulary to describe their learning. Older pupils are beginning to use a widening range of subject specific vocabulary well when talking about their science investigations and use this knowledge in their written work.

Across the school, most pupils make good progress in developing their reading skills. The youngest pupils learn that letters make sounds and they begin to join sounds together to build and read words independently. They develop an interest in books and enjoy listening to stories. As pupils move through the school, they make good progress, developing a range of reading skills that enable them to develop as fluent and confident readers. Older pupils read fluently and accurately and use expression when reading aloud. They demonstrate a joy for reading and are enthusiastic when talking about their favourite authors, giving reasons why they like different types of books.

Overall, pupils' writing skills are developing effectively. The youngest pupils use a range of writing tools to form letters correctly. As pupils develop their letter formation skills, they progress to combining letters to spell basic words and write sentences. For example, younger pupils create posters, using words and pictures to highlight the importance of recycling and reducing pollution on local beaches. They apply their knowledge of letters and sounds successfully to read and spell words. Many older pupils identify the main features in different types of writing and apply their knowledge to write for a range of purposes. For example, older pupils apply their knowledge of report writing when recording their findings and results from science investigations.

Most pupils make good progress in numeracy. Younger pupils use everyday objects to count numbers up to 20, and correctly match objects to numbers. Through play activities, they use suitable mathematical vocabulary when talking about their learning. Pupils in Year 1 and 2 measure using blocks and centimetres. They are beginning to make comparisons of size and solve basic problems. For example, more able pupils in Year 1 and 2 measure their height in centimetres and use this

information to decide whether they are tall enough to ride on a rollercoaster. Through questioning, they are also able to calculate the differences in height. Older pupils develop their understanding of place value and use drawings to calculate addition of two- and three-digit numbers. However, older pupils do not always apply their numeracy skills well enough and for a range of purposes across the curriculum.

Most pupils develop a range of digital skills successfully. Younger pupils access digital devices to record information and to share their learning. Older pupils use a range of digital skills for different purposes. For example, they construct graphs to support their science work, create interesting presentations, and make electronic questionnaires to gather the views of other pupils.

Pupils' progress in Welsh language development is strong across the school. During role-play activities, many younger pupils speak using Welsh and English. For example, pupils in Year 1 and 2 greet customers and take orders in Welsh when playing in the ice-cream parlour. As pupils progress through the school, they take increasing responsibility for leading daily Welsh sessions, and develop a range of extended sentences and wider choice of vocabulary when asking and answering questions in Welsh.

Most pupils work well, both individually and in groups. They follow instructions to complete tasks independently. However, pupils do not always focus well enough on the skills they are developing during independent learning challenges and, as a result, the progress they make when developing their creative and artistic skills are underdeveloped.

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

Nearly all pupils feel safe, secure and happy at school. The relationships between staff and pupils are a particular strength. Pupils feel well supported in dealing with their emotional, physical and educational needs. As a result, pupils develop a strong sense of well-being.

Pupils behave exceptionally well. They are kind and courteous to staff, other pupils and visitors to the school. Nearly all pupils respect the rights of others and have a clear understanding of right and wrong. Older pupils demonstrate kindness and consideration when supporting younger pupils and those with additional learning needs. They help support one another's well-being. For example, older pupils lead reading sessions in the school library during lunchtimes to support and interact with pupils who enjoy quieter settings.

During lessons, most pupils demonstrate a positive attitude towards their learning. They show suitable levels of engagement in lessons and concentrate and persevere well. From an early age, most pupils develop good independent learning skills. They enjoy following instructions and remain on task to complete activities. However, older pupils do not always apply their skills well enough during independent tasks and challenges.

Many pupils respond positively to their learning. Younger pupils enjoy talking about their learning and begin to describe the activities they are completing. As pupils progress through the school, they begin to reflect on their learning, describing the

actions they have completed. However, pupils' responses to the feedback they receive varies too much from class to class. Generally, older pupils do not have a secure enough understanding of the skills they are trying to develop or apply, particularly in their independent learning tasks. This means that they do not always know what they are doing well and what they need to do to improve.

Most pupils understand the importance of healthy eating and how to make healthy choices in relation to diet and exercise. Most develop suitable physical skills throughout their time at school. They enjoy a range of after school activities that enhance their physical and creative skills, such as drama, French and football.

Most pupils know how to keep themselves safe and who to turn to for help if they need it. They know how to stay safe online and how to recognise potential risks. For example, older pupils explain the actions they would take to keep safe when engaged in online chats and games.

Overall, pupils are proud of their school and value the contributions they make. Many older pupils enjoy taking on responsibilities and speak knowledgably of the actions they carry out to help make a difference to others. For example, pupils sell plants to raise money to purchase food items for the local food bank. Many pupils demonstrate an understanding of their role in society and actively seek ways to improve the environment through recycling and litter collections.

