



Rhagoriaeth i bawb – Excellence for all

Arolygiaeth Ei Mawrhydi dros Addysg
a Hyfforddiant yng Nghymru

Her Majesty's Inspectorate
for Education and Training in Wales

A report on
Acton Park Primary School
Box Lane
Wrexham
LL12 8BT

Date of inspection: March 2011

by

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



During each inspection, inspectors aim to answer three key questions:

Key Question 1: How good are the outcomes?

Key Question 2: How good is provision?

Key Question 3: How good are leadership and management?

Inspectors also provide an overall judgement on the school's current performance and on its prospects for improvement.

In these evaluations, inspectors use a four-point scale:

| Judgement | What the judgement means |
|-----------------------|---|
| Excellent | Many strengths, including significant examples of sector-leading practice |
| Good | Many strengths and no important areas requiring significant improvement |
| Adequate | Strengths outweigh areas for improvement |
| Unsatisfactory | Important areas for improvement outweigh strengths |

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

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Context

Acton Park Primary School is situated in the outskirts of Wrexham. Most pupils come from the immediate area. The school admits children to the nursery class at the age of three. Nearly all pupils attend pre-school provision.

The school, in two separate buildings, opened in September 2009 following the amalgamation of the previous junior and infant schools. There are currently 425 full-time and 55 part-time pupils on role organised into 17 classes taught by 20 full-time and four part-time teachers, with six full-time and 19 part-time support staff.

Pupils come from a variety of backgrounds. The school describes the area it serves as neither advantaged nor disadvantaged. Approximately 12.5% of pupils are entitled to free school meals. This is lower than local and national averages. Currently, there are four pupils who are being "looked after" by the local authority.

English is the predominant language for most pupils. At present there are three pupils receiving support for English as an additional language. No pupils speak Welsh at home.

Baseline indications show that, for most pupils, attainment on entry to the school is at or slightly below the expected level. Including the two classes for pupils in need of support for speech, language and communication difficulties, approximately 16% of pupils are identified as having additional learning needs. Twenty-seven pupils have a statement of special educational need. No pupil was excluded in the last year.

The 2010-2011 individual school budget per pupil for Acton Primary is £3,209, which compares with a maximum of £9,122 and a minimum of £2,734 for primary schools in Wrexham. The school has the 35th highest budget per pupil out of the 62 primary schools in Wrexham.

Summary

| | |
|---|-------------|
| The school's current performance | Good |
| The school's prospects for improvement | Good |

Current performance

The overall judgement on the current performance of the provider is good because:

- most pupils attain well and make appropriate or better progress;
- most pupils are enthusiastic, attentive learners;
- most teaching engages and challenges pupils well; and
- pupils' independent learning skills are excellent.

Prospects for improvement

The overall judgement on the prospects for improvement of the provider are good because leaders and managers have:

- set an ambitious vision for the school which is shared by all staff;
- successfully introduced a range of initiatives such as thinking skills and independent learning for pupils; and
- made effective use of first-hand observations and professional learning communities to share good practice across the school.

Recommendations

- R1 Raise standards in Welsh language and pupils higher order reading skills especially in key stage 2.
- R2 Raise the attainment of boys in both key stages.
- R3 Improve pupils' independent writing skills and the quality of assessment in the key stage 2 resource provision class.
- R4 Further develop self-evaluation and monitoring procedures by providing greater emphasis on pupil outcomes and improving the consistency of assessment.

What happens next?

The school will produce an action plan that shows how it will address the recommendations.

Main findings

Key Question 1: How good are outcomes?

Good

Standards: Good

Most pupils in mainstream classes make good progress whilst in Acton Park Primary School. For these pupils, attainment in both key stages places Acton Park in the top 50% of schools with a similar percentage of free school meals and above the average for their family of schools (those schools which face similar challenges). In most lessons pupils achieve well and use their skills effectively.

Many pupils enter the school with skills slightly below the average expected of them, especially in reading and writing. Foundation Phase and Year 2 pupils settle quickly into school routines becoming increasingly confident and independent learners. This enables them to make good progress.

Many pupils demonstrate excellent speaking skills for their age. They are articulate and talk confidently using an extensive vocabulary in a range of situations. Almost all pupils use their listening skills well.

Many pupils read widely, fluently and with enjoyment at a level appropriate for their age. They discuss what they have read with confidence and understanding. However, by the end of key stage 2 not all pupils have well-developed higher order reading skills such as 'skimming and scanning' nor can most pupils accurately identify key points in a text. Only older key stage 2 pupils use library retrieval skills well.

