



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

A report on

Upper Rhymney Primary School

**Oakland Terrace
Rhymney
NP22 5EP**

Date of inspection: June 2023

by

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

About Upper Rhymney Primary School

Name of provider	Upper Rhymney Primary School
Local authority	Caerphilly County Borough Council
Language of the provider	English
Type of school	Primary
Religious character	Not applicable
Number of pupils on roll	162
Pupils of statutory school age	116
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%)	48.8%
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%)	19.0%
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	01/01/2012
Date of previous Estyn inspection (if applicable)	14/11/2014
Start date of inspection	19/06/2023
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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

Upper Rhymney Primary School is a caring and inclusive school, which encourages pupils to learn in a positive atmosphere and to be happy. Pupils enjoy the activities and tasks provided and use a wide range of strategies and resources to learn productively. Pupils' enthusiastic attitudes and readiness to learn during lessons is due to the purposeful working relationships that exist with their teachers and other staff.

The staff provide beneficial learning opportunities for pupils, which includes using the woodland area regularly. Where learning is particularly successful, the teaching and assessment is engaging and purposeful and staff have high expectations of pupils. However, the quality of teaching varies in terms of its impact on pupils' progress. Teachers' feedback is also inconsistent when attempting to develop the next steps in pupils' learning.

All staff provide a high level of support and care for pupils in all aspects of school life. This encourages pupils to take responsibility for their own learning and well-being. Pupils' behaviour is very good, and they are determined to persevere and learn purposefully. As a result, they develop good literacy and creative skills across the curriculum. However, the planning to improve pupils' numeracy and digital skills is not as effective.

The headteacher provides effective and purposeful leadership. She is determined to succeed for the benefit of pupils and the community. The senior leadership team, the staff and the governors share a clear vision. They work together well to ensure that the school is an inclusive learning community that promotes positive opportunities for pupils.

The headteacher shares responsibilities effectively among staff. This creates a positive whole-school focus, where staff and pupils feel valued for their contributions to school life. Leaders evaluate the school's work to plan for improvements thoroughly. They use robust self-evaluation processes and identify development areas well, such as improving outdoor resources for younger pupils. Additionally, these monitoring practices lead to worthwhile training opportunities for staff to develop their skills through effective professional learning.

Recommendations

- R1 Challenge all pupils through consistent and effective teaching
- R2 Plan effective progression in pupils' numeracy and digital skills as they move through the school
- R3 Ensure that the quality of teachers' feedback targets the next steps in pupils' learning across the school
- R4 Improve the resources and outdoor learning opportunities for younger pupils

What happens next

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

Main evaluation

Learning

Most pupils enter the school with skills, especially language skills, which are well below the expected levels for their age. During their time at school, many pupils make good progress, and they achieve well from their starting points. Many pupils with additional learning needs (ALN) and those eligible for free school meals progress well in their learning. In all classes, pupils needing support access all areas of the curriculum effectively. As a result, they make positive gains in their skills, knowledge and understanding.

Many pupils progress well when listening and speaking and communicate effectively with each other and adults. As they move from nursery to Year 2, they ask interesting questions and answer sensibly while discussing tasks. For example, reception and Year 1 pupils write thank you letters to the local fire station, following the fire fighters' question-and-answer session with them at the school. From Year 3 onwards, many pupils progress well and use a good range of vocabulary and phrases in appropriate contexts. They engage well with peers and contribute willingly to discussions, for instance when reflecting on the lives of families that speak Welsh in Patagonia.

Many pupils develop beneficial reading skills. Many of the youngest pupils learn the sounds of letters quickly and by Year 2, the progress in many pupils' reading skills is good. They attempt unfamiliar words using a variety of strategies sensibly. By Year 6, many pupils read purposefully, and use their skills well when using a variety of different texts to support their learning. For example, they evaluate maturely the causes of mining disasters and their effects on local communities, such as Senghenydd, Gresford and Aberfan.

Many pupils develop effectively as writers. By Year 2, many pupils use punctuation and grammar accurately, such as when writing diaries about their holiday experiences. As pupils progress from Year 3 to Year 6, many write more independently in a wider range of genres. For example, Year 4 pupils write detailed instructions on how to create an invisibility potion. By Year 6, many pupils edit their work thoughtfully and use more sophisticated vocabulary to improve their final drafts. Their final pieces of work are generally of a better standard, reflecting the positive progress they make from their individual starting points.

