



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

A report on

Blaengarw Primary School

**Station Street
Blaengarw
Pontycymer
Bridgend
CF32 8BA**

Date of inspection: January 2024

by

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

About Blaengarw Primary School

Name of provider	Blaengarw Primary School
Local authority	Bridgend County Borough Council
Language of the provider	English
Type of school	Primary
Religious character	*
Number of pupils on roll	166
Pupils of statutory school age	125
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%)	31.6%
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	*
Percentage of pupils with English as an additional language	*
Date of headteacher appointment	01/09/2021
Date of previous Estyn inspection (if applicable)	01/05/2024
Start date of inspection	29/01/2024

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

Blaengarw Primary School is part of a federation with nearby Betws Primary School. An acting executive headteacher provides overall leadership for the federation. However, each school has its own head of school and retains its unique character. The staff at both schools collaborate well together to benefit the pupils of each school.

Staff at Blaengarw Primary School create a welcoming environment where all are valued. Leaders and staff place a strong focus on supporting well-being and involving parents in understanding their child's learning, particularly where they have additional learning needs (ALN).

Pupils make suitable progress during their time at the school and talk about the opportunities they have through their curriculum to learn and become independent learners. Teachers are effective in creating stimulating learning spaces and plan carefully plan sequences of lessons to move the learning on. However, the quality of these sessions varies across the school, and this means that pupils do not always make the progress they could, particularly where there is a lack of high expectation and insufficient challenge for pupils.

Across the school pupils' behaviour is variable, particularly in lessons and when they move about the school. As a result, there are too many instances of low-level disruption and these have a negative impact on pupils across the school. Many pupils have positive attitudes and are keen to learn, particularly in oracy, reading and numeracy. However, pupils have limited opportunity to develop these skills, particularly writing, in the work across the curriculum. In addition, the opportunities for them to develop their digital and Welsh language skills are limited.

Leaders support staff appropriately with their development. There is a strong focus on supporting the well-being of staff and ensuring that they have access to suitable professional learning to improve their classroom practice. Staff collaborate effectively with other schools, particularly with Betws Primary School, and this is beginning to impact more positively on pupils' school experience. Leaders are keen to evaluate the strengths of the school and opportunities for improvement. However, this work is at a very early stage in its development. As a result, evaluations are over-generous and do not identify sharply enough the improvements that need to be made, particularly in teaching and addressing pupils' attitudes to learning.

Recommendations

- R1 Use evaluation processes more effectively to inform school improvement work
- R2 Improve teaching to ensure that pupils receive the right level of challenge and develop positive attitudes to their learning
- R3 Improve provision to develop pupils' writing, Welsh language and digital skills and ensure that they have opportunities to use the full range of skills in their work across the curriculum

What happens next

The school will draw up an action plan to show how it is going to address the recommendations. Estyn will work with the local authority to review the school's progress.

Main evaluation

Learning

Many pupils start school with language and social skills that are lower than expected for their age. As they move through the school, most pupils, including those eligible for free school meals and additional learning needs (ALN), make appropriate progress from their starting points across the areas of learning and experience. However, as they get older, pupils do not always make the level of progress they should.

Across the school, most pupils develop their speaking and listening skills well. The youngest pupils engage purposefully in their activities and are keen to talk to adults about their learning. Older pupils listen carefully to their peers, they value the views of others and are keen to share their ideas, for example when describing their invention, using suitable detail for their audience. By Year 6, many pupils are confident when speaking for a variety of purposes and listen well to others. They respond readily and appropriately to questions about their work, using a suitable range of vocabulary to present their views.

Most pupils make good progress in developing their reading skills. Younger pupils develop their knowledge of sounds and apply these skills to help them read new words appropriately and they begin to establish meaning independently. By Year 1, many pupils are confident when reading simple texts and short stories. As pupils get older, they generally read with increasing independence and at an appropriate level, often demonstrating enjoyment in the books they read.

