



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

**A report on**

**Blaen-Y-Cwm C.P. School  
Blaenafon Road  
Brynmawr  
Blaenau Gwent  
NP23 4BR**

**Date of inspection: May 2018**

**by**

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

## About Blaen-Y-Cwm C.P. School

Blaen y Cwm County Primary School serves the communities of Brynmawr and Nantyglo in the Blaenau Gwent local authority. There are 324 pupils aged three to eleven years on roll. This includes 55 pupils in the nursery class who attend school on a part-time basis. Around 35% of pupils are eligible for free school meals. This is much higher than the average for Wales (19%). The school has 10 classes, six of which are mixed-age.

A very few pupils are members of the travelling community or speak English as an additional language. The school identifies around 31% of pupils as having additional learning needs, which is significantly higher than the national average (21%). A very few pupils have a statement of special educational needs. No pupil speaks Welsh at home.

The headteacher took up her post in September 2015. The school's last inspection was in June 2013.

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

Pupils at Blaen y Cwm Primary School experience high quality care, support and guidance. This raises their levels of wellbeing and confidence very effectively and engenders positive attitudes towards learning. Consequently, most pupils achieve well in mathematics, information and communication technology (ICT), Welsh and, in particular, literacy in key stage 2. Nearly all pupils demonstrate exemplary behaviour and they are polite and courteous to each other and to adults. The quality of teaching is good overall and all pupils experience interesting and engaging learning experiences across the curriculum. The headteacher and senior leadership team have ensured the implementation of their vision for the school through strong and supportive leadership of the close-knit staff team.

<b>Inspection area</b>	<b>Judgement</b>
<b>Standards</b>	<b>Good</b>
<b>Wellbeing and attitudes to learning</b>	<b>Good</b>
<b>Teaching and learning experiences</b>	<b>Good</b>
<b>Care, support and guidance</b>	<b>Excellent</b>
<b>Leadership and management</b>	<b>Good</b>

## **Recommendations**

- R1 Improve the quality of independent, extended writing in the foundation phase
- R2 Plan to widen pupils' application of their numeracy skills in work across the curriculum
- R3 Ensure that tasks, particularly in mathematics, challenge more able pupils
- R4 Develop the role of the governing body as a critical friend

## **What happens next**

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

Estyn will invite the school to prepare a case study on its work in relation to its support for vulnerable pupils for dissemination on Estyn's website

## Main findings

### Standards: Good

Most pupils enter the school with basic skills and levels of wellbeing below those expected for their age. As they move through the school, the confidence, attainment and social skills of many pupils develop rapidly and, by the time they reach Year 6, most achieve good standards, particularly in literacy. Pupils with additional learning needs and those who require additional help to improve their basic skills receive exemplary levels of support and this enables them to achieve well in relation to their abilities and personal targets. Pupils in key stage 2 who are more able achieve high standards in literacy, but this group of pupils does not always reach its full potential.

Across the school, most pupils' speaking and listening skills develop well. They listen carefully to one another and to adults and they learn from an early age the importance of respecting points of view that are different to their own. Most pupils enjoy talking about their work and speak with enthusiasm about class activities and 'happenings'. For example, pupils in Year 3 talk eloquently about the meteorite that 'landed' on the playground during their topic on 'Space'.

Most pupils in the foundation phase are developing good reading habits. They enjoy books and use their knowledge of sounds well to decode simple, unfamiliar words. More able older pupils talk about and explain their reading preferences. They understand the functions of authors and illustrators and the role of index and contents pages. Most pupils in key stage 2 enjoy reading for a variety of different purposes and achieve good standards. They are developing effective research skills, for example to find out facts about the American mission to land men on the moon in the 1960s. Most older pupils are developing more complex reading skills. For instance, when they consider an image of and text about the witches in 'Macbeth', they infer and deduce successfully to build up a picture of the witches' lives and characteristics.

In the foundation phase, pupils are beginning to write for a range of interesting reasons. By the time they reach Year 2, many spell simple common words independently and they use basic punctuation with increasing awareness. However, in general, their letter formation, handwriting and presentation are not good enough. Most older pupils write independently, for example to recount familiar stories such as 'Jack and the Beanstalk', but their ability to write extended, independent pieces of good quality is underdeveloped. In key stage 2, many pupils develop their literacy skills to a high standard in work across the curriculum. They use an extensive range of interesting vocabulary and stylistic techniques to make their writing compelling to the reader. For example, pupils in Year 4, as part of their topic on 'Colour', write impressive persuasive pieces as a gold crayon seeking election as leader of the box over other crayons. Older pupils write well-crafted letters from Macbeth to his wife, recounting the journey back to camp after the battle of Dunsinane.

