



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

A report on

St Margaret's R.C. Primary School

**Ty Fry
Aberdare
Cynon
CF44 7PP**

Date of inspection: January 2024

by

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

About St Margaret's R.C. Primary School

Name of provider	St Margaret's R.C. Primary School
Local authority	Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council
Language of the provider	English
Type of school	Primary
Religious character	Roman Catholic
Number of pupils on roll	115
Pupils of statutory school age	97
Number in nursery classes	11
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%)	39.3%
Percentage of pupils identified as having additional learning needs (a) (The national percentage of pupils identified as having an additional learning need in Primary is 13.2%)	*
Percentage of pupils who speak Welsh at home	0.0%
Percentage of pupils with English as an additional language	13.4%
Date of headteacher appointment	05/09/2022
Date of previous Estyn inspection (if applicable)	05/04/2016
Start date of inspection	29/01/2024
Archdiocese did not inspect during the same week but a representative did attend the feedback meeting.	

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

St Margaret's R.C. Primary is a caring school where leaders commit to develop positive relationships with staff, pupils and their families and this helps to develop a connection where there is a strong sense of belonging. Leaders provide an inclusive learning environment, where pupils' emotional needs are suitably met.

Following a period of change in leadership, leaders now provide stability and consistency in the day-to-day running of the school. They have successfully developed a shared vision and are strengthening the role of the leadership team. Leaders provide increased opportunities for governors to link with other staff members to gather first-hand information about the school's strengths and areas to develop. Overall, leaders know their school well and understand the actions they need to take to improve aspects of its work. The current focus to improve pupils' attendance, as well as improving the progress pupils make in their reading and number skills, is having a positive impact. Leaders also identify the need to develop pupils' numeracy skills across the curriculum, as well as their digital skills, and there are planned actions in place to develop in these areas. However, leaders do not identify the need to develop teachers' understanding of child development and this limits the effectiveness of provision for the youngest pupils.

The school is beginning to develop its curriculum and works effectively with partner schools and advisors to develop staff subject knowledge. In the most effective example, teachers provide worthwhile opportunities for pupils to develop a range of skills for a purpose, for example, when designing a modern, sustainable home that is safe for the Three Little Pigs to live in. However, there are limited opportunities to build on pupils' skills systematically and link their learning to purposeful or real-life activities.

Across the school, teachers provide a range of enrichment opportunities for pupils to broaden their learning experiences. There are suitable opportunities for pupils to widen their creative skills through school productions and physical skills through sports activities.

Together, leaders and staff, work diligently to raise standards and improve outcomes for the pupils. They share a commitment and drive to do the best they can for all. Overall, many pupils make suitable progress in reading and number although progress in other areas of learning varies across the school. Most pupils with additional learning needs (ALN) make good progress, and benefit from the effective strategies in place that focus on their individual needs.

Recommendations

- R1 Ensure that the curriculum provides purposeful and engaging learning experiences that challenge and support pupils to build their skills progressively
- R2 Improve pupils' digital and numeracy skills

- R3 Secure teachers' understanding of early child development so that they provide suitable learning opportunities to meet the needs of the youngest pupils

What happens next

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

Main evaluation

Learning

Many pupils throughout the school make good progress with reading. Many younger pupils make appropriate progress in learning letter sounds, which provides a good foundation for reading in subsequent years. As they progress, most pupils in Years 2 and 3 make accelerated progress. They engage well with the ideas behind a story and recognise the use of humour. For example, they understand what the author says about a character who unwisely decides to keep cheese in his hat. Older pupils continue this good progress and, by the time they reach Year 6, many are confident, competent readers who use their reading skills effectively to enhance their learning. For example, they discuss the merits of different genres intelligently and tackle sophisticated story lines such as Moby Dick with good understanding.

Many pupils make sound progress in developing their oracy skills. In their early years, many begin to respond appropriately to questions and express their preferences. In Years 2 and 3, they make good progress in expressing opinions and listening well to the contribution of others on a broad range of topics. Many older pupils develop into confident speakers and listeners. For example, they present an effective argument to justify why the Three Little Pigs should be found guilty of killing the Big Bad Wolf. They explain themselves in detail to engage their audience.

A majority of younger pupils begin to form letters appropriately and use their knowledge of letter sounds effectively when writing simple words. Many pupils build on this foundation and write for a suitable range of purposes. They begin to appreciate the power of the written word, for example, when describing a monster in the forest at night. A majority of older pupils use a good range of vocabulary and generally use punctuation and spelling suitably. However, many pupils throughout the school do not purposefully apply their writing skills across the curriculum.