### **Teaching and learning experiences**

Staff develop effective learning environments that are purposeful and well-resourced, and provide a range of high-quality learning opportunities for pupils. Leaders ensure that there are suitable spaces to enable pupils to reflect and access calm spaces and this helps support pupils who benefit from time away from a busy classroom. Teachers make good use of outdoor spaces to extend the classroom and provide worthwhile opportunities for younger pupils to practise and apply their skills through play activities. For example, younger pupils use their numeracy skills purposefully when counting and collecting items from the garden area to make comparisons in size.

Staff have high expectations for pupils' behaviour and manage this successfully. This helps to ensure that pupils are ready to learn and engage in learning activities. Teachers plan effective lessons to support pupils' progress in their literacy, numeracy and digital skills. They have a good understanding of how to develop pupils' reading skills and provide a range of focused activities to enable pupils to build and apply their reading skills across the curriculum. Teachers plan suitable activities to develop pupils' writing skills. In the most effective lessons, teachers use their subject knowledge skilfully to build on and extend pupils' writing for a real purpose. Teachers provide suitable opportunities for pupils to develop their numeracy skills during focused activities. For example, younger pupils apply and develop their numeracy skills when engaged in outdoor learning. However, opportunities for older pupils to deepen their understanding and apply numeracy skills in authentic contexts are less well developed. Teachers plan a range of worthwhile activities to develop pupils' digital skills and create opportunities for pupils to select the digital skills they need to use in their topic work.

Leaders are developing the school curriculum in line with the Curriculum for Wales. Teachers plan a range of suitable learning experiences to enable pupils to develop their knowledge and skills appropriately. The school is beginning to make suitable use of the local area and the context of the school to plan relevant learning experiences. In a few classes, teachers plan activities that maximise the use of the local area and make links with previous learning. For example, younger pupils go on local walks to find out about different types of buildings and the importance of these buildings to provide valuable services to the community. Teachers plan regular opportunities for pupils to develop knowledge and skills across a range of areas of learning. However, the focus for these activities is not always clear. On occasions, the timetabling of areas of learning restricts the continuation of learning and pupil engagement.

Staff are developing their knowledge and understanding of progress across all areas of learning well. Where this has been a focus, teachers plan effectively for the progression of pupils' skills. For example, in science lessons, teachers share an understanding of the vocabulary they will use to develop pupils' knowledge and skills. This helps pupils to make good progress when developing their scientific skills. However, opportunities for pupils to deepen and apply a range of skills, for real-life, purposeful activities, varies too much across the school.

Most teachers share clear learning objectives for lessons where the focus is on developing a skill. However, overall, teachers do not plan independent learning tasks carefully enough to challenge older pupils appropriately and ensure they know what they are trying to achieve. In a minority of classes, teachers use ongoing assessments to inform their planning and this helps pupils build on prior learning. Support staff use their observations to provide pupils with valuable follow-up intervention and this helps pupils, especially those with additional learning needs. Teachers' use of feedback varies too much. Overall, younger pupils benefit from verbal feedback and have opportunities to improve or revisit learning as a result. However, older pupils do not always have opportunities to respond to feedback and do not understand well enough what they need to do to improve their work.

The school plans a range of extra-curricular and trips and visits to widen pupils' experiences. There are suitable programs in place to develop pupils' spiritual and moral development. Teachers plan a range of activities to develop pupils' understanding around diversity and encourage pupils within the school community to talk about and share their heritage and culture.

The school has high aspirations for the teaching of the Welsh language and all staff act as positive role models. Teachers plan effective daily Welsh language sessions that are supported with high quality resources. This enables many pupils to build confidence in speaking Welsh and to do with correct pronunciation and understanding. Teachers and pupils use the Welsh language successfully during lessons, play activities and break times.

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

The school has a strong, family feel that promotes a wonderful sense of belonging and identity. Staff have strong relationships with pupils and their families and know how to support them. Most staff and pupils have a shared vision and commitment to

do the best they can for each other. As a result, staff and pupils feel valued and cared for. This is a strength of the school.

The school has developed a range of effective interventions to support and manage pupils' well-being. Support staff develop personalised plans to meet the needs of individual learners and to help manage and support their emotional needs. Whole-school strategies, including the use of designated spaces, provide valuable opportunities for learners to reflect and self-regulate their emotions. The school provides a flexible approach to support pupils' well-being and early interventions provide worthwhile support to pupils and their families.

The additional learning needs co-ordinator (ALNCo) provides valuable support to staff and pupils to manage and support pupils with additional learning needs effectively. As a result of this strong support, most pupils with additional learning needs make good progress. Support staff make effective use of observations and assessments to inform pupil development plans and they adjust plans regularly to meet the needs of pupils. The ALNCo works closely with teachers and support staff to track the progress pupils with additional learning needs make. This helps to ensure that interventions are reviewed regularly to maximise pupil progress. Leaders communicate with other professionals to provide valuable training to staff so that they are developing the necessary skills to implement bespoke interventions for pupils with additional learning needs.

