



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

A report on

**Abbey Primary School
New Road
Neath Abbey
Neath
SA10 7NG**

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by

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

About Abbey Primary School

Abbey Primary School is in Neath Abbey, near Neath. The local authority is Neath Port Talbot. The number of pupils on roll is increasing. Currently, there are around 380 pupils on roll, aged from three to eleven, including 61 nursery children who attend part-time. There are 11 single-age and three mixed-age classes in the school. The school opened in September 2015 following the amalgamation of former infant and junior schools, and is on three sites that are around two kilometres apart.

The school contains an Early Years Assessment Unit for up to 12 pupils with additional learning needs, aged between three and five. Most of these pupils travel from outside the school's traditional catchment area.

The school identifies around 34% of pupils with additional learning needs. This is higher than the national average (21%). A few pupils have a statement of educational needs. The average proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals over the last three years is about 16%. This is slightly below the national average (19%). Nearly all pupils are of white British ethnicity and very few pupils speak Welsh at home.

The headteacher took up her post in September 2015, following the amalgamation of the former infant and junior schools. This is the school's first inspection in its present form.

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

Many pupils make good progress, often from low starting points. Most pupils with additional learning needs make strong progress towards their individual targets. Nearly all pupils have positive attitudes towards their learning and behave well in classes. The overall quality of teaching is good and most teachers provide pupils with a wide range of interesting learning experiences. In the foundation phase, staff make imaginative use of role-play areas and the outdoors to promote pupils' independence and problem-solving skills. Throughout the school, many pupils apply their literacy and numeracy skills well across the curriculum. Staff know pupils well and provide high levels of care, support and guidance. The headteacher has amalgamated the former schools successfully and established a unified vision and direction. She is supported well by an effective senior leadership team and the governing body.

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

Recommendations

R1 Improve the attainment of more able pupils at the higher levels in English and science in key stage 2

R2 Increase opportunities for pupils in key stage 2 to develop as independent learners

R3 Improve attendance, especially for pupils who are eligible for free school meals

What happens next

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

Main findings

Standards: Good

The majority of pupils enter the school with levels of skills, knowledge and understanding that are below those expected of pupils of a similar age. Many pupils start school with poorly-developed speaking and listening skills. By the end of key stage 2, many pupils make good progress and attain the expected level in English, mathematics and science. However, pupils' attainment does not compare well with that in similar schools at the higher levels. In the Assessment Unit and in the main school, most pupils with additional learning needs respond well to the support they receive and make very good progress towards their individual targets.

Many pupils make strong progress in developing their speaking and listening skills. By the end of the foundation phase, they listen well to members of staff and follow instructions carefully. In their role-play areas, they speak confidently to one another as they share their ideas, for example about a missing alien. Most pupils in key stage 2 listen attentively during lessons. They hold sensible discussions, such as about how to create a presentation on cyber-bullying.

In the foundation phase, many pupils make good progress in learning letters and sounds. They use their knowledge of phonics to sound out new regular words correctly. Many pupils recognise irregular words that they meet frequently, so that by Year 2 they read confidently. In key stage 2, most pupils read increasingly challenging texts with understanding. In Year 4, most pupils read accurately and without hesitation, using appropriate phonics strategies to help them to read unfamiliar words. However, few vary their intonation to add expression to their reading. By Year 6, most pupils have developed effective reading strategies. They read fluently and with good understanding, using punctuation well to read expressively. A majority show increasing awareness of inference by reading between the lines. More able pupils use literacy skills well to locate and record factual information from non-fiction books and the internet. For example, pupils in upper key stage 2 research and make relevant notes about the origins of computers and compile a fact file about Charles Darwin.

Most pupils in the foundation phase make good progress in developing their writing skills. In the nursery, they use a wide range of media to develop mark-making as an introduction to letter formation and writing their names. Through the foundation phase, many pupils develop a regular handwriting style with consistent size and spacing. By the end of the foundation phase, many pupils write neatly for a broad range of purposes across the curriculum. For example, they recount their visit to St Fagan's and list the similarities and differences between old and new local chapels. In their study of Roald Dahl, they write detailed descriptions of how they made an enormous crocodile sandwich. In key stage 2, many pupils write neatly, generally with accurate spelling and punctuation. They use their skills well in many areas of the curriculum. For example, they describe an investigation into the conditions preferred by woodlice, and use correct terminology when explaining how the human circulatory system works. In their work on North America, most use correctly punctuated sentences to describe the lifestyles of Iroquois tribespeople. In their independent stories, they use adjectives and adverbs effectively.

