A report on

St Mary's R.C. Primary School
Ffordd Llewelyn
Flint
Flintshire
CH6 5JZ

Date of inspection: February 2018

by

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

About St Mary's R.C. Primary School

St Mary's Roman Catholic Primary School is a voluntary-aided school in Flint. Currently, there are 292 pupils on roll, aged from three to eleven, which includes 23 nursery pupils. There are ten full-time classes and a part-time nursery. Four of these classes have mixed age groups.

Around 14% of pupils are eligible for free school meals. This is below the national average of19%. The school identifies that around 15% of pupils have additional learning needs. This is below the national average of 21%. A very few pupils have a statement of special educational needs. No pupils come from Welsh speaking homes. A few pupils are from a minority ethnic background and 26% of pupils have English as an additional language.

The headteacher took up the post in September 2008. The school's previous inspection was in July 2012.

Further information is available from the Welsh Government My Local School website at the link below.
http://mylocalschool.wales.gov.uk/Schools/SchoolSearch?lang=en

Summary

The pupils at St Mary's RC Primary School make good progress from their starting points. They have very positive attitudes to learning and show great pride in their school and in their work. Nearly all pupils behave well and show respect for one another and for adults. Teachers and teaching assistants work together well to provide interesting learning activities, which motivate pupils to learn. However, opportunities for pupils to shape their own learning and develop their independence is limited. The headteacher has a clear vision for the school, values every pupil as an individual and provides strong direction for the staff. However, links between self-evaluation and school priorities are not always clear. The governing body is very supportive of the school's work.

Inspection area	Judgement
Standards	**Good**
Wellbeing and attitudes to learning	**Good**
Teaching and learning experiences	**Adequate and needs improvement**
Care, support and guidance	**Good**
Leadership and management	**Adequate and needs improvement**

Recommendations

R1 Plan for pupils to have more opportunities to develop their ICT skills

R2 Improve links between self-evaluation and school development plans

R3 Comply with Welsh Government guidance when planning spending of specific grants

R4 Plan opportunities to develop pupils' independent learning skills

R5 Improve processes to monitor attendance

R6 Address the safeguarding issue identified during the inspection

What happens next

The school will draw up an action plan which shows how it is going to address the recommendations. Estyn will review the school's progress.

Main findings

Standards: Good

Most pupils start school with knowledge and skills below the level expected for their age. A minority of pupils start nursery with little or no English. As they move through the school most pupils make good progress. However, a few pupils, particularly the more able, do not always achieve as well as they could. Most pupils new to English acquire good communication skills as they progress through the school.

By the end of foundation phase, many pupils speak accurately and fluently. They are happy to discuss their learning and do so confidently. For example, they explain how they create an electronic book clearly. At the end of key stage 2, most pupils have the age appropriate skills to communicate confidently. They use these purposefully in their lessons when explaining their thoughts and ideas. Pupils with English as a second language make very good progress in their oracy skills from a low starting point.

Many pupils in foundation phase read simple texts aloud and use their knowledge of phonics effectively to decipher unfamiliar words. By Year 2, most use their reading skills successfully across the curriculum, for example when researching information about an arctic animal. Most pupils make good progress in reading throughout key stage 2. They skim read to gather information skilfully, for example when researching information about Lent. They discuss appropriate texts by their favourite authors and predict what might happen next confidently.

Most pupils develop effective writing skills. By the end of the foundation phase, many pupils organise and present information across a range of genres and a majority of pupils write accurately and appropriately to their age. Nearly all pupils use basic punctuation well. By the end of key stage 2, most pupils find, select and make effective use of information gathered during research and use this to design an information leaflet. Most pupils present their work appropriately. However, there are some inconsistencies in the quality of handwriting and attention to letter formation throughout the school.

Most pupils use and apply their mathematical skills successfully, for example when solving problems involving money and measure. By the end of the foundation phase, most pupils use their data handling skills well and can extract information from simple tally charts to produce bar graphs accurately. Many key stage 2 pupils order decimal numbers confidently. They use a range of graphs and charts to organise data from their topic work successfully, choosing appropriate scales. Most pupils apply their numeracy skills competently across the curriculum.

Throughout the foundation phase, pupils are able to use tablet computers to develop numeracy and literacy skills. By the end of foundation phase, pupils are able to create presentations using sound, animation and film. For example, Year 2 pupils create weather reports using the green screen and record puppet shows.

In key stage 2, pupils use tablet computers to create short presentations, develop mathematics and numeracy skills and create simple music compositions. Pupils'

skills in using information and communication technology (ICT) to communicate develop well across the curriculum. However, pupils do not develop their data handing and modelling skills sufficiently.