Many younger pupils make suitable progress in learning the names of numbers and learning to count. They use this knowledge to support their learning, for example to estimate the number of steps required to reach a destination. This sound progress in developing number skills continues as pupils move through the school. By Year 2, many pupils understand place value up to 100, successfully calculating 10 more and 10 less. Many pupils in Years 5 and 6 are confident when working with numbers up to a million. However, the progress pupils make in space and shape, measures and

data handling is inconsistent. There are good examples of work, such as when Year 3 pupils identify solid shapes in the environment around the school, but pupils do not develop their skills in these areas progressively. There are a few purposeful examples of pupils using their skills in subjects other than mathematics, for example as part of an enterprise project selling T shirts, but in general pupils are not given enough opportunities to apply their numeracy skills across the curriculum.

Pupils use their digital skills suitably to create basic presentations and use word processors to redraft their work. In a few examples, pupils develop useful skills. For instance, pupils in Year 2 and Year 3 create engaging videos that are well planned and show an understanding of a good range of filming techniques. However, overall, pupils do not develop a broad enough range of digital skills progressively during their time at school. In general, their skills in coding and using spreadsheets to analyse data or create simple formulae are limited.

Many pupils develop positive attitudes when developing their Welsh language skills. Most younger pupils enjoy developing their Welsh skills through songs and games. As pupils progress through the school, they make suitable progress. Many older pupils extend their use of vocabulary and sentences patterns to engage in conversation when talking about their families, likes, dislikes and interests.

Overall, pupils make appropriate progress in their creative and artistic skills. For example, pupils create tableaus to represent a walk through a rainforest and create vibrant African patterns when printing. However, younger pupils make more limited progress. They rarely take initiative or experiment in this aspect of learning. Although pupils throughout the school occasionally challenge themselves in their thinking and problem solving, they do not expect to engage with learning in this way and do not develop their thinking in a systematic way. Pupils' physical skills develop well in many classes. They acquire skills in a broad range of activities and build fitness, strength, balance and co-ordination well.

Many pupils who have additional learning needs (ALN) and those eligible for free school meals progress well from their starting points. They benefit from the effective support they receive through targeted interventions that are monitored and reviewed regularly. As a result, many of these pupils develop greater confidence, engagement and participation in lessons, and this has a positive impact on the progress they make overall.

Well-being and attitudes to learning

Most pupils enjoy school, feel safe and secure and understand who to turn to for help. They value the strong pastoral support they receive from adults and there is a strong culture of trust and support between staff and pupils.

Most pupils understand how the school helps them to treat others with respect and behave appropriately. They respond well to the school's reward systems, and these are promoted effectively by older pupils who act as peer mediators to encourage and reward good behaviour on the playground. As a result, in most lessons and around the school, pupils treat each other with kindness and respect and approach their learning with positive attitudes.

Most older pupils maintain a suitable level of interest in their work and apply themselves purposefully to their lessons. For example, Year 4 and Year 5 pupils enjoy practising their multiplication tables and join in enthusiastically while singing them. Many are beginning to work with confidence to overcome difficulties where they arise and a few can explain what to do if they are stuck, for example by asking a friend. However, a few pupils in the youngest classes do not always maintain enough focus on independent learning tasks. They flit between activities and struggle to engage purposefully in their learning because the learning environments do not develop pupils' interests or respond to their needs well enough.

Many pupils value the contributions of others and work well in groups. For example, the youngest pupils work well together to discuss what makes a good vegetable soup and then how to make it. Older pupils support each other effectively when carrying out reading tasks, for instance when carrying out identified roles to analyse text and support each other's thinking. Most pupils respond appropriately to verbal and written feedback and can talk about their work and what they can do to improve it. When given the opportunity, many pupils make important changes to their work to improve its quality or to address error, for example in mathematics.

Many pupils are developing well as informed and ethical individuals with a growing sense of responsibility for the world around them. For example, older pupils talk thoughtfully about the importance of re-cycling, reducing food waste and using renewable energy. They identify issues in the wider world, such as the impact of the earthquakes in Turkey, where they can make a difference by raising awareness in the community and carrying out fundraising activities.

Pupils participate actively in a wide range of pupil voice groups and have a meaningful impact on the life of the school. They develop their leadership skills, for example through the school Senedd where they carry out specific roles and help lead and allocate their classmates to a wider range of groups such as the Health and Well-being group and the Criw Cymraeg.

Nearly all pupils understand the importance of eating and drinking healthily. Overall, most make good choices with their snacks and drinks, for example choosing fruit and vegetable snacks and drinking water. They take part enthusiastically in a good range of physical activities in PE lessons such as hockey and swimming and a few attend after-school clubs to further develop their interests.

Older pupils have a suitable awareness of the importance of internet safety and how to recognise potential risks, such as strangers trying to contact them online and how to use passwords to protect themselves. They understand who they should turn to if they have concerns.

Teaching and learning experiences

Staff have high expectations of all pupils' behaviour and are good role models. They manage classes well and create a calm, secure environment where pupils settle quickly at the start of the day.