In the foundation phase, most pupils develop a sound grasp of mathematical skills. By the end of the phase, they show a secure grasp of number facts that are appropriate for their age and ability. In key stage 2, most pupils continue to improve their skills in all aspects of mathematics. Based on a solid understanding of place

value and the relationships between numbers, they tackle problem-solving exercises with confidence. However, pupils across the school apply only a narrow range of numeracy skills in other areas of the curriculum.

Most pupils develop their ICT skills successfully. Pupils in the nursery and reception classes use tablet computers well in their planned activities. For example, they begin to use quick response codes to view images and information. In Year 1 and 2 classes, most pupils make good progress finding information for their tasks. For example, they use tablets successfully to research information about 'Amazing Animals' in literacy and they create tables and present bar charts when studying their favourite outdoor areas. Lower key stage 2 pupils use a range of devices effectively to locate, store and retrieve information and to present information using a variety of text and images. Year 4 pupils develop coding skills very well to programme their robot 'JD Dino' as part of the collaborative work with Cardiff University. Older pupils create videos adding text, graphics and sound confidently. Most pupils use an online platform successfully as they move through the school, for example to create interesting fact files about Tim Peake as part of their 'Space' topic. Most pupils use basic graph and database programs appropriately, but their knowledge of spreadsheets is less well developed. Nearly all pupils have a good understanding of the measures they need to take to stay safe online.

Across the school, nearly all pupils develop strong Welsh language skills and communicate in Welsh with enthusiasm. Most pupils in the early years respond well to a wide range of words and phrases. By the end of the foundation phase, pupils talk with increasing confidence about how they feel and what they like to eat. As they move through the school, pupils build effectively on the complexity of the language patterns they use. In Year 6, many pupils respond confidently with a good level of intonation and emphasis, for instance when acting out the character of Harri Morgan in Welsh during an imaginary interview.

### **Wellbeing and attitudes to learning: Good**

Nearly all pupils enjoy their time in school and have a good understanding of the importance of regular attendance. They behave very well and are polite and welcoming towards visitors. There are strong working relationships between staff and pupils, which foster most pupils' social and life skills effectively. Throughout the school, pupils show positive attitudes towards their work, concentrate well in lessons and work diligently for extended periods. Pupils behave well at break times. They play well together and make good use of the range of activities and resources available to them. These include climbing frames and staging, which the school provided at the request of pupils.

Most pupils show a real pride in their work and are eager to discuss and explain what they have been doing. Pupils in the foundation phase share with their class information they have researched, such as the fact that pandas have unusual feet. Across the school, pupils have opportunities to make suggestions about what they would like to learn. Teachers develop these ideas effectively. This ensures that pupils have a high level of interest and engagement in the topics they study.

A strong feature of the school is the commitment of pupils to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. As a direct result of the work of the school council, pupils

throughout the school identify rights and apply them in their learning. For example, pupils in the foundation phase discuss their right to care for their environment sensibly, as they work outside in the forest school area.

Most pupils understand the importance of eating and drinking healthily. For example, they eat fruit at break-time and understand what makes a healthy lunchbox. They enjoy their regular opportunity for exercise as they challenge themselves on the 'daily mile' track. Pupils feel safe in school and know that there are members of staff available for them to discuss any problems or concerns they may have.

Pupils have a strong sense of community and an awareness of the world around them. Pupils of all ages visit local churches for their harvest festival celebrations, sing to the residents of a care home and take part in a range of fund-raising activities for various charities, including the local food bank. Classes in key stage 2 take turns to become 'rotakids', during which time they work together to raise money for a charity of their choice.