The school provides a range of worthwhile opportunities for pupils to take on responsibilities and lead change. There are valuable systems in place that encourage pupil leadership groups to gather the opinions and suggestions of others so that the actions they take to lead change have a positive impact. For example, the pupils' well-being group develops pupil questionnaires to generate ideas how to improve play times. As a result, they implement Playground Pals successfully to support pupils' friendship and participation in play activities during break times. Recently, pupils relaunched the Helpful Heroes Award, where pupils nominate one another for rewards, promoting respect and recognition for efforts.

Teachers promote pupils' spiritual and moral development effectively through a variety of purposeful collective worship activities. They provide opportunities for older pupils to lead assemblies and share information on a range of topics, including global issues, inclusion and diversity. For example, older pupils share information about poverty in other countries and younger pupils liaise with charities to arrange a collection of unwanted shoes to send to children in Zambia. The school provides regular opportunities for pupils to discuss and develop an understanding of issues or topics of interest in the local community. These sessions, 'Word on the Street', allow pupils to talk about how their behaviour affects others. They have explored themes around kindness and respect and demonstrated these skills sensitively when visiting the local care home and planning celebrations of the Queen's Jubilee.

The school provides a strong and effective safeguarding culture. There are clear systems in place to ensure that all pupils, staff and visitors are safe. All staff have a clear understanding of the school's policy to safeguard all learners. The school has engaged successfully with pupils and the well-being team to develop a child-friendly poster informing pupils how to keep safe. The school's behaviour policy is highly effective. All staff deal with any incidents calmly and discretely. There are clear



systems in place to report and manage any incidents of alleged bullying or discrimination. The systems to support and challenge low attendance are effective.

## **Leadership and management**

The headteacher is an effective, nurturing and caring leader who prioritises the wellbeing of pupils and staff. A strong culture of respect and consideration filters through the school and is shared by everyone. The leadership team has developed a strong vision for the school that is well understood by all stakeholders. This has resulted in staff and pupils developing the confidence to share their ideas, develop their talents, and do their best, which reflects the school's motto well.

The distributed leadership across the school ensures that staff share roles and responsibilities effectively. Teachers and support staff have valuable opportunities to develop their own leadership skills. There is a supportive learning culture for all staff that encourages them to share their ideas and lead projects and areas of development within the school.

Leaders plan school improvement thoughtfully. Overall, they have a good understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses through conducting a range of self-evaluation and monitoring processes, such as considering the quality of pupils' work, lesson observations and learning walks. There are valuable opportunities for all staff to contribute their ideas to these whole-school evaluation and improvement processes. Very occasionally, however, leaders have not identified a few areas that need refining, including how effectively teachers use independent learning to deepen pupils' skills and knowledge.

Leaders make good use of information gathered by teachers to understand pupils' progress in learning. This information also helps them to make appropriate decisions about the school's priorities and how grants should be spent. This means that most pupils who receive support make good progress. Leaders ensure that teachers and teaching assistants have a secure understanding of their responsibilities to those pupils with additional learning needs. They secure appropriate support for pupils and enable staff to undertake their roles and responsibilities effectively.

Leaders hold staff to account appropriately for the progress each pupil makes, for example through regular progress and tracking meetings. As a result, the school identifies pupils who require additional support quickly and provides prompt responses to support their development and well-being needs. Leaders have a good understanding of the needs of all pupils. They share pupils' achievements and activities with parents appropriately.

Leaders provide a suitable range of professional learning opportunities for staff that links to school improvement priorities. These opportunities support specific areas of the school's improvement effectively. For example, cluster work to develop pupils' scientific vocabulary has improved pupils' use of correct scientific language in their work. There are suitable opportunities for staff to visit other schools to see their good practice and consider how they may implement changes back in their own classes. For example, recent changes to the learning environment have created a sense of calm and allow pupils space to think and relax. Senior leaders and governors use performance management processes successfully. Targets link appropriately to the

school priorities for improvement and the personal development goals of teachers and support staff.

The headteacher provides detailed reports to governors that ensure that they are well informed about progress in teaching and learning. Governors understand their role as strategic partners and critical friends to leaders across the school. They provide appropriate support and challenge in areas of the school's work and use their skills and expertise to help with aspects such as finance and pupils' well-being. Governors have a suitable understanding of national priorities, including the school's work to develop its own curriculum and the requirements of ALN reform. The headteacher and governing body promote a positive culture of safeguarding and ensure that school practices and policies meet requirements. They understand their duties to ensure that the school promotes healthy eating and drinking appropriately. Leaders and governors pay due regard to the impact of poverty on attainment. For example, they are mindful of the trips and visits that are arranged by the school and ensure that no pupils are excluded from these by using the pupil development grant to offer support to pupils and families where finance can be a barrier to learning.

The school has developed strong relationships with parents. They make valuable contributions and are fully involved in the life of the school and its community. The school has purposeful links with local university that support the development of trainee teachers. Leaders recognise the positive impact this partnership has on school improvement.

## 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:

Publications Section

Estyn

Anchor Court, Keen Road

Cardiff

CF24 5JW or by email to [publications@estyn.gov.wales](mailto:publications@estyn.gov.wales)

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