In the foundation phase, most pupils make good progress in acquiring and developing a suitably broad range of mathematical skills. Most apply their numeracy skills effectively in other areas of learning. They survey each other's opinions regarding their favourite castle, tallying responses and entering results into a computer program that produces a colourful bar chart. In key stage 2, many pupils develop their mathematical skills well, applying them for a suitably broad range of purposes in other subjects. For example, pupils in Year 4 compare the distances from various fruit-exporting countries. They engage in real-life problem-solving activities, such as deciding which ingredients to buy for a charity event, and how much to charge for the resulting cakes. Many older pupils apply their numeracy skills well. For example, in science, Year 6 pupils measure and calculate carefully to discover which pieces of fruit contain most juice. They produce accurate graphs to show how pulse rates alter during and after exercise, and design and make a mathematical game for younger pupils to play in their topic on space, constructing dice from sheets of paper.

As they move from class to class, most pupils develop their skills in information and communication technology (ICT) well. In the foundation phase, most use tablet computers and interactive whiteboards confidently to practise their numeracy skills and create pictograms. Most instruct programmable robots to negotiate a set course competently. In key stage 2, most pupils use a suitable range of educational and commercial software competently. They search the internet for information relating to their topics and are strongly aware of how to minimise the internet's inherent risks. Although most pupils use ICT well to present information using text and images, most pupils' awareness of how to use databases and spreadsheets is more limited.

In the foundation phase, most pupils write in Welsh in simple sentences and ask and answer questions regarding themselves. In key stage 2, most write extended pieces about themselves and their families using the present and past tenses. The majority of older pupils read clearly, but hesitantly, from Welsh texts. Many use the sentence patterns that they practise in lessons to hold simple conversations with one another, for example on the weather.

Wellbeing and attitudes to learning: Good

Nearly all pupils behave well in lessons and around the school. Most demonstrate positive attitudes to their learning and co-operate well with each other when working in pairs and groups. They are courteous and treat each other and adults with respect. Pupils develop a strong sense of fairness and tolerance. Most pupils who receive additional support to improve their social and life skills make good progress. This is a strength of the school.

Most pupils respond well to visits to school from the police liaison officer and lessons in every class on cyber-safety. As a result, they have a secure awareness of how to stay safe, including when using the internet. Many pupils undertake leadership roles effectively. For example, the school council devised the motto for the new school, has produced an e-safety leaflet and influenced the school's homework policy. Pupils actively support a number of local and national charities. For example, they organised a 'Danceathon' in aid of a national children's charity. A particularly strong feature is the role of pupils with additional learning needs who express their opinions well in pupil voice groups. Rates of attendance tend to be lower than those in similar schools; and the attendance rates of pupils who are eligible for free school meals is notably lower than that of other pupils.

Most pupils have a clear understanding of how to stay healthy and enjoy participating in a wide range of sporting activities both in school and in the local community. Nearly all pupils are eager and ready to start lessons promptly each morning and many pupils have a positive attitude towards learning, especially in the foundation phase where they are ambitious and independent. In upper key stage 2, many pupils demonstrate high levels of perseverance when solving complex numeracy problems. For example, they calculate the costs involved in organizing a trip to South Africa well.

Most pupils in the foundation phase contribute ideas towards their learning opportunities regularly. For example, they chose to create suitable shoes and a house for an alien visitor as part of their topic work. In key stage 2, pupils have fewer opportunities to contribute to how and what they learn.

Teaching and learning experiences: Good

The overall quality of teaching is good. It builds well on a successful working relationship between pupils, teachers and teaching assistants. Nearly all teachers provide exciting and engaging learning activities that motivate and enthuse pupils successfully.

Schemes of work ensure that activities meet the statutory requirements of the literacy and numeracy framework appropriately. The teaching and provision from entry to the school to the end of Year 2 reflect the principles of the foundation phase well. Most teachers establish appropriate learning objectives and ensure that pupils understand what is expected of them. Most teaching assistants provide effective support for individuals and groups of pupils.

Provision to develop the Cwricwlwm Cymreig is well established in the school. As a result, pupils have regular experiences to develop their understanding of Welsh culture through a wide variety of visits and visitors. For example, they visit the nearby abbey ruins and enjoy residential visits to outdoor pursuit centres. This contributes well to their social and personal development.

Pupils receive many purposeful opportunities to develop their literacy and numeracy skills across the curriculum. Teachers plan plenty of opportunities for pupils to develop their skills in oracy, reading and writing in all subjects, for example when pupils in Year 3 ask questions of a visiting worker from the local steel company.

Staff plan carefully to develop most pupils' ICT skills. However, planning for improving pupils' skills in using spreadsheets and databases is at an early stage of development. Foundation phase activities provide a good balance between adult-led and child-initiated learning, which encourages pupils to be independent and inquisitive learners. However, in key stage 2, too many lessons do not encourage pupils to become independent learners enough.

Most teachers use a wide variety of teaching styles effectively and use the outdoor areas imaginatively to enrich pupils' learning. The outdoor learning areas on the two sites for the younger pupils are well-laid out and provide stimulating opportunities for pupils to develop creatively and physically. However, the outdoor provision for pupils in the upper foundation phase is more limited.

