



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

A report on

Gnoll Primary School

**Wellfield Avenue
Neath
SA11 1AQ**

Date of inspection: November 2023

by

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

About Gnoll Primary School

Name of provider	Gnoll 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	342
Pupils of statutory school age	263
Number in nursery classes	49
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%)	42.8%
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%)	26.6%
Percentage of pupils who speak Welsh at home	*
Percentage of pupils with English as an additional language	2.3%
Date of headteacher appointment	01/09/2011
Date of previous Estyn inspection (if applicable)	28/06/2016
Start date of inspection	20/11/2023

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

Gnoll Primary School is a caring community where pupils feel safe and happy, and make effective progress. Nearly all pupils forge positive relationships with their peers and staff alike and demonstrate high levels of respect for one another's cultures. They enjoy coming to school and are enthusiastic about their learning. Pupils know that staff expect them to behave well and respect everyone in the school and the community. Pupils are proud to be part of such a highly inclusive school. Many pupils participate enthusiastically in pupil voice groups and work to improve the school.

The school places a strong emphasis on supporting the well-being of all. There are strong relationships with parents and families and the school provides an effective range of support in collaboration with outside agencies. Provision for pupils with additional learning needs (ALN) is highly beneficial. The work of the school's learning support centre, 'The Rainbow' classes, is particularly effective. Pupils are fully included in the life of the school and nearly all make strong progress. There is a strong culture of safeguarding across the school.

Staff offer pupils a variety of learning experiences, which help to keep pupils interested in their learning. As a result, most pupils, including those with ALN, engage well with their learning, make good progress and achieve well. However, in a few instances teachers over-direct learning and this hinders pupils' independence, including knowing how to improve their own work.

The school's curriculum takes account of pupils' interests. Teachers and teaching assistants are skilful and support pupils to develop a range of skills well. However, provision to develop pupils' writing and numeracy across the curriculum is less well developed.

The acting headteacher provides strong and caring leadership and knows the school well. She is ably supported by the acting deputy headteacher and all staff. Staff and senior leaders form an effective, successful team. The team works purposefully alongside the governing body to secure improvements for the school. Together, they understand most of the school's strengths and areas for development.

Recommendations

- R1 Increase opportunities for pupils to develop their independence when learning, including improving their own work following feedback
- R2 Provide opportunities for pupils to write at length and to apply their numeracy skills across the curriculum
- R3 Continue to improve attendance

What happens next

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

Main evaluation

Learning

A majority of pupils begin school with skills at a level below those expected for their age. Most pupils, including those affected by socio-economic disadvantage, make good progress. Nearly all pupils identified as having additional learning needs (ALN), including those in the Rainbow classes, make effective progress from their individual starting points.

A minority of the youngest pupils communicate their ideas clearly. As they progress, many pupils' language skills develop effectively. Nearly all pupils, including the pupils in the Rainbow classes, make good progress in developing their communication skills as they move through the school. The youngest pupils listen attentively to stories and play alongside each other amicably. Reception pupils discuss purposefully the food available in their role play shop and explain which foods are the healthiest. When considering how to respond during a drama session, older pupils consider different vocabulary choices and categorise these words as positive or negative responses. They listen carefully to each other and build upon each other's ideas. By the time pupils are in Years 5 and 6, most listen well to others. For example, when discussing plans to change the school holidays, they give reasons to justify their thoughts and politely agree and disagree with one another.

Most pupils' reading skills develop well. Younger pupils, and those in the Rainbow classes, develop their knowledge of sounds and letters effectively. As they make progress, they use this knowledge successfully to build words when reading. A majority of older pupils read with pace and use the skills and knowledge they develop, in their work across the curriculum. Most pupils retell events and discuss characters from their reading with a clear understanding of the plot and characters' actions. By the time they are in Year 6, many pupils are fluent, enthusiastic readers.

Across the school, many pupils develop their writing skills appropriately. A few younger pupils form letters and numbers legibly. Older pupils develop and improve their writing by varying sentence structures and adding synonyms for effect. Overall, pupils make suitable progress in spelling and in using punctuation accurately. However, pupils do not write at length often enough and do not edit or redraft their writing to improve its quality.

