



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

A report on

Derwendeg Primary School

**Hengoed Road
Cefn Hengoed
Hengoed
CF82 7HP**

Date of inspection: February 2024

by

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

About Derwendeg Primary School

Name of provider	Derwendeg Primary School
Local authority	Caerphilly County Borough Council
Language of the provider	English
Type of school	Primary
Religious character	None
Number of pupils on roll	177
Pupils of statutory school age	136
Number in nursery classes	23
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 23.7%)	44.1%
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 13.2%)	13.2%
Percentage of pupils who speak Welsh at home	0.0%
Percentage of pupils with English as an additional language	*
Date of headteacher appointment	01/09/2019
Date of previous Estyn inspection (if applicable)	07/12/2015
Start date of inspection	05/02/2024

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

Derwendeg Primary School is a caring and inclusive school with a strong sense of community. Most pupils enjoy their time in the school and value the working relationships they develop with staff and their peers. The school's nurturing ethos supports pupils to behave responsibly and to show courtesy to others in lessons and around the school. Most pupils settle to tasks readily and focus well on their learning. Many pupils make sound progress in developing their literacy, numeracy and digital skills, although they do not always extend their use of these fully enough in their wider learning.

Teachers provide a worthwhile variety of learning experiences, including a stimulating variety of visits and extra-curricular activities. They support pupils to develop their Welsh language skills effectively and provide beneficial opportunities for them to explore their locality and understand the wider world. Staff tailor provision to secure pupils' well-being and to meet their emotional needs successfully. This supports pupils to feel valued and to learn how to manage their feelings effectively. Teachers structure pupils' learning thoughtfully. They provide clear objectives in lessons and monitor pupils' progress carefully. However, overall, teachers manage pupils' learning too closely and this hinders their development as independent learners. They do not provide enough opportunities for pupils to develop and apply their skills at a suitably challenging level in their learning across the curriculum.

Leaders have successfully developed a committed staff team. They work well together to secure improvements, such as increasing rates of pupils' attendance and developing pupils' reading skills. However, leaders' evaluation of the quality of teaching does not focus closely enough on its impact on pupils' progress. The headteacher and governors understand the needs of the school community well. Staff work energetically to foster strong relationships with families who value the support the school provides.

Recommendations

- R1 Sharpen self-evaluation processes to focus more keenly on the quality of teaching and learning
- R2 Improve teaching to provide suitable challenge to all pupils and develop their independence as learners
- R3 Strengthen the curriculum to provide richer opportunities for pupils to develop and apply their skills and knowledge

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 start school with skills below those expected for their age. Many pupils across the range of socio-economic backgrounds, including those with additional learning needs (ALN), develop their skills, knowledge and understanding appropriately during their time in the school. Most pupils make good progress in developing their social skills. This supports them to engage with their learning effectively and to relate well to others.

Most pupils across the school listen respectfully to staff and to the views and ideas of their peers. A majority of the youngest pupils talk readily together and with familiar members of staff, often copying the vocabulary they hear adults use. Most pupils follow instructions readily and many are keen to respond to questions their teachers ask. Many older pupils explain their work clearly and enjoy reflecting on their learning during whole-class feedback in lessons. Where pupils are most engaged in their learning they share and justify their opinions enthusiastically.

Many pupils make good progress in developing their reading skills. The youngest pupils enjoy listening to, and join in enthusiastically with, a familiar story. Many younger pupils choose to explore books in their reading corner. They begin to develop their knowledge of letters and sounds effectively. By Year 2, many pupils use this knowledge to read suitably challenging texts confidently. As they move through the school, many pupils read with increasing fluency and accuracy. A minority of more able pupils read suitably challenging texts at a lively pace and with good intonation. They reflect on what they read to empathise with others and to infer motives for the way characters in a story behave. Many older pupils use their skills to identify relevant, specific information and to support their wider learning appropriately.

Many pupils make broadly suitable progress in developing their writing skills. The youngest pupils enjoy using resources to experiment with mark making independently. By Year 2, a majority of pupils begin to write at greater length, for instance to retell a familiar story. They use basic punctuation, such as capital letters and full stops, with increasing consistency. Older pupils write for a suitable variety of purposes in their literacy work. Most use simple plans to organise their writing appropriately, noting suitable words and phrases to include. However, many pupils do not broaden their vocabulary sufficiently to use more ambitious word choices in their writing. Older pupils in particular, do not write at length frequently enough in their literacy sessions or in their work across the curriculum. Overall, the quality of pupils' handwriting and presentation varies too much.