The youngest pupils are keen to learn to write. They make marks on paper and draw in the sand to start their writing journey. By Year 2, many pupils begin to write with increasing confidence and independence, they organise their ideas and write in simple sentences and use basic punctuation marks accurately. As they move through the school, pupils carefully apply their knowledge of letter sounds and patterns to spell words with increasing accuracy and independence. During their time at school pupils generally make suitable progress in developing their writing skills. Many pupils write for a range of purposes and by the time they are in Year 6 most pupils have developed stamina for writing and produce increasingly lengthy texts, demonstrating an awareness of their audience. However, their progress slows at the top end of the school due to a lack of challenge and opportunity to apply their skills. Overall, across the school, pupils do not apply their writing skills well enough across the curriculum.

Many younger pupils are keen to use their developing knowledge of the Welsh language. They are beginning to use simple greetings well and sing along to Welsh rhymes. A few older pupils are beginning to use simple phrases in Welsh independently, for example when discussing the weather. However, overall, pupils' Welsh oracy skills are limited.

Most pupils make appropriate progress in the development of their mathematical skills as they move through the school. Younger pupils are developing a sound awareness of the number system and identify one more and one less with increasing accuracy. They create tally charts and bar graphs about their favourite fruits and pets

and present data in simple tables. Older pupils are developing a secure knowledge of place value and fractions. However, pupils' application of numeracy skills across the curriculum is less well developed.

Many pupils are keen to develop their digital skills. They use devices and applications appropriately to support a few aspects of their learning. For instance, pupils write basic code to program a device to escape from a maze and use the features of word processing software appropriately to redraft their written work. However, overall, pupils' digital skills are underdeveloped.

Most pupils develop and use their creative skills appropriately. Younger pupils produce good quality artwork and take pride in their work. For example, when creating a collage about nocturnal creatures, they work carefully with a range of materials. Older pupils enjoy sketching portraits of themselves and painting images of Henry VIII. A few pupils experiment with sounds and play tuned instruments, such as the flute, violin and guitar, successfully.

Most pupils develop their physical skills appropriately. Younger pupils develop their fine motor skills by using tweezers and mark making with chalk. Outdoors they climb, ride bikes with confidence and move stealthily through large tyres. Older pupils develop stamina by completing a daily mile.

Well-being and attitudes to learning

Relationships between pupils, staff and parents are a strength of the school. Pupils show kindness to each other and extend a warm welcome to visitors. They are appreciative of the support they receive from staff to promote their well-being. They use systems such as the early morning pupil check-in well, when they need to, to help them settle at the start of the day or to access the support they need. This helps to ensure that a majority of pupils are happy and are keen to engage positively with school life and learning. However, the behaviour of too many pupils, for instance when moving between activities, is not always good enough and has a negative impact on others.

Across the school, pupils are becoming increasingly aware of the feedback their teachers provide for them and are beginning to respond to this to support their personal development. However, this is at an early stage of development. as pupils are not always aware of the next steps in their learning and do not always know what they do well or how to improve. Pupils are beginning to demonstrate increasing levels of perseverance, for example when using the 'three before me' strategy to encourage resilience and self-help when learning. However, in too many classes pupils are over reliant on staff for help.

Many pupils show pride in their school. They relish their opportunities to have important leadership roles such as Eco Council, School Council and the Press Gang. These responsibilities help to develop pupils as responsible citizens. However, these groups are still in their infancy and have a limited impact on school life.

Most pupils show an appropriate understanding of how to stay safe online. Many show an understanding of the importance of making healthy food choices and the need for a balanced diet. However, few pupils make healthy choices that reflect this.

Pupils are developing a sound understanding of their locality. For example, they speak with pride when they explain that the song Calon Lan was written in the community in which they live. However, overall, pupils' understanding of their Welsh heritage and culture is underdeveloped.

Pupils develop additional skills beyond the curriculum effectively through their participation in a wide range of extra-curricular clubs. For example, they enjoy learning to sew and developing their understanding of digital coding. Pupils talk about how their achievements out of school are valued and celebrated within the school community.

Teaching and learning experiences

There is a shared vision for the curriculum across the federation, which takes suitable account of the requirements of the Curriculum for Wales. Regular professional learning and collaboration between federation staff supports the development of the school's curriculum appropriately. This is an ongoing process and staff continue to refine their planning to improve their curriculum provision. Across the school, teachers plan a variety of suitable lessons around a chosen theme. This provides an appropriate route for the development of pupils' skills, knowledge and understanding. However, teachers do not always ensure that pupils develop a full range of skills systematically and progressively as they move through the school.