Most pupils develop a secure knowledge and understanding of mathematics as they progress through the school. Younger pupils recognise and name 2D and 3D shapes and discuss the features of these shapes. Older pupils use their knowledge of place value to represent numbers in the thousands. By the time pupils are in Years 5 and 6, a majority develop as capable mathematicians, handling numbers in tens of

thousands when adding, multiplying and dividing. However, they do not have sufficient opportunities to apply their mathematical knowledge across the curriculum.

Most pupils are enthusiastic about the Welsh language and use basic vocabulary and language patterns to communicate well. Across the school, pupils respond accurately to familiar Welsh instructions and questions. During Helpwr Heddiw sessions, pupils use accurate pronunciation when asking and answering questions. Older pupils use Welsh competently and with appropriate expression when sharing their opinions.

Generally, pupils use digital skills efficiently to support their learning. Younger pupils create books to help other pupils learn about 2D shapes using text and images. As they progress through the school, pupils improve, develop and apply their digital skills, for example to create posters and presentations using digital programmes. Older pupils interrogate a database to solve a 'whodunnit' and use a spreadsheet with formulae to plan a disco within a budget.

Overall, pupils develop their physical skills well. Nursery pupils deftly build a road and nimbly hold cars to run along it. Reception pupils use dough and twigs to make models of hedgehogs. They place the twigs precisely to represent the spines on their backs. Older pupils enjoy opportunities to take part in physical exercise during a gymnastics lesson. While warming up they swiftly change direction, dodge and turn to avoid each other. They work well individually and collaboratively to lithely shape their bodies to represent letters.

Across the school pupils participate enthusiastically in creative activities. In Year 2, pupils use natural items, including leaves, effectively to create a large butterfly from objects sourced during outdoor learning. Older pupils reflect on music they hear, and discuss the mood of the music and the effect it has on their emotions.

When provided with the opportunity, many pupils work well independently and collaboratively. They are beginning to use success criteria to guide their work. However, during lessons where staff over-direct the learning, pupils do not develop their independent learning skills well enough.

Well-being and attitudes to learning

Pupils across the school, including those in the Rainbow classes, show respect and kindness towards staff and each other in formal and informal situations. Pupils are happy, polite and courteous and interact with their friends, staff and visitors positively. Behaviour is a strength of the school. Pupils enjoy coming to school and appreciate the experiences they have when they are in school. Many pupils feel safe and secure in school and think that staff listen to their views carefully. Many pupils undertake leadership roles and participate well in a good range of effective pupil leadership groups. This is a strong feature of the school. Pupils in these groups identify and suggest potential improvements to school experiences and work with staff to implement changes as necessary. For example, pupils have established their own after-school football club, organise sports tournaments with local schools and raise money for new playground equipment. The School Senedd consists of the chairs and vice chairs from each pupil leadership group. The Senedd works closely with school leaders on improvement priorities including the recent successful work to improve attendance.

The nurturing ethos of the school is a strength and as a result most pupils enjoy positive relationships with staff and their peers. This results in pupils engaging in their learning and developing as confident contributors to school life. Most pupils have a clear understanding of classroom routines and resources, which support their well-being positively. For example, the school's regulation zones and calm areas help pupils to understand and manage their emotions well.

A minority of pupils take part in after-school clubs such as craft and Ju-Jitsu. Pupils who attend the dance club do so with high levels of enthusiasm and enjoyment and are proud to perform popular musicals to parents and community members.

Most pupils are developing well as ethically informed citizens. They talk knowledgeably about healthy eating and drinking and the importance of keeping fit. Pupils are aware of their rights and identify purposeful links in their learning, which enable them to empathise with others. For example, older pupils make sound comparisons between the experiences of children in Victorian times to those working today in mines in the Congo. Pupils develop a suitable knowledge of people of different backgrounds, cultures and ethnicities. They participate in a range of activities during the year, which help them to learn about and celebrate diversity.

Most pupils engage positively with their learning. For example, most younger pupils contribute to Welsh oracy sessions with zest. They are visibly proud of how successfully they answer simple questions and sing Welsh songs with delight.

Across the school, most pupils attend well to their learning. Many pupils discuss their learning appropriately. They are courteous when their teachers or other pupils are talking and respect each other's views, maintain concentration well and are resilient during activities. For example, younger pupils show a high degree of focus when making 2D shapes from twigs in the outdoor area, being careful to ensure that their shapes have the correct features.

