



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

**A report on**

**Gilfach Fargoed Primary School**

**Vere Street  
Gilfach  
Bargoed  
CF81 8LB**

**Date of inspection: November 2023**

**by**

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

## About Gilfach Fargoed Primary School

Name of provider	Gilfach Fargoed Primary School
Local authority	Caerphilly County Borough Council
Language of the provider	English
Type of school	Primary
Religious character	
Number of pupils on roll	186
Pupils of statutory school age	132
Number in nursery classes	32
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%)	36.5%
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%)	3.8%
Percentage of pupils who speak Welsh at home	0.0%
Percentage of pupils with English as an additional language	
Date of headteacher appointment	01/09/2014
Date of previous Estyn inspection (if applicable)	15/03/2016
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](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

This school is part of a federation, characterised by strong leadership, high expectations, good quality classroom provision, and a focus on the well-being of staff and pupils. The headteacher has fostered a successful learning culture where everyone, staff and pupils, feel proud to be members of the school community, and want to do their best.

The federation leaders are strategic in their approach to partnership working. This benefits the staff, in terms of their professional learning, building capacity and effective deployment. Most importantly, it benefits the pupils in receiving effective teaching, that results in notable progress from their starting points. As a result, by the end of their time at the school, nearly all pupils achieve well across the curriculum, and develop their self-confidence and sense of empathy and responsibility. The provision for most areas of learning is strong, although leaders have rightly recognised the need to strengthen the provision to develop pupils' wider mathematical skills and ICT (information and communication technology) systematically.

Teachers devise exciting, engaging topics and activities that their pupils enjoy. The professional relationships between staff and the pupils are a particular strength of the school. As a result, classrooms are well resourced, purposeful, happy learning environments where learning proceeds at a good pace. Pupils influence the learning appropriately and contribute their views about what interests them. In the best examples, teachers allow pupils to think for themselves, but this is not always the case and, occasionally, teachers over-direct the learning.

Teaching assistants provide skilled, worthwhile support for any pupil that may require help to keep pace with their peers. Staff care deeply for their pupils and know them well as individuals. In addition, leaders work supportively with families wherever appropriate, for example to help them to improve their child's attendance.

## Recommendations

- R1 Ensure that teaching and learning experiences develop pupils' digital and mathematical skills, coherently and systematically
- R2 Share the strong practice across the school to support pupils to think for themselves and extend their independent learning skills

## What happens next

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

Estyn will invite the school to prepare a case study on its work in relation to, Establishing a cohesive team for a successful federation, for dissemination on Estyn's website.

## Main evaluation

### Learning

Overall, most pupils at Gilfach Fargoed Primary school make strong progress from low baselines. Most leave the school at least at the level expected for their age. There is no notable difference over time between the progress of the pupils eligible for free school meals and their peers. Pupils with additional learning needs make strong progress, in line with their individual targets.

When they start at the school, many pupils' speech and language skills are below those normally found for their age. Most make strong progress in learning to speak clearly, broadening their vocabulary, and learn to listen carefully and respond appropriately. By Year 6, most communicate effectively and confidently with their peers and with adults and share their opinions freely. For example, they debate maturely whether the Brecon Beacons should have been renamed as 'Bannau Brycheiniog'.

Many pupils make strong progress in learning to read. Younger pupils quickly learn to recognise the sounds that different letters and combinations of letters make. By Year 2, most use their phonic knowledge well to read and write simple words accurately. They identify patterns in words and sounds and recognise everyday words at sight. As pupils move through the school, most develop strong reading skills, for example skimming and scanning a text to retrieve information efficiently, by searching for key words and phrases. They think beyond the literal and give thoughtful reasons for answers. By Year 6, most read suitable extended texts fluently, and a few read widely for pleasure.