Nearly all members of staff assess pupils' work accurately and make effective use of assessments to set targets for improvement. This is having a beneficial impact on standards, for example in the quality of writing that pupils produce as they move through the school.

There are a wide range of extra-curricular clubs and activities that enrich pupils' learning successfully and contribute very well to pupils' standards of wellbeing. There are valuable opportunities for pupils to take part in environmental activities and make effective and regular use of the outdoor learning environment, such as the forest school.

Most members of staff model the Welsh language well and encourage pupils to use the language during formal and informal activities, for example using Welsh successfully in a numeracy lesson on percentages in key stage 2. Most teachers provide purposeful opportunities for pupils to build effectively on their previous experiences so that they continue to develop their confidence in speaking Welsh as they move through the school.

Care, support and guidance: Good

There is a caring, inclusive and supportive ethos that permeates the school's daily life and work. Staff know the circumstances and needs of individual pupils well. The school's arrangements for safeguarding pupils meet requirements and give no cause for concern.

The school identifies pupils with additional learning needs soon after they enter the nursery or reception class. It provides purposeful support in class and in a wide range of effective withdrawal groups as identified pupils move through the school. Successful programmes include targeted speech and language provision in the nursery and interventions to support pupils' wellbeing in key stage 2. All pupils with additional learning needs have a personalised education plan that includes measurable and challenging targets. Staff and parents review these plans regularly. Most pupils make good progress towards their individual targets.

A few more able pupils benefit from effective interventions to boost their learning, such as an online reading intervention that provides a higher level of challenge to capable readers. The school benefits from the contributions of a comprehensive range of outside agencies that support and advise teachers and enhance pupils' learning. Nearly all pupils in the early years assessment unit respond extremely positively to the varied activities and nurturing environment that staff create for them.

There are suitable systems in place for tracking the progress of all pupils. The school uses them well to monitor groups of pupils, such as those with additional needs and those who are eligible for free school meals.

The school has appropriate arrangements to promote healthy eating and drinking. Staff provide a wide variety of regular physical activities, including after school clubs that help pupils to become fit and active. A wide range of enjoyable workshops and coffee mornings over the school year boosts parents' confidence in knowing how best to support their children's education.

Assemblies, circle time, personal development programmes and acts of collective worship make a strong contribution to pupils', moral and social development and promote the school as a community. A number of successful programmes, such as Talkabout and the Cool Club, support pupils who have social and communication difficulties. Pupils' cultural awareness is developed successfully through musical, artistic and activities in the performing arts. For example, pupils in the Year 6 Criw Celf participated successfully in an Arts Council of Wales project to develop their knowledge of visual and applied arts.

Leadership and management: Good

The headteacher delivers effective and purposeful leadership and has set a clear strategic direction for developing the school. She provides a strong, professional role model and sets appropriately high expectations for pupils and staff. Senior leaders have supported the amalgamation process well and have had a positive impact in developing many aspects of the school's work. There is an established, clear vision and ethos for the school which staff share and which is consistent across the three separate sites. This underpins the school's caring and inclusive nature and the positive and professional working relationships between all staff and other stakeholders. There is purposeful distributed leadership across the school and the headteacher has allocated roles and responsibilities appropriately across the school. All staff have relevant, up-to-date job descriptions and understand their roles and responsibilities clearly in relation to school improvement. Senior leaders take appropriate action to address shortcomings in the school's provision.

The headteacher has a positive track record in taking forward school improvement and, while leading the foundation phase, has created an effective learning environment of high quality. However, improvements in key stage 2 are ongoing and have not had sufficient time for their impact to come through fully since the school's amalgamation.

The self-evaluation report gives an accurate picture of the strengths and areas for development. Staff, governors, pupils and parents take an active role in the self-evaluation process. Priorities in the school improvement plan reflect many regional and national priorities, such as improving pupils' numeracy and literacy skills and the application of the principles of the foundation phase, which are a particular strength. The development of the school's response to the digital competence framework is at an early stage.

Members of the governing body are supportive and they are highly visible in the day-to-day running of the school. Senior leaders keep governors well informed about the school's work. Members of the governing body contribute a wide range of relevant skills and expertise to their roles. They challenge school leaders appropriately to improve the school in important areas, for example in relation to attendance and the quality of teaching and learning.

Performance management arrangements are comprehensive. All teachers and support staff have relevant targets linked to the school's development plan. Teachers and learning support assistants benefit from a range of appropriate professional learning opportunities, including sharing good practice with other schools. For example, staff have undertaken specialist training to support pupils with additional

learning needs and updated their skills in ICT. All teachers have opportunities to observe each other in their classrooms and to share good practice within the school. As a result, approaches to teaching and learning, in particular assessment for learning, are increasingly consistent throughout the school.

The headteacher and governors monitor expenditure carefully in order to ensure effective use of financial resources. The school uses its pupil development grant appropriately to support vulnerable learners by funding specialist interventions aimed at improving pupils' attainment and emotional wellbeing.

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.

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