Many pupils collaborate well and encourage each other sensitively during lessons. They recognise the challenge some pupils face and show empathy and compassion. A few older pupils support their friends to achieve success in mathematics by discussing and demonstrating the method they have used. Nearly all pupils in the Rainbow classes enjoy learning and approach their activities with strong levels of enthusiasm and effort. Their confidence and self-esteem develop well and a few integrate positively into mainstream classes. They listen and respond to simple instructions and understand the class routines. As a result, pupils in the Rainbow class adapt well to change and access the full curriculum.

Teaching and learning experiences

The school is beginning to develop a broad and balanced curriculum. Teachers provide a range of learning experiences through which pupils develop their learning well. In most cases, teachers provide pupils with relevant contexts for their learning. For example, older pupils learn about the impact of the mining industry on the local area. Overall, the school provides a range of purposeful opportunities to progressively develop pupils' mathematics and language skills. However, there are too few opportunities for pupils to write at length, to improve their writing through

drafting their work or to apply their numeracy skills in purposeful ways across the curriculum.

The school enriches its curriculum effectively through visits to, and activities in, the local area and further afield. For example, older pupils develop their cultural and historical awareness through visiting a colliery to gain an understanding of the difficulties suffered by children during the Victorian era. The school uses its community links well to support its curriculum. For example, younger pupils develop their awareness of local causes purposefully through working with the local food bank.

Nearly all staff develop highly beneficial working relationships with pupils. Teachers establish classroom environments that are calm and supportive and pupils interact positively with each other and staff. Teachers plan useful opportunities for pupils to develop their understanding of equality and diversity, including learning about different cultures through the curriculum. Most older pupils recognise the contribution to the world and modern society of people who are from a range of cultures and backgrounds. For example, pupils investigate the number of countries currently at war, the impact on people and the difficulties faced by victims of war.

There is a good range of strategies, which enable most pupils with additional needs to access the school's curriculum. Teaching assistants provide effective additional support in lessons and through targeted interventions. In many cases, teachers provide effective support and scaffold lessons effectively. This is particularly the case with pupils in the Rainbow classes, where all staff are highly skilled at meeting the needs of pupils through high quality learning experiences, high expectations and sensitive support and guidance.

Most teachers have a secure knowledge of the concepts and skills they are teaching. They provide clear explanations and learning objectives to support pupils to understand what is needed to be successful in the lesson. However, teachers do not provide sufficient opportunities for pupils to develop independence in their learning. In these heavily structured lessons, most pupils' ability to think creatively and guide their own learning is limited.

In many instances, teachers provide pupils with useful feedback during lessons. In these lessons, pupils have a clear understanding of what they have done well. However, too often teachers do not provide feedback that enables pupils to develop their learning further or address misconceptions. As a result, pupils do not always know how to improve their work. The school uses a range of assessments to gather data and monitor pupils' progress appropriately. Teachers and leaders discuss every pupil's learning each term and use these dialogues to plan for pupils' next steps in learning.

Care, support and guidance

School staff consider pupil well-being to be the highest priority within the school. As a result, the school provides a caring and nurturing environment. Staff develop strong and effective relationships with pupils and each other. This results in pupils feeling well supported and cared for. Nearly all staff skilfully use a calm, positive approach to managing behaviour within the school. They work exceptionally hard to engage and

encourage pupils to participate. Staff know their pupils extremely well and provide them with sensitive support for their behaviour and emotions. The school provides a wide range of well-being and learning support for pupils. Knowledgeable and experienced teaching assistants provide useful interventions and pupils enjoy taking part in these sessions. As a result, most pupils in need of additional support make good progress.

Provision for supporting pupils with ALN is strong. The school's additional learning needs co-ordinators (ALNCos) provide effective leadership. They identify, monitor and review pupils' progress effectively and ensure that staff have a deep understanding of pupils' progress. With the support of the ALNCos, nearly all teachers set clear, specific targets to support pupils' learning. Teachers work collaboratively with individual pupils to ensure that each pupil has an opportunity to contribute their views when setting and reviewing targets and celebrating successes. The school works hard to communicate effectively with parents and keeps them informed of their children's progress. Parents are regularly invited to review progress. The school works closely with a wide range of outside agencies. This collaborative approach supports pupils successfully, allowing them to engage better in their learning.