### **Teaching and learning experiences: Good**

The quality of the curriculum for all pupils is rich, varied and interesting. Teachers plan a range of exciting learning experiences, which they often deliver through topics with a strong emphasis on science and the creative arts. For example, through the Arts Council for Wales, three classes have completed a 'Space' project recently. This included work with a local artist to produce large three-dimensional alien models and a creative practitioner to stage a 'space' performance of 'Zong the Alien' for the rest of the school as a culmination of the topic. Regular working with a local music organisation provides many opportunities for pupils to develop an appreciation of different aspects of music. For instance, pupils in key stage 2 experience African drumming and the chance to learn to play the ukulele. The school links effectively with Cardiff University to develop pupils' scientific knowledge and enquiry skills, for example through a robotics workshop and work on chemistry. Outdoor learning experiences are developing well and all classes have opportunities to acquire useful new skills in the forest school area. A wide range of lunchtime and after-school clubs, such as science, chess, reading and a variety of sports, further enhance pupils' learning in both key stages.

Staff develop pupils' knowledge of the history and culture of Wales effectively, such as through the study of Welsh authors, artists and photographers. For example, during their topic on 'Homes', older key stage 2 pupils visited Nantyglo Ironworks with a local historian to study life in the 1800s. The annual school Eisteddfod is a popular event. Staff make good provision to encourage pupils to speak Welsh regularly throughout the day.

Opportunities for pupils to apply their literacy skills in work across the curriculum are good and, as a result, key stage 2 pupils in particular produce many examples of extended, independent writing of high quality. For example, they write vivid recounts of their visit to the ironworks. However, planning to enable pupils to apply a wide range of numeracy skills in cross-curricular work is more limited. Teachers differentiate work well for pupils who are less able, but, in general, planning to challenge more able pupils, particularly in mathematics, is less effective, although there are pockets of strong practice in a few classes.

The quality of teaching is good. Teachers and support staff work well together to plan and deliver a range of learning experiences of high quality that engage nearly all pupils effectively. Across the school, the strong working relationships between staff and pupils are effective in supporting and developing pupils' levels of wellbeing, which in turn enables them to apply themselves to their learning with enthusiasm. In most classes, learning moves at a suitable pace and staff use questioning techniques well to assess pupils' understanding and to move their learning forward. Most teachers promote pupils' independent learning skills regularly, but, on occasions, learning experiences are too adult directed in foundation phase classes.

All teachers provide productive verbal and written feedback to pupils on the quality of their work. Written comments often make clear what a pupil has achieved and a further comment identifies what the pupil needs to do next in order to improve their work. Pupils respond well to these comments, for example by using their 'purple polishing pens' to redraft sections of their writing to make it more interesting for the reader. The use of self and peer marking is developing, and older pupils are beginning to use the success criteria in 'toolkits' well to assess the work of others constructively. Due to these initiatives, most pupils have a clear understanding of what they do well and what aspects of their work require improvement.

### **Care, support and guidance: Excellent**

The school's provision for the care, support and guidance for pupils promotes their wellbeing exceptionally well. It ensures that pupils have a wide range of opportunities to succeed in their academic, social and emotional development. Staff know pupils extremely well and provide a nurturing environment that builds pupils' confidence and self-esteem, and promotes positive, mature approaches towards learning. There is a clear emphasis on developing pupils' understanding of their human rights and this has a positive impact on their impressive attitudes and behaviour.

The school has comprehensive systems to track and monitor pupils' achievements, progress and behaviour as they move through the school. Leaders and staff use these very effectively to identify pupils who need additional support and to monitor the progress of different groups. The school adapts its provision of support flexibly to ensure that pupils receive support quickly and for an appropriate period of time, when required. Provision for these pupils is outstanding and the school uses a wide range of initiatives that meet their needs very successfully.

The additional needs co-ordinator supports staff members extremely efficiently in customising provision that is of high quality. Skilled staff deliver a range of well-targeted intervention programmes to improve pupils' literacy and numeracy skills. There are very beneficial programmes to support vulnerable pupils, including those with emotional needs. For example, the work of the emotional literacy support assistants has a very positive impact on raising targeted pupils' self-esteem. As a result, pupils demonstrate improved levels of confidence and engagement in school life and have the resilience to participate in mainstream activities. All pupils with additional learning needs have an individual education plan that includes measurable, challenging and achievable targets with a very high degree of pupil and parental input. This strong provision underpins all aspects of the life and work of the school community. The co-ordinator takes the lead across the authority to mentor additional needs staff in other schools.