Most pupils quickly develop into confident writers for a range of audiences and purposes. By the end of key stage 2, most children write well. A few more able and talented Year 6 pupils write to a very high standard across a range of subjects. Overall, pupils' handwriting skills and presentation are good but they are not consistently high across all classes. Pupils in the key stage 2 resource provision class do not write well enough independently and rely too much on copying from other sources.

Pupils use numeracy well in a range of subjects. Information and communication technology skills are good with some very high quality examples of independent research from the internet in Year 6.

Pupils in the key stage 1 resource provision class make good progress. In the key stage 2 resource provision class, overall progress is adequate. Most pupils in receipt of free school meals, 'looked after' by the local authority or who have support for additional learning needs make at least appropriate progress and a minority of these do even better. In most cases, girls attain significantly better than boys. These differences are considerably greater than for most other schools in the family.

Standards of Welsh language at key stage 1 are good. Most pupils use simple language to describe the weather and how they feel, and to ask for items such as fruit and classroom objects.

In key stage 2, most pupils follow basic instructions well and occasionally speak Welsh around the school and during lessons, but overall make only adequate progress. Most pupils are not able to follow simple sentence patterns accurately and they do not always use the common Welsh vocabulary for everyday articles.

When comparing the results of all pupils at seven years of age in key stage 1 to local and national averages, attainment is around the average. End of key stage 1 assessments for 2010 for English, mathematics, science and the core subject indicator (the percentage of pupils who achieve the expected level in English, mathematics and science in combination), place the school in the lower 50% of schools with a similar percentage of free school meals.

Compared to its family of schools the school's performance is below the average in all areas for all pupils at the expected level 2. However, performance is above the average for the family for the higher level 3 in mathematics and science.

In 2010, in the end of key stage 2 assessments for all pupils at age 11 years, attainment is slightly above the average for the local authority and all schools in Wales. However, when compared to schools with a similar percentage of free school meals, results are in the lower 50% for all subjects and the core subject indicator.

Compared to its family, performance for all pupils is below average for the expected level 4 for the core subject indicator, English and science and around average in mathematics. For the higher 5 it is around the average for science but below average in other areas.

Wellbeing: Good

Nearly all pupils say that they feel safe in school. They show a clear appreciation of the importance of healthy lifestyles and keeping safe.

Almost all pupils behave well. Little bullying occurs and staff deal with occasional incidences promptly.

Most pupils are enthusiastic, attentive learners, and are courteous and friendly. They work well, take an active part in lessons, show care, respect and concern for others and demonstrate increasingly mature attitudes as they move through the school. Many pupils take on additional responsibilities such as head boy or head girl, or become members of the school council or eco-council. The pupil self-evaluation group works well with the school council to seek pupils' views and to share their findings with the governing body. The school council has recently opened a school shop to sell stationary and uses the profits from this to improve the school grounds.

Many pupils have excellent levels of independent working. In lessons they begin work quickly, stay on-task for long periods and take real interest in what they do. This is raising standards of achievement, especially of the more able pupils.

Many pupils use 'thinking skills' processes very effectively to solve problems and develop their work. A majority are aware of what they need to improve their work but very few are engaged in contributing to planning what they learn.

Almost all pupils are often involved with the community through recycling events, sporting events and fundraising activities for organisations such as local hospices, The Royal British Legion, Seeds For Africa and local churches.

Pupils' attendance, at around 96%, is consistently in the top 25% of that for similar schools. Most pupils are punctual.

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| Key Question 2: How good is provision? | Good |
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Learning experiences: Good

Pupils receive a broad and balanced education which effectively builds on their existing knowledge, understanding and skills. Curriculum planning addresses the needs of almost all pupils well and is consistently applied throughout the school. The school has been especially successful in developing a very smooth transfer for pupils from the Foundation Phase to the key stage 2 skills-based curriculum. This aspect of provision is excellent.

Staff provide suitable opportunities for most pupils to develop their skills across all subjects, especially for thinking skills and writing. Many pupils read to staff on a regular basis but there is inconsistent support for them regarding how they might improve their reading and particularly how they can develop higher order reading skills. The school has not yet established a consistent approach to homework across all classes.

The school is working successfully to promote Y Cwricwlwm Cymreig and a Welsh identity amongst the pupils. Provision for pupils to develop Welsh language skills is good at key stage 1 but less effective in key stage 2. Visits to, for example, Nant BH, Cardiff, Glan Llyn Outdoor Education Centre, Erddig Hall, and Ty Mawr Country Park effectively help support pupils' learning.

There is a good uptake of the wide range of after school activities which include golf, football, rugby, netball and dance as well as creative arts. These support the taught curriculum well.