When speaking Welsh, most of the youngest pupils develop suitable vocabulary and respond to commands and greetings appropriately. By Year 2, many pupils use basic phrases confidently, for example to express their feelings or when discussing the weather. By Year 6, many pupils recall relevant sentence structures and vocabulary appropriately. As a result, most pupils develop satisfactory Welsh oracy skills.

By Year 2, many pupils use mathematical principles effectively. They use numbers confidently, collect information and record their results in simple tables and graphs. For instance, they create tally charts and bar graphs about their pets and their eye colours. They also measure the length and breadth of different sized objects, such as doors with rulers. Additionally, they experiment with capacity when filling and emptying different sized containers with water.

From Year 3 to Year 6, many pupils demonstrate sound mathematical skills. Older pupils develop effective strategies to multiply the weights, diameters and thickness of coins. They use data appropriately and present it effectively in various forms. For example, many pupils place football related images accurately into four quadrants using co-ordinates. However, across the school, most pupils do not apply their numeracy skills consistently in real-life situations.

Most pupils have satisfactory digital competency skills. Younger pupils use camera functions to edit and crop photographs efficiently and program robots and spheres well to follow a set route. By the end of their time at school, many pupils create multimedia presentations and manipulate texts effectively to personify the role of a fighter plane during the Second World War. However, many pupils do not create databases and spreadsheets confidently and do not interrogate data with enough understanding.

Most pupils develop good artistic and creative skills. For example, the youngest pupils role-play happily in the travel agency and mix colours independently before painting trains at an easel. Across the school, most pupils embrace opportunities to experiment creatively, such as Year 5 pupils composing water themed dances based on local rivers. In all classes, most pupils develop effective thinking skills. They use purposeful strategies to accomplish tasks successfully, such as pupils in Year 3 collaborating on enterprise tasks to upcycle used materials to make pillows and plant pots.

Well-being and attitudes to learning

Most pupils' well-being and attitudes to learning are a strength of the school. They show a good level of pride in themselves, their school, their local area and their work. They feel a genuine sense of belonging to the school and its staff and articulate clearly that the school is an important part of the community.

Most pupils have a sound understanding of the values that underpin the school rules and this helps to develop the school's nurturing and caring environment. Most pupils feel that they are treated fairly and are listened to by staff. As a result, they show a high level of respect for their peers and adults in the classrooms and in the extensive outdoor areas. Most pupils embrace the warmth of the school ethos and the culture of inclusivity that exists across the school. Most pupils feel safe and secure at school and in most cases, their behaviour is a positive aspect of daily life, which reflects well during lessons and at breaktimes. They move around the school calmly and respectfully and demonstrate care for each other in the 'Cwtsh' and the outdoor play areas.

Most pupils are polite, welcoming, and courteous to visitors and are happy and confident to engage in conversations about their learning. As they progress through

the school, most pupils develop attitudes and behaviours that enable them to develop as enthusiastic learners. Many pupils are resilient and determined to do their best. They share their ideas and aspirations confidently with each other and adults and many are ambitious to succeed in tasks. They understand that persevering in their learning will benefit them in later life. For example, Year 6 pupils are eager to appreciate the work of Welsh artists and the characteristics of local sculptures, such as the Twisted Chimney.

Many pupils make good progress in developing their social skills and respond positively to questioning during lessons. They are keen learners, and they extend and develop their explanations well to convey a firm understanding of their work. For example, following their conscientious investigations, they conclude that making tuned and untuned instruments from recycled materials do not always create authentic sounds. Most pupils show pride in their work and react positively to verbal feedback from adults and their peers. However, their use and application of written feedback to make improvements in their work is inconsistent.

Most pupils are developing well as healthy, confident individuals who understand the importance of healthy eating and drinking. For example, Year 3 pupils create effective leaflets for parents to inform them on reducing the use of sugar-based drinks, and pupils in all classes use fruit from the orchard to make healthy desserts. They appreciate the importance of regular exercise and show great enthusiasm for developing their physical and creative skills in the school's hall and woodland area.