Many teachers develop lessons with good pace and communicate learning expectations clearly. They model learning well and use a range of suitable resources

effectively to support pupils' learning. For example, teachers use good quality reading books effectively to promote guided reading in groups. Most teachers have good subject knowledge in how to teach reading and pupils make good progress as a result. Many support staff have good understanding of how to teach effective well-being programmes and those pupils targeted benefit significantly. However, teachers' understanding of early child development is less well developed. This affects how well these areas of learning are planned for, and the progress pupils make. Adults working with the youngest pupils direct learning too much and this limits pupils' development as independent, creative learners. The provision in these areas also limits opportunities for pupils to develop their imagination and curiosity through play and exploration.

The curriculum is developing purposefully in a range of important areas, such as building number skills, reading and developing pupils' social and emotional well-being. However, the curriculum lacks breadth in a few areas, including mathematics across the curriculum and the development of pupils' digital skills. When curriculum design is effective, teachers develop engaging topics that include purposeful activities for learning. In the best examples, these topics provide exciting learning experiences where pupils develop a range of skills for real-life purposes. For example, pupils in Years 2 and 3 develop their digital skills when making movies about plants and apply the skills, to make recordings of Nursery's, Reception's and Year 1's carnival. However, curriculum development is at an early stage and opportunities to build on pupils' skills progressively vary. In addition, teachers do not always use contexts of learning well enough to ensure that pupils have the right level of challenge in their work.

The school has high aspirations for the development of Welsh language communication skills and it provides appropriate opportunities for pupils to develop their skills in formal and informal situations. Teachers are beginning to consider the school's locality and the heritage of Wales when designing learning experiences. For example, a topic entitled 'If Wales could speak, what would she say?' included a visit to the Dare Valley Country Park and this helps develop pupils' understanding of their local area and how it fits in Wales. However, the school is less successful when developing pupils' appreciation of Wales as a nation, its culture and geographical nature.

The school's curriculum for personal and social education supports the social and emotional skills of all pupils from all backgrounds well. The school's core values of being kind, respectful and resilient are promoted well in all aspects of school life. The school provides valuable opportunities for pupils to develop other important values, such as compassion and love, Personal and Social Education when supporting local charities and collecting gifts to fill shoeboxes that are used as Christmas gifts for disadvantaged children in other countries. The school's curriculum also helps pupils to make healthy lifestyle choices, for example, in relation to healthy eating and drinking, substance misuse and online safety as part of Relationship and Sexuality Education provision. For example, regular visits from the Police Community Support Officer to all classes cover topics such as alcohol, drugs, peer pressure, making the right choices, staying safe and people who help us. The school plans suitable extra-curricular activities and trips and to widen pupils' experiences.

Teachers are beginning to use ongoing assessments during lessons to provide immediate feedback and support pupils' learning. Recent changes relating to the quality of feedback teachers give and suitable time for pupils to respond is having a positive impact. Many teachers provide purposeful opportunities for pupils to assess their own and peers' learning and quality time for pupils to respond to feedback, for them to address errors and improve their work. In a few examples, teachers are also beginning to use assessment information to plan learning, for example when developing pupils' reading skills and supporting those pupils with additional learning needs. However, overall, teachers do not use assessment information well enough to inform learning and this impacts the progress pupils make when developing a range of skills, including their thinking, problem-solving and creative skills.

Care, support and guidance

Leaders, teachers and support staff work effectively to ensure the school is an inclusive environment where all pupils, including those with (ALN), are successfully integrated into the classroom and play a full part in school life. Support staff carry out their roles thoughtfully and provide careful support for pupils, particularly those who require additional support with social and emotional needs. For example, pupils use the hug room as a safe haven to help them keep calm or work with peer mediators to resolve conflict.

The ALN Co-ordinator and leaders work well alongside staff and parents to identify those pupils who require additional support. Leaders ensure that there are targeted interventions in place, which effectively support the development of pupils' literacy and social skills. They monitor the impact of these interventions closely, for example by getting feedback from support staff about pupils' progress to help make further adjustments to provision when needed. As a result, pupils with ALN often make strong progress in developing their social, emotional and communication skills.

The school is making good progress to align its provision for ALN with the requirements of recently introduced legislation. Leaders have clearly mapped out the provision for all pupils, including the universal provision all pupils are entitled to alongside more specialised support where pupils require Individual Development Plans. Leaders monitor and support class teachers, to identify the strengths and those areas of provision that need further development. Whilst still developing, this reflective approach is beginning to develop a shared responsibility across all staff to meet the needs of pupils with ALN. The ALN Co-ordinator communicates regularly with parents, considers the views of pupils and their parents thoughtfully when discussing how well they are doing and deciding next steps for learning. Where more significant concerns arise, there are effective arrangements to work with external agencies to help identify further support.