The school succeeds in promoting education for sustainable development and global citizenship. There are well established links with schools within Wales, Lesotho and USA.

Teaching: Good

Most teaching is good or better. In the few classes where teaching is excellent, staff provide high quality learning experiences that very effectively engage and challenge pupils. Most teaching uses a wide range of strategies to interest and motivate pupils: it has clear learning and success criteria, good pace, good use of questioning and a strong use of bilingualism. Support staff are used effectively across the school.

They work alongside teachers providing pupils with well-focused support. In most lessons the teaching promotes excellent opportunities for pupils to develop their 'thinking' and independent learning skills.

Procedures for end of key stage assessments for English, mathematics and science are rigorous. The very effective use of 'Learning Journals' throughout the school is a successful part of this process. However, assessments for Welsh language are not always accurate.

The effective tracking system enables staff to easily identify how well pupils are achieving. They regularly assess pupils' performance and, in most classes, pupils receive useful oral or written feedback from staff to help them know what to do to improve. On a few occasions, some books are unmarked by staff, or marked incorrectly. Assessment in the key stage 2 resource provision class does not build successfully on the good foundations laid in key stage 1.

Care, support and guidance: Good

The school has effective arrangements to improve pupils' wellbeing, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Staff encourage all pupils to take a full part in the life of the school and pupils' achievements are recognised and celebrated. These arrangements contribute well to the high standards of pupils' wellbeing.

The school liaises well with specialist agencies such as the police, health, speech and language and social services and this impacts positively on pupils' achievements. Other external agencies, such as the educational psychology service, work in close partnership with the school to ensure that they meet pupils' needs.

In the mainstream classes there are appropriate levels of differentiation and support for pupils with additional learning needs through a range of interesting, open-ended tasks. In both specialist resource provision classes, pupils' social and emotional development is well supported. Provision for the development of pupils' literacy skills is very good in the infant class, but in the key stage 2 class these good foundations are not consistently built upon, particularly for the development of pupils' writing skills.

Throughout the school, pupils' individual education plans contain appropriate targets and are reviewed regularly, often with parental and pupil involvement. Annual reviews for pupils with statements of special educational needs meet statutory requirements.

The school has an appropriate policy and procedures for safeguarding.

An issue regarding pupils' wellbeing was brought to the attention of the governing body.

Learning environment: Good

The school is caring community that works hard to ensure equal opportunities for all its pupils. The curriculum is fully accessible to all, regardless of gender, race or background. There are many occasions where pupils in the two specialist classes integrate well with pupils in mainstream classes, for example in assemblies, games and mathematics lessons. These opportunities enhance pupils' learning. Pupils' understanding of diversity is well promoted, particularly through work on global citizenship.

Accommodation is of a high quality, is well maintained and provides a calm atmosphere to promote successful learning. Outside areas are also maintained to a high standard. Good use is made of the wide-ranging resources in the school.

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| Key Question 3: How good are leadership and management? | Good |
|--|-------------|

Leadership: Excellent

The headteacher and senior leaders have an ambitious and clear vision for the school. They have involved all staff exceptionally well to overcome difficulties and develop a strong, shared identify and priorities following amalgamation in September 2009. The principles of developing thinking skills and confident, independent learners are at the heart of the school and all staff work collaboratively to support these.

The headteacher has been very successful in building relationships across the school. She is approachable and her trust in senior leaders and staff motivates them and gives them confidence to make improvements. The senior leadership team work very well together and have clear responsibilities. They are highly effective leaders who have been instrumental in the school's strong progress to date.

Performance management arrangements are rigorous and involve all staff within the school. Personal targets link well to whole school priorities and individual self-evaluation is a valuable feature this process. Senior leaders use regular classroom observation and book scrutiny to gain an accurate insight into performance across the school.

Governors are clear about their roles and have a good knowledge of the school, its overall performance and new initiatives. Governors have very effective links with staff and this increases their detailed understanding of the school. As a result, they are able to provide effective challenge.

The school has made very good progress in a short time to share the best practice from the two schools and develop this across the amalgamated school. Work to address national priorities such as the Foundation Phase, thinking skills and Assessment for Learning has been particularly effective in enabling learners to have greater opportunities to work independently and develop a range of skills. Pupils interviewed are very positive about the changes in the school.

Improving quality: Good

Acton Park Primary is a reflective learning community. Joint planning and peer observations by staff are particularly valuable and support the ethos of sharing good practice and learning from each other.