Most pupils show a positive attitude towards learning Welsh. Younger pupils recognise and use an increasing range of vocabulary, for instance to name colours and describe the weather. By Year 2, many pupils are familiar with a suitable variety of simple Welsh patterns and phrases. Older pupils extend their knowledge effectively to ask and respond to familiar questions, such as to share personal information about their lives and interests. Most pronounce words correctly and

speak confidently and without hesitation. A few older pupils extend their talk by using connectives and adjectives to express themselves more fully.

Overall, pupils' number skills develop well across the school. Younger pupils develop their early understanding of number suitably, for example by counting familiar objects, joining in with rhymes and using sticks to practise their number bonds to 10. By the time they reach Year 2, many pupils develop a secure understanding of place value and use this to carry out simple calculations correctly. Older pupils use written methods to add and subtract larger numbers effectively and are beginning to apply this understanding to solve simple problems successfully. Most pupils in Year 6 use their knowledge of angles to calculate the degrees of a turn as part of their digital coding work. However, pupils across the school do not always develop a wide enough range of mathematical skills or apply their knowledge purposefully in their wider learning.

Pupils develop their digital skills well across the school. Younger pupils experiment with programmable toys and create simple procedures to control their movement. As they move through the school, most pupils develop a wider range of skills. For example, they use the internet to research information for class topics. Older pupils create good quality presentations combining text, image and video, for instance to produce cooking instructions for healthy, low-cost meals. By the time they reach Year 6, most pupils develop their coding skills suitably, for instance by using an app to create and debug games.

Overall, most pupils make good progress in developing their physical skills. Younger pupils participate in activities indoors and outdoors that develop their motor skills and coordination successfully. For example, pupils in the nursery class show careful control when using a range of tools and materials to decorate their paint shop independently. Older pupils develop their hand-eye co-ordination, agility and fitness beneficially when practising their tennis skills.

Well-being and attitudes to learning

Relationships between pupils, parents and staff are strong, and as a result pupils feel well cared for in school. Most pupils behave well throughout the school day and show respect for adults and their peers. Nearly all are caring towards each other and work and play together well. Most pupils feel safe in school and know who to go to if they have a problem.

Many pupils have positive attitudes towards their learning and try their best in lessons. They participate purposefully during lessons, listening attentively and working conscientiously. Many pupils collaborate well with their peers when working with a partner or in small groups. Most pupils listen respectfully to the opinions of others and share their own thoughts and ideas confidently.

A few pupils are developing leadership skills and take on responsible roles in pupil groups such as the Criw Cymraeg. They carry out their duties enthusiastically and make sound decisions on behalf of their peers that benefit the school and its community. For example, members of the school's Heddlu Bach have been instrumental in improving safety for pupils and families by taking action to encourage

parents to park more responsibly. This has reduced pavement parking at the start and end of the school day significantly.

Most pupils understand the importance of acting sustainably. They learn how to take responsibility for the environment through their work on reducing the environmental damage caused by plastic. Pupils play an active role in leading the school's effort by recycling materials, promoting waste minimisation and carrying out litter picks in the neighbouring area.

Pupils have suitable opportunities to influence what they learn. They offer relevant ideas when planning new topics and make worthwhile suggestions about how they could best learn new skills. Most pupils reflect constructively on what they have achieved in lessons during weekly class feedback sessions. They appreciate the way teachers respond to their views, for instance by returning to work they are unsure about to help them understand it better.

Many pupils know how to keep fit and healthy and enjoy attending a variety of extra-curricular clubs that enhance their physical, creative and social skills beneficially. They understand the importance of eating a balanced diet and staying hydrated and clearly explain the value of regular exercise.

Most pupils understand the importance of regular attendance and punctuality. They appreciate the high priority the school places on attendance and as a result, attendance rates for all pupils, including those affected by socio-economic disadvantage are noteworthy.

Teaching and learning experiences

Teachers plan a suitable variety of worthwhile learning experiences that engage most pupils successfully. They make good use of visits and enrichment days to broaden pupils' experience and to motivate their interest. This includes valuable opportunities for pupils to participate in residential and international visits that broaden their knowledge of other localities and cultures. Teachers and leaders carefully consider potential barriers to learning for all pupils and take steps to ensure equitable access to the full range of experiences on offer.