The school has strong relationships with parents and informs them well about their child's progress. Arrangements include detailed progress reports, regular parents' evenings and 'The Term Ahead' newsletter, which gives useful information about upcoming events and class topics for the term. This helps parents to support their children's learning well. The school's social media platforms are effective in providing parents with an up-to-date picture of activities and many parents access the information on a regular basis.

There are good opportunities for pupils to take an active part in decision-making and leadership, for example through the work of the school council, playground buddies and the 'Helpwr Heddiw'. The school council focuses effectively on health matters. For example, its efforts mean that pupils now have healthier drinks at lunchtime. The school has effective arrangements to promote healthy eating and drinking. It encourages physical activity very well through the 'daily mile' initiative and the many sports clubs available to pupils to develop their physical and social skills. Nearly all pupils enjoy participating in these activities.

The school's strong focus on children's rights and issues relating to equality and diversity ensures that pupils develop the values of tolerance and respect well. For example, the school is a 'Dementia Friendly' school and Year 6 pupils visit a local care home to take part in activities with the older generation. This strengthens the school's links with the community and improves pupils' social and emotional skills. Many activities support pupils' spiritual development effectively. For example, pupils reflect with empathy in assemblies on their own beliefs and the importance of respecting difference.

Arrangements for safeguarding pupils meet requirements and give no cause for concern.

### **Leadership and management: Good**

The headteacher provides strong and effective leadership. She communicates a clear vision for the school that puts pupils' wellbeing at its core. The staff, including an effective management team, support the headteacher well and share her values. Members of the senior leadership team share their responsibilities across the school well. This ensures that they have a good knowledge of the professional practice of staff and pupils' learning experiences. They work collaboratively with other staff to improve the quality of provision within a strong team ethos.

All staff develop their professional knowledge effectively through working with other professionals both within and outside the school. For example, teaching assistants have visited another local school to share good practice in supporting pupils with additional needs. Links with Cardiff University as part of a science and technology initiative are effective in raising standards in science and ICT and pupils' aspirations. Staff benefit from a wide range of training opportunities, including sabbaticals, and pupils' standards have improved as a result, for example the Welsh oracy skills of pupils in the foundation phase. Procedures for the performance management of staff are effective and link well to staff development. For example, whole-school training on the digital competency framework, emotional literacy and rights respecting schools has improved many aspects of provision and outcomes for pupils.

The governing body are supportive and carry out their responsibilities conscientiously. The headteacher gives them a suitable range of information, including performance information and progress reports on the school improvement plan. Consequently, governors have a good understanding of developments in the school and its targets for improvement. Governors have begun to gather first-hand evidence of teaching and learning through learning walks and scrutiny of pupils' work. However, this process is at an early stage of development in enabling governors to ask searching questions about progress.

School self-evaluation procedures include an appropriate range of first-hand evidence and analysis of the views of all stakeholders. For example, as a result of pupil feedback, staff have provided an additional outside stage for role play and drama opportunities in key stage 2. The self-evaluation procedures give leaders a good understanding of the school's strengths and areas for development. The improvement plan has clear targets and leaders measure progress against these regularly. Interim reports and end-of-year evaluations are clear and concise, and they identify progress and areas for further development accurately. The emphasis on raising standards of literacy and wellbeing over the past two years has raised standards of speaking, listening and reading across the school and writing in key stage 2. The emotional literacy programme is having a very positive impact on many pupils' attitudes to learning.

The school uses its budget effectively. For instance, the recent purchase of additional ICT equipment is having a positive impact on raising pupils' skills. The use of grants to support vulnerable groups and promote inclusion for all is highly effective. For example, leaders employ additional staff to support vulnerable pupils through the implementation of a wide range of targeted intervention programmes that match their needs closely.

## Copies of the report

Copies of this report are available from the school and from the Estyn website ([www.estyn.gov.wales](http://www.estyn.gov.wales))

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

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

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 going to press. Any enquiries or comments regarding this document/publication should be addressed to:

Publication Section

Estyn

Anchor Court, Keen Road

Cardiff

CF24 5JW or by email to [publications@estyn.gov.wales](mailto:publications@estyn.gov.wales)

This and other Estyn publications are available on our website: [www.estyn.gov.wales](http://www.estyn.gov.wales)

© Crown Copyright 2018: 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: 11/07/2018