The school's self-evaluation draws on a range of evidence from first-hand observations, data, the professional learning communities and feedback from pupils and parents. These were used well soon after amalgamation to develop a shared understanding of the school's strengths and areas to develop through professional learning communities. Although leaders regularly scrutinise pupils' work, they do not identify inconsistencies, for example in marking, rigorously enough.

The school improvement plan identifies a range of appropriate priorities. Progress is reviewed regularly but this does not take enough account of the impact of actions on outcomes for pupils. The school has made good progress against the actions in last year's school improvement plan.

The five professional learning communities in school are well established and include all teachers and many teaching assistants. This work enables expertise to be shared and has led to greater collaboration between staff and improved resources and teaching strategies, for example for thinking skills and transition from Year 2 to Year 3. The regular feedback to whole staff meetings informs practice across the school but this work has not yet had a clear impact on standards.

Partnership working: Good

The school has effective links with a range of partnerships that make a successful contribution to improving outcomes for pupils. These include links for the shared planning and moderation of pupils' work with staff from Rhosnesni High school. Regular presentations on teaching strategies and first-hand observations of teaching across different schools are helping to share good practice. Suitable arrangements with partner secondary schools enable pupils to transfer smoothly to their next stage of learning.

Partnerships and working together have been a focus for the school and the topic of a professional learning community within the school. The school works closely with local colleges and the university to support placements for trainees in teaching, childcare and speech and language therapy. The school works well with parents. Almost all feel well informed and able to approach the school with any concerns.

Resource management: Good

The school manages its finances well. Funding is used flexibly to address priorities. For example, profits from the before and after school provision are used to employ additional teaching assistants within the school.

Staff are deployed effectively to build on their expertise and strengths. Training and staff development are planned well in relation to priorities and include all staff across the school.

There is a very good range of appropriate resources. The school has targeted investment to improve these in line with priorities such as outdoor learning and information and communication technology.

In view of the good progress made by most pupils and the quality of provision, the school provides good value for money.

Appendix 1

Stakeholder satisfaction report

Pupil questionnaires

Just over 62 pupils in key stage 2 completed the questionnaire. Almost all feel safe in school although a few do not believe that the school deals well with any bullying. Nearly all think that they are well supported in school, especially having someone to talk to if they are worried or upset. Most feel that they are doing well at school and believe that there are enough resources to enable them to learn well. Most think that homework is of value to them and they know what do to and whom to ask if they find their work hard. There is widespread agreement that the school helps pupils to live healthy lifestyles.

Just under half of pupils feel that other pupils do not always behave well in class or in the play and lunch intervals.

Parental questionnaires

There were 34 completed responses to the questionnaire. Overall, many parents expressed very positive views about the school. In particular, they think that their children like school, teaching is good and staff expect the pupils to work hard. They feel that their children are safe at school.

A few parents have concerns about the amount of information they receive about their child's progress, suitability of homework, appropriate support for pupils with additional learning needs, the range of trips and visits, and how the school deals with complaints. A very few wrote about not feeling comfortable when approaching the school with a problem.

Appendix 2

The inspection team

| | |
|-------------------------|---------------------|
| Rick Hawkley | Reporting Inspector |
| Rhona Edwards | Team Inspector |
| Jassa Scott | Team Inspector |
| Peter Haworth | Lay Inspector |
| Tania Armstrong Owen | Peer Inspector |
| Sue Edgar (Headteacher) | School Nominee |

Copies of the report

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Year groups and key stages

Schools use a common system of numbering year groups from the start of compulsory schooling to 18 years of age. This system emphasises the importance of continuity and eases communication among schools, governing bodies, parents and LEAs.

The term 'Reception' (R) refers to the year group of pupils in a primary school who reach the age of five during the academic year. Year 1 refers to the year group of pupils who reach the age of six during the academic year and so on. Year 13 is the year group of students who reach the age of 18 during the academic year.

Primary phase:

| | | | | | | | |
|------|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|------|-------|
| Year | R | Y1 | Y2 | Y3 | Y4 | Y5 | Y6 |
| Ages | 4-5 | 5-6 | 6-7 | 7-8 | 8-9 | 9-10 | 10-11 |

Secondary phase:

| | | | | | | | |
|------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| Year | Y7 | Y8 | Y9 | Y10 | Y11 | Y12 | Y13 |
| Ages | 11-12 | 12-13 | 13-14 | 14-15 | 15-16 | 16-17 | 17-18 |

The four key stages cover the following year groups:

| | |
|-------------|---------------------|
| Key stage 1 | Year 1 and Year 2 |
| Key stage 2 | Year 3 to Year 6 |
| Key stage 3 | Year 7 to Year 9 |
| Key stage 4 | Year 10 and Year 11 |