Most pupils make strong progress in developing their writing skills. The youngest pupils use their mark-making skills to form letters in their names. As they progress, most younger pupils learn to form their letters correctly. By Year 2, many write interesting sentences for specific purposes and spell simple words accurately. Most older pupils write using well-chosen vocabulary and use thoughtful sentences that they punctuate accurately. More able pupils weave sentences successfully into paragraphs that develop a thought or an idea. For example, pupils in Years 5 and 6 write well-organised, detailed, and accurate explanations of how hurricanes are formed, as part of their work on climate change. However, across the curriculum, the opportunities that pupils have to write at length are, on occasions, constrained by worksheets.

Across the school, most pupils' speaking and listening skills in Welsh develop successfully. Most pupils have a sound grasp of basic language patterns, appropriate to their age and prior learning. They show a sound understanding of familiar Welsh phrases and respond appropriately to straightforward questions and instructions given by staff. For example, they enjoy engaging in simple conversations about

themselves, their families and where they live. Nearly all pupils demonstrate a positive attitude towards learning the Welsh language.

Most pupils make strong progress in developing their mathematical skills, particularly their understanding of number and calculation. From an early age, many pupils develop a clear understanding of place value and calculate straightforward sums mentally, at an age-appropriate level. Older pupils halve and double numbers quickly and accurately and use their times tables knowledge to calculate fractions and percentages. Pupils' ability to manipulate number is a strength of the school. However, a majority of pupils do not develop their knowledge and understanding of shape and space, and data to the same level. Most older pupils apply their numeracy skills confidently across the curriculum, when given the opportunity. For example, pupils in Years 4 and 5 design a flood-proof home for the island of Watu, sticking within a given budget for materials.

Most pupils use digital technology confidently across the school. For example, reception pupils create and programme toy robots from plastic blocks to travel across the desk. As they move through the school, most pupils enjoy experimenting with basic coding programmes and collaborate well to devise online presentations and documents. However, leaders recognise that the provision does not yet fully develop older pupils' IT skills, for example in manipulating data in spreadsheets.

Many younger pupils develop their creativity purposefully, for example creating leaf necklaces in the forest area. They develop their fine motor skills successfully, concentrating to weave the thread through a hole they have punched in the leaves. Most older pupils enjoy the opportunities that staff are beginning to provide for them to think creatively about how they might present their work. For example, when informing others of what is happening to Fairbourne (due to sea levels rising), a few groups of older pupils decide to present their work as a poem or an interview, instead of a presentation. Most pupils develop their physical skills well through the range of activities provided, particularly in the Forest School.

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

The school ensures that pupils' standards of well-being are high. This is a notable strength and a valuable focus of the school's work. Most pupils enjoy their time at school and demonstrate pride at being part of an inclusive and caring community.

Relationships between staff and pupils are particularly strong and these high levels of respect is conducive to their learning progress. They feel safe and staff listen to their views sensitively and take them in to account when considering decisions that affect them. Nearly all pupils behave well, and they are courteous and welcoming to adults and visitors. Most pupils show care and consideration for each other and collaborate effectively, showing respect for the contributions of other pupils.

Nearly all pupils are developing well as capable and aspirational learners. They have a positive attitude towards learning, show strong interest in their work and most talk confidently and enthusiastically about school life. Most pupils listen attentively to teachers' instructions and concentrate well on their work during lessons. They collaborate successfully in groups and in pairs, and many make positive contributions to class discussions.

Nearly all pupils draw on strategies to support their emotional well-being effectively. For example, pupils make use of the classroom displays as a resource to help them overcome any challenges they may face in their work. As a result, most pupils develop confidence and resilience when persevering with their work.

Most pupils are developing their knowledge of children's rights well. They have a mature understanding of their rights and the rights of others across the world. They have an informed appreciation of how some children's circumstances can affect how they live and the barriers they may face. For example, many pupils understand the story of Malala Yousafzai and the stance she took to make sure she attended school. This supports pupils to develop their awareness of fairness, equality, sustainability and as a result they are developing their understanding of how to be an ethical and informed citizen.

Many pupils take an active part in the life of the school by taking on beneficial leadership roles through a range of inclusive pupil groups. They fulfil their responsibilities skilfully and conscientiously. Representatives undertake their work proudly and make a valuable contribution to the school's life and work. This includes leading whole-school assemblies on matters that are important to them. For example, the Criw Cymraeg encourage the use of Welsh around the school and raise awareness of Welsh culture through assemblies, rewarding use of Welsh and taking part in Welsh games at break times.