Many pupils, including those eligible for free school meals and pupils with additional learning needs, relish opportunities to take on leadership roles through joining a variety of pupil voice groups at the school. These include the School Council, Criw Cymraeg, Heddlu Bach and the Eco Council. As a result of the work of these groups, many pupils speak positively about the impact of their actions and their support to the school community, including organising the collection of litter around the town. This enables most pupils to show a clear understanding of their responsibilities within their community. It also gives them valuable opportunities to play a developing role in making decisions, which have a positive effect on the school's provision. A good example is deciding collectively that the school needed new outdoor equipment to engage more pupils in physical activity during playtimes.

Most pupils develop as ethical and informed citizens by contributing to the running of school-based community events. For example, the pupils work with external providers, through grant funding, to develop their expressive arts skills by participating in theatre productions. This develops pupils' awareness of the importance of community cohesion and it encourages pupils to lead initiatives within their local community. They also created a mural to celebrate their well-being, through using natural materials that exist by the local river and nearby fields. As a result, pupils demonstrate positive attitudes to caring for the natural world and appreciating their own environment.

Teaching and learning experiences

Teachers and teaching assistants develop positive working relationships with pupils and create a supportive and nurturing learning environment. They encourage respect

among pupils and each other and have high expectations of pupils' behaviour. This contributes positively to the school's calm and inclusive atmosphere.

Staff know the local community and the needs of its children very well. They adapt their teaching to develop pupils' learning successfully, which includes purposeful use of the 'Cwtsh' and additional areas for emotional support. Even though there are inconsistencies in teachers' expectations and how they challenge pupils to improve their outcomes, on the whole, teaching is effective. Where it is at its best, teachers challenge pupils to produce their best work in lessons within an engaging working environment. Staff ensure that pupils feel listened to and can ask questions if they need help with their learning. Teaching assistants work successfully alongside teachers and contribute positively to planning and to the promotion of pupils' learning and well-being.

The school's provision for personal and social education encourages pupils' understanding of their own well-being effectively. Staff use a wide range of teaching initiatives and strategies very well to support the emotional health of pupils. These have been particularly good in supporting pupils to improve their attendance. They have helped pupils to manage their anxieties and emotions well, by giving them the appropriate strategies with which to explain their feelings openly.

The school implements a curriculum that is broad and balanced and reflects the requirements of the Curriculum for Wales well. This includes planned topics, such as an African theme in Year 6 and celebratory events, which engage pupils' interests purposefully. For example, teachers facilitate diversity and racial tolerance sessions to re-enforce the school's values. They also plan visitor days to raise pupils' awareness of global issues, such as organising a visit from an Afghan refugee to talk to pupils about his experiences.

Provision to develop pupils' listening, speaking and reading skills is successful across the school. Teachers develop pupils' writing skills well, considering pupils' starting points, and opportunities to write at length independently is an important aspect of the school's provision. Provision to develop pupils' Welsh language skills is appropriate. Staff model a range of greetings, instructions and questions in Welsh and the school provides suitable enrichment programmes to further develop pupils' Welsh oracy skills.

The provision for most pupils to apply and develop their numeracy and digital skills across the curriculum is appropriate. Although teachers provide many activities to support pupils to make progress in their numeracy and digital skills, the planning does not systematically build purposefully on these skills from one year to the next. As a result, this limits the progress that most pupils make in developing and using their skills in a wider range of contexts.

The school collaborates closely with colleagues in schools in the cluster, including the feeder high school, to ensure consistency of approach in planning the curriculum and to share good practice, as well as maximising training opportunities. As a result of this positive collaboration between staff, pupils develop as enthusiastic and innovative learners. For example, older pupils develop a range of different skills, such as the ability speak simple phrases in other languages, an understanding of design technology practices and science skills related to mock forensic investigations.

Teachers provide opportunities for pupils to respond to feedback and suggest improvements to their work. However, the quality of teachers' feedback is variable, and it does not always support pupils well enough to improve their work and develop their skills independently. For example, where it is less effective, teachers repeat the same feedback often, without the intended impact on the pupils' next pieces of work.

The school uses a rigorous approach to tracking pupil progress in literacy, numeracy and well-being skills. Teachers use this and other sources of information to inform their planning and to identify pupils who require targeted support well. For example, they use termly assessment information for reading, mathematical development and social skills to select individuals for specific support, which includes more able pupils.

School reports to parents and carers provide suitable information about their child's progress and attitudes to learning. They contain useful targets to highlight the next steps for learning for individual pupils.