The school works diligently to build strong relationships with families to support and benefit its pupils. Staff use an online platform to share and celebrate pupils' achievements and parents are invited into school for assemblies where pupils showcase topics and carry out performances. The family engagement officer holds weekly coffee mornings with parents to offer support for their well-being or provide advice. As a result, most parents appreciate the inclusive nature of the school and value the support it offers, in particular for pupils with ALN. The school offers access

to clothing and a food bank as well as subsidising costs of trips, and this helps support families.

Staff ensure that pupils play an active part in the wider life of the school. For example, pupil playground leaders support younger classes at breaktimes, and older pupils are trained as peer mediators who resolve conflict sensitively. Staff ensure that pupils have a clear understanding of their rights and responsibilities. For example, super ambassadors are currently responding to the Children's Commissioner for Wales request to gather pupils' opinions on changing the length of the school term.

The school provides useful opportunities for pupils to develop as reflective individuals. For instance, during collective worship, younger pupils reflect thoughtfully on the value of being thankful and share their appreciation of family, friends and teachers. Staff provide a few opportunities for pupils to discuss important issues such as the historical impact of racism through their 'worlds apart' topic. However, the school's provision for developing pupils' understanding of the diverse nature of Wales and the impact of a diverse culture on its history is at an early stage of development overall.

Staff are beginning to provide suitable opportunities for pupils to influence their own learning. For instance, pupils make a few suggestions for learning activities in their topics or homework tasks, such as designing and making T-shirts. The school ensures that there are engaging opportunities for pupils to develop their musical and performance skills. For example, they take part in African drumming sessions and create their own music and dance compositions to perform in assembly.

School leaders monitor attendance robustly and work closely with families to improve pupils' attendance. The Family Engagement Officer works closely with parents and pupils whose attendance falls below an acceptable level. As a result, the rates of attendance show a strong upward trend, particularly for those pupils from low-income households. A particular strength of the school is the strong progress these pupils make in their learning after successfully attending school more regularly.

The school has a strong culture of safeguarding. Arrangements to keep pupils safe meet requirements and give no cause for concern.

Leadership and management

Following a time of instability and change, the recently appointed executive headteacher and the head of school have worked successfully to build positive relationships with staff, pupils and their families. They have developed a nurturing environment where there is a strong focus on supporting the emotional and well-being needs of all members of the school community.

Leaders have developed a clear vision for the school, based on their values to be kind, resilient and respectful. Through a 'vision week', this is communicated effectively to all staff, pupils and parents, and helps to promote a caring ethos and raise aspirations.

Leaders have established effective partnerships with parents and provide valuable opportunities for parents to engage in their child's learning and to promote healthy

lifestyles. For example, parents attend open day sessions to gain an understanding of their child's learning in school and attend cooking workshops to learn about healthy eating and the planning of affordable meals.

Leaders are developing a systematic approach to self-evaluation and are beginning to include governors and teachers in this process. There are increased opportunities for staff and governors to gather first-hand evidence and to use this information to evaluate standards and progress. Leaders now use monitoring activities appropriately to identify the school's strengths and opportunities for improvement. For example, leaders have made very good progress when improving pupils' attendance, as well as effective progress developing pupils' reading and number skills and provision for pupils with ALN. Leaders are realistic about the improvements still required and have a planned approach to address further areas in need of development, to raise standards and sustain pupil progress in all areas.

Performance management targets are appropriate and linked to individual needs and school improvement priorities. Leaders identify the professional needs of staff appropriately and provide beneficial opportunities for teachers to work alongside advisors and other schools to strengthen their professional knowledge, practice and skills. This work is beginning to have a positive influence on the curriculum offer and aspects of teaching. However, the quality of teaching across the school remains variable overall. Provision for the youngest pupils does not match their developmental needs well enough and leaders do not currently ensure that teaching supports pupils to develop the full range of skills progressively as they move through the school.

Leaders provide a range of opportunities for pupils across the school to engage in valuable activities to broaden their experiences, both in school and beyond. For example, all pupils have the opportunity to experience playing a musical instrument, attend swimming lessons and perform in community events. Leaders at all levels promote the use of Welsh across the school, during lessons and break-times and this influences a positive approach and commitment to the development of pupils' Welsh language skills. The school provides valuable transition opportunities for older pupils to visit their future secondary schools and this helps prepare pupils and their families for change.

Governors are supportive of the school and eager to play an active role in the school improvement process. They are beginning to develop a realistic understanding of the school's priorities through participation in learning walks and conversations with teachers and pupils. Governors ensure the school provides a healthy eating and drinking policy. Senior leaders and governors monitor the school's finances carefully and consider priority spends based on the needs of the school. The school uses its pupil development grant funding appropriately to ensure suitable level of support for pupils through interventions and access to learning experiences such as school trips.

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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