There is a consistent approach to the development of literacy and numeracy skills across the school. The provision for developing pupils' oracy skills in English is a particular strength. A range of experiences and activities ensure that pupils build on their confidence as they progress through the school. The planned daily phonics and reading sessions impact successfully on pupils' writing and support other areas of their learning well. However, although teachers provide opportunities for pupils to develop discrete literacy and numeracy skills in lessons, generally there are not enough opportunities for pupils to apply these skills across other areas of the curriculum. In addition, provision for the development of older pupils' writing and numeracy skills does not always ensure they are provided with sufficient challenge. Provision for developing pupils' Welsh language and digital skills is limited.

Pupils contribute appropriately to the planning of termly topics by suggesting things they want to learn. Teachers use pupils' ideas and questions at the beginning of class topics to steer and guide planned learning. As a result, many pupils enjoy and are engaged in their learning.

The school is beginning to develop its curriculum to reflect the nature of its context, including activities that reflect the cultural and linguistic nature of a diverse Wales and the wider world. For example, pupils learn about the history of coal mining in Wales during their topic work as well as learning about other festivals, such as Diwali. The school makes good use of off-site visits, including residential trips, to enhance the curriculum and pupils' learning experiences. For example, they visit Llancaiach Fawr and Parc Calon Lan. There are a wide variety of extra-curricular clubs, such as sewing, smart moves and the school choir. These enable pupils to learn new skills and support their well-being.

Staff establish good working relationships with pupils. This creates a suitable environment that allows pupils to feel confident to ask questions and request help with their learning. Generally, teachers manage pupils' behaviour appropriately. However, too often they do not address low level disruption in lessons and when pupils move around the school from previous activities. Support staff across the school are effective in their roles and support pupils to make good progress, in important aspects of their learning. They reflect the warm, thoughtful and supportive ethos of the school in their working relationships with pupils and provide strong support for vulnerable pupils and those with ALN.

Most teachers use the indoor classroom suitably to enhance the curriculum and create purposeful environments for pupils that support their learning. For example, in the classrooms for the youngest pupils, teachers plan learning environments that promote independence successfully. Outdoor learning is a strength across the federation. Nearly all pupils enjoy beneficial opportunities to learn through forest school sessions where they develop important skills such as teamwork and problem-solving whilst also improving their well-being.

In many classes, teachers deliver lessons at a suitable pace. They share the lesson aims clearly and use a suitable range of resources to engage pupils' interest. In the most successful lessons, teachers plan highly engaging activities set in real-life contexts for learning. However, too often, teachers do not have high enough expectations of pupils can achieve and, as a result, do not plan activities that meet their pupils' needs appropriately. They use questioning suitably to challenge, check and extend pupils' understanding and to move learning forward. Overall, teachers generally provide appropriate opportunities to review and discuss learning at different points during lessons. However, across the school, the quality of teachers' feedback to pupils' work is inconsistent. As a result, pupils do not have a clear understanding of what they need to do to improve their work.

Care, support and guidance

The school is an inclusive and happy community where leaders and staff work to provide high levels of care, support and guidance for pupils and their families. All staff support pupils' emotional, health and social needs purposefully through a range of effective strategies.

The ALN Co-ordinator provides strong support across the federation and has a clear strategic overview of pupils' needs across Blaengarw school. Leaders track pupils' progress and evaluate the impact of support on their progress effectively, adapting their provision accordingly. The school deploys well-trained staff effectively to support pupils with their individual needs. All pupils have clear and personalised one-page profiles that include useful information about their individual interests and what they need to develop further. Staff plan activities and deliver interventions effectively to ensure that all pupils with ALN learn the skills needed for life in school and beyond. As a result, many pupils make appropriate progress from their starting points.

Staff work closely with external agencies, such as the local authority's well-being team, the educational psychology service and social care professionals. They also forge strong relationships with families to gain a full picture of the pupil and how best to support them in school and at home. This has a positive impact on the lives and

development of pupils. Parents and carers appreciate the regular communication they receive about school events on social media. There are regular and worthwhile opportunities for parents to share in and support their child's learning journey.