Care, support and guidance

The school is a supportive community, and staff encourage pupils to contribute to its caring and friendly atmosphere successfully. The strong relationships between staff and pupils and among most of the pupils are a positive feature of the school. Teachers and support staff know the pupils well and they respond promptly and intuitively to the pupils' emotional and social needs. Through effective use of the well-planned nurture areas, the school provides strong support for pupils' physical and emotional health and well-being. This reassuring and warm atmosphere helps most pupils to settle comfortably into school life and it contributes well to their happiness in school. These sensible and thoughtful practices encourage pupils to engage in the life of the school and in their own learning beneficially.

The provision for pupils identified as having ALN is thorough. The school's ALN co-ordinator works effectively in partnership with the headteacher and staff members. Together, they ensure that pupils' needs are identified early, and that the robust tracking and support for individuals and groups of pupils begin promptly after identification. Thorough pupil progress reviews result in staff members having a deeper understanding of the needs of pupils and specific targets to support their learning. The school interacts beneficially with a range of specialist services to secure additional, timely resources and to offer specialist support to pupils with a range of academic, physical, emotional and social needs. These arrangements ensure that most targeted pupils make good progress in relation to their abilities.

The school ensures that pupils of all backgrounds and abilities take on leadership roles effectively on a variety of purposeful groups. This provision develops their understanding of the importance of active citizenship well. As a result, the school provides pupils with worthwhile opportunities to participate in making decisions to improve the school. For example, through their eco work, pupils investigate the causes of global warming and organise school-based protest marches to highlight the negative impact of deforestation. They also learn that acts, such as raising money during the school's enterprise day to support children living in poverty, improve children's life opportunities through better water sanitation.

The school has an effective range of opportunities that helps pupils to develop a good understanding of their Welsh heritage. For example, the school effectively promotes Welsh cultural aspects, such as a charring ceremony as part of its Eisteddfod activities. St David's Day celebrations also contribute strongly towards a positive Welsh ethos, as does the history of mining and research on the 'Bells of Rhymney' poem. Additionally, following a visit from Welsh language singers and clog dancers, the Criw Cymraeg lead activities to promote pupils' daily use of Welsh. This type of effective provision allows pupils to engage willingly with the heritage of Wales and to feel proud of the school's Welsh ethos.

The school places a strong emphasis on providing a rich and varied range of trips and visits that support the curriculum and engage pupils in their learning. For example, these include local visits to work with an artist to create a mural in the library and to develop a sensory garden in the town. Additionally, they travel wider afield to the Welsh Folk Museum and to study castles in and around Cardiff. These experiences provide varied opportunities for pupils to learn about the history of their town and the different communities of South Wales over time.

Staff enable pupils to make strong contributions to the life of their community. They use the experiences positively so that pupils develop respect and that they understand that caring for others is important. For example, pupils support a local food bank by taking part in a harvest festival, which contributes to pupils' understanding that supporting the less fortunate is important in society. This helps them to begin to understand important issues relating to equality, diversity and inclusion and enhances their spiritual development and the values of empathy and compassion effectively.

All staff understand their roles and responsibilities in contributing robustly to pupils' safety and well-being. They ensure that pupils' well-being and safety are prominent elements of school life. Leaders embed a culture of purposeful safeguarding processes among all staff and these practices are an integral part of their daily responsibilities. As a result, the school's arrangements for safeguarding pupils meet requirements and are not a cause for concern. The school has effective systems to monitor and improve attendance and recent measures taken by the school have led to improvements.

Leadership and management

The headteacher works conscientiously with the senior leadership team, staff, pupils, parents and the local community. Together, they have developed a shared vision that has a strong emphasis on improving pupils' well-being within a supportive environment. This collaborative approach is beneficial to pupils and reflects the school's motto, 'Together We Learn, Together We Succeed', effectively.

The headteacher leads the school diligently and ensures that staff focus directly on creating an inclusive and nurturing environment, where all pupils and adults feel valued. She encourages staff to model values and behaviours that are based directly on the school's caring ethos, which aim to benefit the school, local community and the lives of its pupils. This includes promoting respect and togetherness as integral features of school life. As a result, relationships throughout the school are positive

and there is a clear commitment amongst staff to improve the school's provision and pupils' outcomes.