Teachers plan themes that provide a coherent framework for pupils' learning. They provide opportunities for pupils to take responsibility for their learning by raising questions for their class to answer. Overall, the school's curriculum provides pupils with an appropriate breadth of experiences. However, teachers do not always make clear enough connections between different areas of learning and miss opportunities for pupils to deepen their knowledge and understanding about the topics they study. They do not provide enough opportunities for pupils to apply their literacy skills and a broader range of numeracy skills suitably in their learning across the curriculum.

Teachers plan appropriately for pupils to develop their digital skills. Many teachers use a variety of Welsh phrases naturally in their classroom routines, for instance to ask questions and give instructions. They are good role models and use approaches that engage pupils successfully. As a result, most pupils are enthusiastic about learning Welsh and develop confidence in their ability to use the language effectively.

Staff form warm and respectful working relationships with pupils. This helps pupils to feel relaxed and secure in school and to focus appropriately in lessons. Staff manage pupils' behaviour very well. They set, model and reinforce clear expectations for pupils' attitudes to learning and for their conduct in lessons. They manage any difficulties pupils experience sensitively and without hindering other pupils' learning. This consistent approach impacts positively on pupils' consideration for others and on their readiness to learn.

Staff plan learning experiences that support the youngest pupils to learn through play, and activities that interest them. Staff facilitate pupils' progress in their learning skilfully. They make effective use of the indoor and outdoor environment to promote pupils' independence and to develop their social and communication skills beneficially.

Teachers provide clear objectives for pupils' learning in lessons that help them know what is expected of them. They generally give clear instructions and often recall relevant details of pupils' recent learning to support their progress. Where teachers use an engaging stimulus in lessons, pupils respond with excitement. For example, pupils in Years 2 and 3 are intrigued by a close-up image showing the iris of an eye. This inspires lively, spontaneous discussion in which pupils eagerly share their ideas and opinions about what they see. However, in many lessons teachers manage pupils' activity too closely. For example, they often plan tasks and use methods that reduce pupils' opportunities to think for themselves or to seek creative solutions to problems. This means that pupils are not always challenged sufficiently to tackle their learning as independently as they could. In a minority of lessons, teachers engage pupils in tasks that do not develop their learning purposefully enough. In these instances, pupils often complete the tasks and make superficial progress without developing their understanding effectively.

Teachers and teaching assistants ask relevant questions during lessons to check pupils' understanding and to monitor their progress. Teachers provide regular opportunities for pupils to reflect on their learning, for instance, through discussion at the end of lessons. This supports pupils to develop an awareness of the attributes they need to develop as successful learners. However, teachers use of feedback to extend pupils' thinking about their learning is underdeveloped. As a result, pupils do not always have a clear understanding of what they need to do to make progress or to improve their work.

Care, support and guidance

Derwendeg Primary School is a nurturing, inclusive community where nearly all pupils feel happy and cared for. The school has successfully established strong relationships with pupils and their families. Staff provide consistent and effective support to all pupils, including those with specific emotional needs. They have high expectations of pupils' behaviour and use effective methods to manage and support pupils' behaviour well. The school values all pupils' achievements both in and beyond school and regularly celebrates their success.

Parents appreciate the high level of support that pupils and families receive. For example, the school helps parents to access additional help at home that enables

them to build on the beneficial support pupils receive in school. Parents particularly value the wide range of opportunities the school provides for all pupils.

The school has a range of appropriate processes in place to identify and support pupils with ALN. For example, in response to an increase in the number of pupils experiencing difficulty in managing their feelings, the school has established nurture provision and a social and communication group to support identified pupils. Staff draw on the expertise of the psychology service and a local authority nurture provision to ensure that this support is effective. As a result, these pupils are now more settled in school. Staff set appropriate targets to move pupils with ALN forward in their learning. Teachers and parents review individual pupils' progress regularly, making beneficial adjustments to their support when needed. As a result, many pupils with ALN make at least appropriate progress from their starting points.

Staff promote a clear set of values and expectations consistently during the school day. This contributes beneficially towards pupils' moral and social development. Teachers provide pupils with suitable opportunities to learn about a wide range of faiths and cultures. Worthwhile assemblies and class activities support pupils to reflect on their own beliefs and to develop their understanding of spirituality.

Teachers provide suitable opportunities for pupils deepen their understanding of inclusion and diversity. They encourage pupils to respect and empathise with the views of others and to recognise the differing needs and rights of others as equal members of a diverse world. For example, they plan useful opportunities for pupils to discuss and reflect on the experience of nurses and their families entering the UK from India to join the National Health Service.