Most pupils make informed choices in respect of how to eat healthily and keep hydrated. Pupils make good use of the school's healthy fruit snack shop and are encouraged to bring water bottles and fruit from home. Recently the Wellbeing Ambassadors pupil group have been proactive in encouraging drinking water and eating healthy snacks and have sent a letter to parents to support their work.

Nearly all pupils access the school's outdoor areas enthusiastically and embrace their outdoor learning experiences with pleasure. For example, they visit the forest area and make energetic use of the play and games equipment during playtimes.

Most pupils benefit from a suitable range of extra-curricular activities that promote their physical and mental well-being, such as the fitness and games clubs. Nearly all pupils have a good understanding of the need to be careful when using the internet and know how to keep themselves safe online.

Although school attendance rates dipped significantly after the pandemic, attendance rates have now improved. The attendance of pupils receiving free school meals has improved but not as well as their peers. The school has robust arrangements in place to monitor attendance.

### **Teaching and learning experiences**

The school provides a broad and balanced curriculum that aligns effectively to the vision and principles of Curriculum for Wales and the school's ethos of developing 'learners for life'. The planned activities are exciting and engage most pupils well. Teachers successfully motivate pupils to persevere and succeed in their learning.

Across the school, teachers and support staff know their pupils well and develop strong, supportive relationships, creating a nurturing learning environment. The school's curriculum supports the development of pupils' social and emotional skills effectively. The strong focus on well-being has a notable impact on pupils' attitudes to learning. All staff across the school have high expectations of pupils' behaviour and learning.

Teachers plan to develop pupils' language skills successfully. A particular strength is the way in which teachers foster pupils' love of reading through the good use of well-chosen high-quality children's fiction. This contributes well to developing vocabulary, imagination, and a love of literature, both within the language lessons and in topics across the curriculum.

The planning and provision for mathematics is comprehensive and, as a result, most pupils make strong progress in developing their number and calculation skills especially. A noteworthy feature is the detailed support for teaching assistants, who deliver effective intervention groups. Teachers plan progressive, purposeful opportunities for pupils to apply their number skills and calculation highly effectively across the curriculum. For example, in Years 5 and 6, pupils apply their skills to calculate the possible permutations and outcomes from the Rugby autumn series. However, currently mathematics planning does not develop pupils' shape and data skills coherently. There is too much time between the planned lessons, and as a result pupils forget the skills that they have previously mastered. In addition, there are too few timely, matched opportunities to practise these skills across the curriculum.

Teachers plan appropriate opportunities for pupils to develop their literacy and communication skills using digital devices and programs. However, teachers' planning for the development of pupils' digital skills across a range of competencies is at an early stage of development.

The provision to develop pupils' Welsh language skills is progressive and systematic. Staff are very effective role models and use a variety of greetings and instructions and provide encouraging praise to pupils within their lessons.

Teachers plan to develop the skills that pupils need progressively across the school. They work collaboratively and effectively with local schools to ensure a consistent approach. Staff plan real life activities that interest their pupils and motivate and engage them, for example through weekly cookery lessons as part of the 'Foody Friday' activities and through raising pupils' aspirations of the world of work. Teachers plan appropriate opportunities for pupils to develop their creativity and independence skills, for example in deciding how to present their work. However, on occasions, teachers' over-direct pupils' learning. Where this happens, pupils do not have enough opportunities to think for themselves and develop as independent learners.

Teachers across the school have strong subject knowledge and plan specific objectives for learning. They explain tasks clearly to pupils and help them understand what to do. Most lessons challenge pupils appropriately. Teachers use questions well to assess pupils' understanding. All teachers provide regular feedback to pupils. In most cases, this feedback is positive and identifies what pupils are doing well.

Recently, teachers have developed further strategies to encourage pupils to improve their work. For example, they add additional challenging questions, or ask pupils to redraft a sentence.