The school promotes the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils suitably and allows pupils to have time for reflection. As a result, most pupils have a clear understanding of fairness, equity and inclusion within their daily lives. The school is beginning to support pupils to understand their rights as children. Staff provide monthly rights to cover through the curriculum and in assemblies.

Staff use a range of learning experiences, including visits, to enrich pupils' understanding of their Welsh identity. For example, pupils visit Parc Calon Lan and are proud that the song Calon Lan was written in Blaengarw. However, the pupils' overall knowledge of their locality and their understanding of the heritage and culture of Wales is at an early stage of development.

The school ensures that pupils of all backgrounds and abilities take on positions of responsibility through participation in leadership groups. These groups include the School Council, Press Gang and Eco Committee. Pupils at Blaengarw feel valued and that the adults around them listen to them. However, the work of these groups is at a very early stage and as a result the views of the pupils do not currently have a notable impact on school life. The school provides suitable opportunities for pupils to perform and to participate in creative and sporting activities. For example, the school makes worthwhile use of visiting tutors and specialist teachers to develop pupils' musical skills.

Leaders promote a positive culture of safeguarding that is understood by all who work at the school through a system of effective policies and procedures. As a result, the school is effective in ensuring the welfare of all pupils has the highest priority. Leaders monitor pupil attendance carefully and provide appropriate help and support to identified pupils and their families.

Leadership and management

The acting executive headteacher has developed a vision for collaborative working across the federation that is effective and beneficial to both schools. She demonstrates professional values and sets high expectations for leadership, provision, pupil outcomes and their well-being across the two schools. In addition, she promotes a strong climate for collaboration and close working between the two schools, for example on curriculum design, and with other local primary schools and the neighbouring secondary school.

In the federation's two schools, each head of school has a clearly defined role and responsibilities within the leadership structure, ensuring that each has a key role in developing their individual schools, in tune with their unique circumstances. At Blaengarw Primary School, leadership is still at an early stage in its development, as is the development of the team. As a result, at times, staff lack clarity of what is expected of them and the purpose of their roles.

Members of the federation's governing body understand their roles and contribute to the strategic direction of the federation. Governors visit the schools regularly and

have an appropriate understanding of each school's strengths and the challenges they face. Governors provide an appropriate balance of support and challenge when holding senior leaders to account and fulfil their statutory duties. For instance, they ensure that the school makes appropriate arrangements for healthy eating and drinking and by work hard to encourage pupils to make healthy choices.

Leaders ensure that spending is appropriate and regularly monitor the budget, including the use of the pupil development grant. They monitor attendance at the school effectively and the progress pupils make, although analysis of the achievement of groups of pupils is at an early stage of development. Leaders and staff create a highly effective, robust culture of safeguarding across both schools. As a result, all pupils feel safe at school and learn how they can keep themselves safe. Overall, leaders promote good working relations with parents, who value the school's effective communication.

Under the direction of the acting executive headteacher, the heads of school, alongside other senior leaders, are beginning to monitor the school's performance. This work informs the school's improvement plan and sets out the expectations for improvement and expected progress, with clear timescales. However, this work is relatively new and leaders' current evaluations are over-generous and lack rigour. This means that important shortcomings are slow to be identified and addressed. For example, pupils' low-level disruption is not rectified and this has a negative impact on pupils' attitudes to learning and on the effectiveness of learning time. In addition, arrangements to monitor and improve important aspects of teaching are not strong. For example, leaders do not ensure that pupils receive the right level of challenge in their learning. Over time, this limits the progress pupils make.

Leaders support and encourage staff to engage with professional learning activities to support their developmental and the school. The acting executive headteacher is keen to identify and share good practice in each of the schools. For example, staff at Blaengarw successfully supported colleagues at Betws to improve their knowledge and approaches to the teaching of phonics.

Work to support pupils and their families with outside agencies is highly effective. There are frequent events at the school for parents to attend and receive valuable support, for example Early Help, Holistic Steps, Active Young People and the police, to embed community cohesion for the benefit of all. In addition, leaders ensure that there is support for staff well-being through outreach services. Governors understand their role to support the well-being of the acting executive headteacher.

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: 03/04/2024