Across the school, nearly all pupils develop strong Welsh language skills and communicate in Welsh with enthusiasm. They are eager to participate in Welsh lessons. Most pupils in the nursery ask for their preferred snack in Welsh and key stage 2 pupils respond appropriately to simple questions about how they feel and their families. There is clear progression across the school as they build on the complexity of the language patterns they use, for example when undertaking oral and written activities based on the story about Saint David. Most pupils' Welsh writing is developing well. In Year 4, they can write about how mammals live in the Arctic and in Year 6, they can write an imaginary postcard from abroad using the past tense. Most pupils' standards in reading Welsh are good and nearly all take part eagerly in activities such as reading a rap in preparation for the school eisteddfod.

Wellbeing and attitudes to learning: Good

Nearly all pupils feel safe and secure in school. They are happy and confident with adults, visitors and their peers.

All pupils enjoy coming to school and are proud of their achievements. Most pupils are keen to learn. They engage fully in lessons and sustain concentration well. Groups of pupils receiving additional support make good progress with developing their social and emotional skills and their self-esteem over time.

Most pupils behave well in their classes and as they move around the school. They respond very well to the positive behaviour strategy and supportive ethos of the school, particularly enjoying the 'star of the week' raffle. Nearly all pupils are confident that staff will deal with any unpleasant behaviour decisively.

Across the school, most pupils develop strong attitudes and behaviours to help them learn throughout their lives. Pupils talk enthusiastically about their learning and enjoy the topics they study. They take a positive approach to their work and are not afraid to have a go. In lessons, nearly all pupils show a very positive attitude to learning. Most pupils have a sound understanding of what they need to do to improve their work. They respond well to teachers' feedback and use self and peer assessment strategies confidently to reflect on their work and help others to improve.

Nearly all pupils have a good understanding of how to keep healthy. They make good choices regarding diet and exercise and understand the importance of a healthy mind. They have a good awareness of how to stay safe, including when they use the internet. Most pupils enjoy taking part in physical activities with many pupils attending a range of after school sports activities such as the dance club.

There is a strong emphasis in the school on encouraging fairness, equality and tolerance of others and pupils respond positively to this, for instance when pupils have been studying other religions and cultures as part of their work in religious education.

Pupils take their roles and responsibilities seriously, including becoming prefects and reading buddies. The school council is well established and represents the view of all pupils very well. Members are currently involved in the development of a new school logo and are working with a local business to update the school's signage. However, their contribution to wider school improvement and self-evaluation is limited.

Teaching and learning experiences: Adequate and needs improvement

Overall, the quality of teaching at the school is good. All staff know their pupils well and many respond sensitively to the needs and interests of individuals. Most staff manage pupils' behaviour well. Many teaching assistants know when to intervene and provide effective support to individuals and groups of pupils, particularly those pupils who have English as an additional language.

Most teachers give clear instructions and explanations and use a variety of questioning techniques effectively. This helps to further many pupils' learning and enables them to explain their thinking purposefully. In many classes, the stimulus for lessons is exciting and engages pupils' interest and enthusiasm for learning. In these sessions, learning is fun, activities are purposeful and pupils make strong progress. However, in a few classes lessons do not always move at a suitable pace or allow pupils to take an active enough part in activities.

All teachers provide pupils with useful feedback about how well they have completed tasks and what they can do to improve their work. They give pupils suitable time to improve their work. Teachers assess pupils' work accurately and many use this information to set suitable targets for pupils.

In the foundation phase, teachers plan useful focused learning activities that help children develop their emerging literacy and numeracy skills across all areas of learning. However, teachers do not plan well enough for pupils to practise and embed their skills and follow their own interests in the indoor and outdoor learning environments.

In key stage 2, teachers work together to plan a broad, balanced and engaging curriculum. They identify stimulating topics that link to interesting storybooks and texts, such as the Indian fable of 'The Barhunda Bird'. This provides purposeful opportunities for pupils to practise their literacy and numeracy skills in meaningful contexts. Pupils in key stage 2 do not contribute to the planning of topics and activities on a regular basis. Consequently, their development as independent learners is restricted.

There is a good range of educational visits that stimulate pupils' interests and knowledge linked to topics and themes. Residential visits to Glan Llyn and Cardiff help to develop a better understanding of the culture and history of Wales.

There are worthwhile opportunities for pupils to develop their Welsh language skills in formal teaching activities and around the school. For example, lower key stage 2 pupils create Welsh digital books, about polar bears and record their own Welsh sound tracks.

Although teachers are beginning to develop pupils' digital competence, they do not plan sufficiently well to develop the full range of pupils' ICT skills, particularly the use of data and modelling in a range of contexts.