Leaders ensure that teachers and teaching assistants have clear roles and delegated responsibilities that contribute well to improving the school's practices. For example, they work together cohesively, both within the school and with other local schools, to promote a shared understanding of how to develop an effective curriculum. As a result, arrangements to promote professional learning for all staff link well with the school's priorities for improvement. Leaders also evaluate pupils' learning and well-being thoroughly and match them carefully to the school's targets, such as developing pupils' emotional and social skills through effective staff training.

Leaders have established a range of well-planned monitoring activities to identify the school's strengths and areas for development. They gather a broad range of first-hand evidence to inform their evaluation of the school. For example, they consider the views of pupils, parents and staff effectively, and analyse information on how well the pupils are progressing rigorously. The school uses the findings from the self-evaluation processes to inform the school's development targets accurately. This includes addressing areas for improvement successfully, such as promoting family engagement with the school and improving attendance.

Leaders and staff develop pupils' use of most of the school grounds purposefully, which includes a woodland area. They have also improved indoor facilities, which has allowed pupils more opportunities to choose where and how they learn. For example, older pupils use the newly created reading areas in their classrooms effectively. However, the outdoor provision for younger pupils is not well-resourced. This restricts the opportunities for pupils to develop their skills through a broad range of learning experiences.

Governors are supportive of the school. They understand their roles and fulfil their responsibilities well, for example in areas such as financial management and safeguarding practices. They keep updated with their own knowledge of national priorities, such as the Curriculum for Wales, ALN reform and the impact of poverty on the lives of parents and pupils within their own community. Governors are assigned to areas of responsibility that are in line with their levels of expertise and hold the school to account effectively against an agreed set of criteria. For example, they recognise the school's progress over recent years and support the priorities to improve pupils' basic and social skills.

Governors have an accurate and detailed picture of the school gained through participating in activities, such as listening to pupils and looking at their books. They also hold regular discussions with staff and receive informative reports from the headteacher. They liaise closely with staff to ensure that there are suitable procedures to promote the importance of healthy eating and drinking among pupils. As a result, governors contribute a positive voice in moving the school forward.

Leaders manage the budget effectively and allocate resources to meet the school's needs well. This includes the pupil development grant, which the school uses effectively to support pupils, such as those eligible for free school meals.

The school keeps parents well informed of any developments at the school and their children's learning. This includes the use of social media and the presence of staff at drop-off and pick-up times. Parents feel that the school is a safe and caring environment. They appreciate how quickly leaders and staff respond to any concerns that they raise, and this is a strong aspect of school life.

Evidence base of the report

Before an inspection, inspectors:

- analyse the outcomes from the parent/carer and pupil questionnaires and consider the views of teachers and the governing body through their questionnaire responses

During an inspection, inspectors normally:

- hold a meeting with parents/carers to hear their views on the school and its effectiveness
- meet the headteacher, governors, senior and middle leaders (where appropriate) and individual teachers to evaluate the impact of the school's work
- meet pupils to discuss their work, to listen to them read and to gain their views about various aspects of their school
- meet groups of pupils in leadership roles, such as representatives from the school council and eco-committee
- visit a broad sample of classes, including learning support groups and undertake a variety of learning walks to observe pupils learning and to see staff teaching in a range of settings, including classrooms, support groups and in outdoor areas
- where appropriate, visit the specialist resource base within the school to see pupils' learning
- observe and speak to pupils at lunch and break times and at a sample of after-school clubs, where appropriate
- attend assemblies and daily acts of collective worship
- look closely at the school's self-evaluation processes
- consider the school's improvement plan and look at evidence to show how well the school has taken forward planned improvements
- scrutinise a range of school documents, including information on pupil assessment and progress, records of meetings of staff and the governing body, information on pupils' well-being, including the safeguarding of pupils, and records of staff training and professional development

After the on-site inspection and before the publication of the report, Estyn:

- review the findings of the inspection alongside the supporting evidence from the inspection team in order to validate, moderate and ensure the quality of the inspection

Copies of the report

Copies of this report are available from the school and from the Estyn website (www.estyn.gov.wales)

The report was produced in accordance with Section 28 of the Education Act 2005.

Every possible care has been taken to ensure that the information in this document is accurate at the time of publication. Any enquiries or comments regarding this document/publication should be addressed to:

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