The school celebrates its Welsh heritage positively. Staff arrange purposeful visits to local landmarks and places of interest, such as Cardiff Castle and St Fagan's Museum. They plan activities that strengthen pupils' knowledge of the history of their local area. For example, pupils learn about the local area from an older resident's memories of childhood. This helps pupils appreciate how the school and its community has changed over time.

The school provides valuable opportunities for pupils to participate in an international school exchange project. This helps to broaden pupils' understanding of other cultures and to recognise what is unique about their own. For instance, pupils in Year 6 learned about similarities and differences between their own and the Spanish way of life. Staff and visiting providers offer a range of clubs for pupils to attend. These clubs are popular with pupils who appreciate the opportunity to develop a wide range of physical, creative and language skills alongside their friends.

During the last two years the school has worked effectively with pupils and families to improve levels of attendance. As a result, attendance rates of all groups of pupils have shown a strong upward trend since the pandemic. Staff promote and monitor attendance energetically. They set ambitious targets for overall attendance and work tirelessly within school and with local authority partners to secure improvement. The school makes thorough arrangements to ensure the safety of staff and pupils. Staff develop pupils' understanding of how to stay safe online appropriately. All staff have a clear understanding of their safeguarding responsibility and fulfil this diligently.

Leadership and management

The headteacher leads by example and places staff and pupil well-being at the heart of the school's work. She has worked effectively with the whole school community to develop a clear vision for Derwendeg Primary School, where pupils are encouraged to strive for their best. Leaders and staff dedicate themselves to fostering a strong family ethos in the school, creating an environment where pupils and the wider school community feel welcomed and supported.

Leaders adopt a useful variety of approaches to identify the school's priorities for improvement. For example, during focused self-evaluation weeks senior leaders look at pupils' work, observe lessons and meet with pupils to talk about their progress in lessons. Overall, leaders use this information well to make suitable judgments about what is working well and which aspects of the school's work need development. For instance, a recent review identified the need to improve pupils' reading and, as a result, leaders introduced a more structured approach to teaching phonics. This has had a positive impact on the progress pupils make in developing their reading skills. However, while leaders and staff are eager to move the school forwards, they sometimes focus on too many areas and do not always prioritise improvements to teaching that would bring about improvement quickly.

The role of middle leaders is developing well across the school and staff are beginning to have a stronger influence on improving the quality of teaching and learning. For example, middle leaders have successfully driven improvement in the provision for the Welsh language and this is having a positive impact on pupils' attitudes to learning Welsh.

Leaders ensure that professional learning links to the school's improvement priorities and fosters innovation across the staff team. This supports staff to experiment with initiatives that lead to improvement in outcomes for pupils. For example, staff have worked together to refine effective approaches to teaching oracy skills across the school. Staff have good opportunities to collaborate with other schools, for instance by working on a project to improve the provision for science and technology. Leaders encourage staff to share their professional learning experiences and to engage in regular discussions about its impact in the classroom. This leads to a growing culture of reflection across the school, where staff and leaders jointly evaluate the quality of teaching, learning and professional development.

Leaders regularly monitor the quality of teaching and provide useful feedback to staff on how to improve their practice. However, they place too much emphasis on teachers using a wide range of techniques during lessons, rather than providing learning experiences that engage pupils' deeper thinking and develop their independence.

Governors undertake their roles and responsibilities thoroughly, fulfilling their statutory duties well. They apply themselves with dedication and provide useful scrutiny and challenge to the work of leaders, for instance on improving pupils' rates of attendance. They take an active role in school self-evaluation, meeting regularly with curriculum leaders and pupil groups to gather information about progress on key improvement goals.

Governors address national priorities suitably, for example they create a shared vision for the school's curriculum and the development of clear policies and guidelines for the delivery of relationships and sexuality education (RSE). They work energetically alongside leaders to promote effective safeguarding approaches and to ensure that these procedures are integral to the school's day to day practice. Whilst governors and leaders make suitable arrangements to promote healthy eating and drinking, pupils do not always bring appropriate food and drinks from home.

Leaders and governors monitor spending robustly. They plan appropriately to address future challenges while ensuring resources are sufficient to meet the current needs of pupils in the school. Leaders use the school's pupil development grant funding to improve access to opportunities for pupils affected by socio-economic disadvantage. Leaders deploy resources effectively to ensure that staff provide worthwhile support for learners and their families. A particular strength of the school is the work of leaders and staff to improve pupils' attendance and emotional resilience. Because of this, families feel well supported when dealing with challenging situations that impact on their child's social skills and learning behaviours.

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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