Staff encourage pupils to participate in pupil leadership groups. These include the Eco Committee and Criw Cymraeg. Each group sets clear targets for their work and provides useful information for the rest of the school. For example, the Digital Leaders promote keeping safe online. Pupils in leadership roles work profitably with leaders, developing a series of strategies to improve school priorities, such as the successful action taken to make recent improvements to attendance and punctuality. Actions include a robust system for monitoring and communication in cases where attendance has been identified as needing improvement. Leaders work closely with parents and pupils and as a result rates of attendance are improving.

The school provides opportunities for pupils to explore rights and values. Teachers refer to children's rights in their teaching, and assemblies focus on a different value each month. Daily acts of collective worship are well planned and appropriate. Teachers make clear links with the school's behaviour policy, for example in supporting younger pupils to identify and name their feelings.

Teachers plan regular opportunities for pupils to consider equality, diversity and inclusion in relation to pupils' experiences and staff promote these values suitably. This teaches pupils awareness, empathy and to embrace and celebrate differences.

The school provides a range of extra-curricular activities and school visits. Teachers invite visitors to support learning and strengthen local community links. For example, a local artist works with pupils to create work that celebrates the heritage of the local area.

Staff promote a highly robust culture of safeguarding. Leaders monitor pupil attendance carefully and this is having a positive impact.

Leadership and management

The acting headteacher provides strong and stable leadership. She is ably assisted by an effective and dedicated acting deputy headteacher and the senior leadership team. Roles and responsibilities are well established and leaders carry out their work diligently. Senior leaders work constructively with pupils, staff, governors and parents to establish a clear and shared vision for the school based on a strong culture of inclusion and pupil well-being.

School leaders successfully ensure that the school is wholly inclusive and that most pupils, including those in the Rainbow classes, make good progress from their starting points. The school's work to address the impact of poverty on education is a strength. Sensitive and carefully planned provision ensures that the individual learning and well-being needs of pupils who are experiencing poverty are addressed well. The pupil development grant is used effectively to deploy staff to provide individualised support for these pupils.

Self-evaluation is robust and in most cases its findings are an accurate reflection of the school's strengths and areas for improvement. The current improvement priorities reflect the school's needs, local and national priorities purposefully. The school's work to address the findings of the previous inspection is strong in many aspects and there is a good track record of bringing about improvements. For example, the school's relentless focus on improving pupils' reading since the pandemic has been successful.

Leadership responsibilities are distributed well and senior leaders ensure that all staff contribute purposefully to school improvement. For example, leadership of Welsh is strong and has ensured that the Welsh language has a high profile across the school. All staff, including teaching assistants, are positive role models for the language and most pupils enjoy their experience of learning Welsh.

The school places a high priority on developing staff. It has a strong track record of providing them with the necessary skills and experience to develop their careers both in the school and in other settings. The school's arrangements for performance management are effective and all staff are fully involved. Individual targets reflect whole-school priorities and professional development needs. Performance management is used well to support staff in improving their practice by providing access to a good range of professional learning opportunities. There is a strong culture of sharing effective practice within the school. All teachers have opportunities to observe each other, and particularly effective practice is highlighted in staff meetings and modelled at appropriate times. The use of triads provides valuable opportunities for staff to work together to support improvements in each other's practice. This has been beneficial in establishing greater consistency in the quality of teaching across the school.

Overall, the school uses its financial resources well. The deployment of well-trained and highly skilled staff is prioritised and this impacts positively on the progress pupils make. The school bursar, headteacher and governing body work together well to ensure that they have good oversight of the school's finances. However, the budget is not used well enough to develop and maintain the school building. As a result,

some areas of the school are unkempt and the quality of the learning environment is variable.

The governing body provides the school with strong support. Governors have a valuable range of skills and experiences, which benefit the work of the school positively. For example, the school uses governors' professional experience of supporting families across the local area well to support its work to improve attendance. They have suitable oversight of the school's arrangements for healthy eating and drinking. Most governors have good first-hand knowledge of the school's strengths and areas for improvement through involvement in self-evaluation activities such as learning walks, work scrutiny and listening to learners. Governors receive appropriate levels of safeguarding training and support the school's strong safeguarding culture well.

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:

Publications Section

Estyn

Anchor Court, Keen Road

Cardiff

CF24 5JW or by email to publications@estyn.gov.wales

This and other Estyn publications are available on our website: www.estyn.gov.wales

© Crown Copyright 2024: This report may be re used free of charge in any format or medium provided that it is re used accurately and not used in a misleading context. The material must be acknowledged as Crown copyright and the title of the report specified.

Publication date: 25/01/2024