Teachers organise their classrooms well, to create an effective environment and a positive ethos for learning. Most use resources effectively in their lessons. For example, in their number work, pupils routinely use readily available counting sticks and beads to support their progress. Staff provide valuable opportunities for all pupils to benefit from learning outdoors through the effective, purposeful and regular use of the well-resourced forest school areas. However, generally, teachers do not plan well enough for the younger pupils to have a choice of when they wish to use the outdoor provision.

Nearly all staff have highly effective professional working relationships with pupils, which foster a supportive and inclusive environment. Support staff are exceptionally skilled, and teachers deploy them well. They work to ensure that all pupils make strong progress in their learning, not only during intervention groups but on a day-to-day basis to support pupils who need it. For example, teaching assistants reinforce class work with smaller groups of pupils, if needed.

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

The school is a caring and nurturing community that prioritises the care, support and guidance of its pupils and staff. As a result, both staff and pupils feel cared for, respected and highly valued.

Well-being has a high focus in the life of the school and is a particular strength. Leaders identify early any pupils who are at risk of not engaging in their learning and provide effective intervention strategies to address their needs. Leaders place a high priority on improving the well-being of pupils and, as a result, most are happy, well behaved, and ready to learn. The school provides a range of bespoke interventions that support the more vulnerable pupils well. These allow pupils time and space to reflect on their behaviours in a calm and protective environment. As a result, these pupils are building their resilience to attend school for increasing periods of time during the school day.

The school considers and monitors the well-being and learning needs of pupils successfully. Staff work well in partnership with pupils and their families to create personalised plans to best meet their individual needs. Staff care deeply about the lives and needs of these pupils. For example, the care staff show to the pupils with behavioural and emotional needs improves the trust these pupils have with other adults and children within the school.

The school promotes the spiritual, moral, social, and cultural development of pupils well. Teachers provide worthwhile opportunities for pupils to appreciate diversity and to celebrate differences, for example through whole-school assemblies, visits, and discussions about different faiths such as Christianity, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Islam. As a result, nearly all pupils reflect on their own values and beliefs and challenge stereotypes. Staff provide pupils with worthwhile experiences that encourage them to consider their rights and the needs of others. For example, pupils take part in events to stop racism in school and the community. Leaders provide



pupils with valuable opportunities to engage with events in the local community. They take part in Remembrance activities, celebrate Harvest festival at a local church and include the community in their enterprise initiatives where they sell recycled and up cycled products.

Pupils' Welsh identity, heritage and culture is actively encouraged through whole-school initiatives, assemblies, and participation in Eisteddfod competitions. This ensures that most pupils have a developing awareness of Welsh traditions and an appreciation for its language. The school provides positive opportunities for pupils to visit the locality including Bannau Brycheiniog Visitor Centre, The Blackwood Miners' Institute and Castell Coch. Staff provide pupils with worthwhile opportunities to make a positive difference to the lives of others in the community and the wider world, for example through organising 'litter picks' to improve the local environment and participating in fund raising activities to raise money for local and national charities.

Provision for pupils identified as having ALN is strong and early interventions are a strength of the school. The ALN co-ordinator works well with external partners to ensure that there is effective identification, tracking and support for individuals. Staff members have a clear understanding of the needs of pupils, including developing extensive pupil profiles that are monitored well in class. Multi-agency target setting reviews are effective in identifying what pupils have achieved over time and set targets for next steps. As a result, most parents feel that they know what the school is doing to help their child make progress. These arrangements ensure that most of the pupils who benefit from additional support make good progress towards their learning goals.

Teachers provide pupils with meaningful opportunities to take on leadership roles during their time at the school. As a result, most pupils feel that their ideas are listened to, and that they contribute effectively to the life and work of the school. Members of the pupil-led groups collaborate successfully on priority areas within the school to bring about desired improvements. For example, the well-being ambassadors have encouraged pupils to give their opinions on how the school could promote healthy eating. As a result, there is an improvement in the range of fruit eaten during break times.