Care, support and guidance: Good

The school has effective processes to track and monitor pupils' progress and wellbeing. Teachers use this information appropriately to identify pupils who need additional support and produce detailed person-centred plans that summarise clearly each pupil's individual needs. Well-trained practitioners deliver programmes effectively, which are flexible and specific to the needs of individuals. The school provides a wide range of interventions booster groups for literacy, including speaking, listening and reading, numeracy and a homework club for pupils new to English. However, support for more able pupils is under developed.

The school is inclusive and sees pupils as individuals. There is a nurturing environment and staff recognise and celebrate pupils' achievements in many different areas of school life. The school develops pupils' social and emotional understanding well through group sessions to raise self-esteem. It works closely with external agencies including the local authority's social inclusion manager and education psychologist and builds on the advice given to provide effective support to meet the needs of specific individuals.

The school offers a good range of opportunities for parents to learn how to support their children best. For example, at the beginning of the school year, class teachers hold information sessions to talk about the forthcoming topics and curriculum. This support is child centred and tailored to the needs of the family. In addition, there are worthwhile literacy and numeracy workshops for parents. Most staff communicate well with parents and use social media to inform them about events and projects.

The school makes appropriate arrangements to promote healthy eating and drinking. Pupils have valuable opportunities within the curriculum to discuss the importance of healthy eating and most pupils show a good understanding of how to keep themselves healthy in relation to their diet, physical activity and emotional wellbeing.

The ethos of the school is positive and supportive. Pupils have worthwhile opportunities to develop their understanding of spiritual, moral, social and cultural issues through classroom activities and collective worship. The school helps pupils to learn the importance of citizenship through pupil-led groups, such as the school council and eco warriors.

Leaders have improved strategies for promoting attendance. They ensure that parents and pupils know the importance of attending school regularly and being punctual. These strategies are beginning to work as fewer pupils are late and persistent absence is falling. However, over time, there has not been enough improvement in attendance.

The school's arrangements to safeguard pupils give cause for concern. This is because there are issues with the security of the site.

Leadership and management: Adequate and needs improvement

The experienced headteacher has a clear vision for the school and staff work together as a cohesive and effective team. This ensures high standards of wellbeing and improving pupils' outcomes by raising expectations of what they can achieve. They provide good opportunities for all pupils from every background to play a lead role in the life of the school.

The governing body know the school well and are highly supportive of its aims and vision. Over time, governors have developed their ability to question leaders more effectively. Senior leaders keep governors well informed with useful, detailed reports. These include progress on activities and the outcomes of teachers' assessments and national tests. As a result, governors have a good understanding of the school's strengths and areas for improvement. They use this information effectively to challenge the school on its performance, for example on the impact of the initiatives made to improve attendance. However, their involvement in first-hand self-evaluation processes is less well developed.

The school makes use of a variety of monitoring activities in its self-evaluation processes. It uses an appropriate range of evidence to evaluate its work, such as lesson observations and the scrutiny of pupils' books. Senior leaders make good use of this information to identify a comprehensive list of improvement priorities. However, the links between the outcomes of self-evaluation and its plans for improvement are not always clear. The current improvement plan has appropriate strategic targets that link suitably with national and local priorities for instance, introducing the digital competency framework. The improvement plan allocates funding suitably to each priority and leaders divide responsibilities well among members of staff.

The school's processes to manage and oversee the professional development of staff are effective. Visits to other schools and participation at relevant courses relate well to the personal and professional needs of staff, as well as to national priorities. The school has established links with other schools to work collaboratively on a project to raise pupils' self-esteem. The school has shared this practice with schools across the county.

The headteacher, with the support of the governing body, manages the school budget effectively. They target finances well to meet pupils' needs and to support priorities in the school's improvement plan. For example, the recent purchase of computer tablets has improved provision for the development of pupils' ICT skills. The school makes creative use of the pupil development grant to provide a suitable range of intervention groups that ensure that pupils of all backgrounds achieve at an appropriate level. However, it does not target the grant specifically enough or channel all of the allocated funds appropriately.

Copies of the report

Copies of this report are available from the school and from the Estyn website (www.estyn.gov.wales)

Estyn evaluates a provider's effectiveness using a four-point judgement scale:

Excellent	Very strong, sustained performance and practice
Good	Strong features, although minor aspects may require improvement
Adequate and needs improvement	Strengths outweigh weaknesses, but important aspects require improvement
Unsatisfactory and needs urgent improvement	Important weaknesses outweigh strengths

The report was produced in accordance with Section 28 of the Education Act 2005.