The school has robust systems for monitoring pupils' attendance. Staff promote a positive culture of safeguarding, which ensures that the welfare of all pupils has the highest priority. Leaders monitor pupil attendance carefully and provide appropriate help and support to pupils and their families to support them attend school regularly and punctually. As a result, nearly all pupils feel safe in school.

### **Leadership and management**

The headteacher is an effective leader who sets high expectations for herself, her staff, and pupils. Since her appointment as headteacher across the federation she has established strong working relationships with all staff across both schools. As a result, there is a shared understanding of the schools' aims and vision of 'two schools, one team', that is understood by all. There is a real sense of a shared collaborative approach that permeates both schools. The headteacher is a compassionate leader who understands the needs of the individual schools' communities extremely well. Leaders prioritise the well-being and emotional needs of

pupils and, as a result, all staff are committed to providing a safe and secure environment for pupils to thrive and excel.

The headteacher models reflective and thoughtful leadership and is strategic in her approach. She has established an effective use of distributed leadership throughout the federation, which works to the advantage of both schools, both being stronger as a result. She is ably supported by the senior leadership team. Leaders make effective use of the capacity within the federation to improve important elements of teaching and learning. For example, the deputy headteacher shares and models best practice of teaching mathematics across the two schools. Leaders ensure that there are clear processes and procedures, which are implemented consistently by all staff.

There is a highly effective system across the federation to develop teachers' professional practice. Leaders use coaching and mentoring activities effectively. This has a positive impact on improving the quality of teaching. Coaching allows time for teachers to reflect on their practice and provides a worthwhile platform for staff to share strong practices across the schools. For example, sharing effective practice in the teaching of guided reading has resulted in improvements in pupils' reading skills.

There are clear, well-defined opportunities for all staff to develop their leadership skills. All staff are encouraged to take on leadership roles and lead on priority areas within the school development plan. They monitor and review progress against actions set to ensure that impact, consistency of provision, and progress is made in a timely manner.

Leaders have developed a robust cycle of self-evaluation and improvement planning practices across the federation, to which all stakeholders contribute successfully. Leaders, including the governors, use a range of first-hand evidence to support them gain an accurate picture of the strengths and areas of development in teaching and learning across the federation.

Leaders provide a wide range of professional learning opportunities for staff linked to the school improvement priorities and their professional standards. This supports specific areas of school improvement effectively, such as developing a set of teaching principles based on the pedagogical principles of the Curriculum for Wales. This focus on effective teaching and developing leaders has ignited a passion for learning within the school staff. As a result, many members have taken on further studies to extend and develop their knowledge. For example, the deputy head has been successful in completing her National Professional Qualification for Headship accreditation and several teachers are studying for a Master's post graduate qualification.

Leaders work thoughtfully to develop positive working relationships with parents and communicate with them well to keep them informed about events at the school and the progress that their children are making.

The headteacher provides highly detailed reports to governors, which ensures that they are well informed about progress in teaching and learning. Leaders and governors pay close regard to the impact of poverty on pupils' attainment. They provide worthwhile opportunities for pupils to access a range of activities and experiences where finances maybe a barrier. Leaders work appropriately to oversee

the allocation of each school's budget, grant spending and other resources to ensure that they have a beneficial impact on pupils and their learning. Governors provide appropriate support and have a clear understanding of national priorities such as the federation's work to develop its curriculum and to meet the requirements of ALN reform. Governors ensure that the school promotes healthy eating and drinking appropriately.

Leaders have a secure understanding of the progress made by learners. Through purposeful review meetings, they carefully monitor pupils' progress in developing their key skills. Leaders use this information strategically to allocate resources to meet the needs of pupils, in particular those who require targeted support with their basic skills and their emotional health and well-being needs.

Leaders make best use of opportunities for teachers to collaborate with other schools in their local area. These offer beneficial opportunities for teachers to share their own good practices as well as developing their own skills. For example, the recent focus on developing expressive arts across local schools resulted in pupils creating a dance, which they performed on the stage at a local Miners' Institute.

## 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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