



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

**Gurnos Nursery School
Cedar Way
Gurnos Estate
Merthyr Tydfil
CF47 9PA**

Date of inspection: July 2012

by

Mr Peter Mathias

for

**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

Gurnos Nursery School with 92 pupils on roll aged three to four years is situated in a large estate of public housing on the northern edge of Merthyr Tydfil, which is the local authority. It serves the local area where there are high levels of multiple deprivation and unemployment. The majority of pupils come from disadvantaged backgrounds. Fifty-five per cent are considered eligible for free school meals, which is well above local and national averages.

One pupil has English as an additional language and no pupil has Welsh as the language of the home. Nearly all are from white, British backgrounds. Fourteen per cent are identified as having some degree of additional learning needs, nearly all for speech and communication difficulties. No pupil receives help from outside services or has a statement of special educational needs. None was excluded in the previous school year; one is looked after by the local authority.

During the inspection four permanent members of staff were absent, two of whom were on maternity leave. Their places were taken by temporary staff. The school was last inspected in the summer term 2006.

The 2011/2012 individual school budget per pupil for Gurnos Nursery School is £4,239 which compares to a national average of £5,986 for all maintained nursery schools in Wales.

Summary

The school's current performance	Excellent
The school's prospects for improvement	Excellent

Current performance

The school is excellent because:

- standards and progress are excellent;
- the curriculum is innovative and exciting;
- the partnership with parents and carers is outstanding;
- very good attention is given to pupils' views;
- the quality of teaching is excellent; and
- there is a very high quality and generous quantity of learning resources.

Prospects for improvement

The prospects for improvement are excellent because:

- standards have been raised consistently and significantly year on year;
- the leadership of the headteacher is dynamic;
- all staff are very committed to future improvement;
- there are strong professional partnerships with other schools and educational bodies; and
- self-evaluation is rigorous and accurate.

Recommendations

In order to improve further, Gurnos Nursery needs to:

- R1 review the impact of strategies to raise levels of attendance and take further steps to raise standards; and
- R2 further develop initiatives to improve the performance of boys compared to girls.

What happens next?

The school will produce an action plan that shows how it will address the recommendations. The school will be invited to prepare a written case study for Estyn describing the excellent practices identified during the inspection.

Main findings

Key Question 1: How good are outcomes?	Excellent
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Standards: Excellent

Communication skills are excellent. All pupils have exceptionally good listening skills and respond well to commands and instructions in a range of situations. Most speak very clearly and explain their answers fully.

Nearly all pupils make excellent progress in early reading skills with a minority recognising common words. They understand that print has meaning and know the difference between text and pictures.

Most pupils develop very good writing skills from emergent writing to correct formation of letters. They use these skills very effectively to label their drawings and to write their names.

Nearly all pupils make excellent progress in numeracy and count accurately in real situations. They order numbers and match one to one accurately.

Information communication technology skills are excellent. All pupils use interactive white boards, robotic toys and electronic equipment confidently. They are familiar with a range of software packages and select the programs they want independently.

Creative skills are outstanding. Nearly all pupils produce pieces of work of an exceptionally high quality in a range of media.

Nearly all pupils begin compulsory schooling with standards in basic skills which are well below those expected for their age. Most by the end of the year in school make excellent progress and achieve levels which are above and sometimes well above those expected of four-year olds. Particular strengths include the progress they make in oracy and personal, social and physical development.

Standards in Welsh language development are good. Nearly all pupils respond to instructions and use Welsh words for colours and numbers naturally. They begin to read and write single words using talking books. All are aware of the Welsh language and have positive attitudes towards learning to speak it. Their awareness of being Welsh develops well.

Wellbeing: Excellent

Considering their age, the majority of pupils have an excellent understanding of what they need to do to grow up into a healthy adult. They are aware that they need to eat sensibly, take exercise and drink plenty of water.

Attendance has improved over the last three years and the proportion of pupils achieving 100% attendance is also growing. However, levels are still low, averaging around 85% for the academic year 2011-2012. A few arrive late.

Pupils make excellent progress in their personal and social skills. They say they feel well cared for and they understand the need to follow rules, particularly in the forest school, in order to keep safe. Their self-confidence develops very well and they are courteous to each other and to adults. They are very friendly and play and work very well together. Their behaviour in lessons and around the school is excellent. There have been no exclusions.

The school council, very sensitively guided by a member of staff, provides pupils with a very strong voice. Their suggestions as to how to make their school more fun are listened to and acted upon.

All pupils have positive attitudes to their school activities and show sustained involvement in their work and play. Nearly all make informed choices from a range of activities and often work independently for long periods.

Key Question 2: How good is provision?	Excellent
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Learning experiences: Excellent

The school plans a very innovative and exciting curriculum which is very successful in engaging all pupils.

Teachers and support staff plan and work together very closely to ensure that all aspects of the curriculum are covered. Work is based around broad themes which are imaginative, inventive and planned carefully to ensure that they build successfully on existing knowledge, understanding and skills.

Pupils are grouped in one of three parallel classes and individual needs are met effectively through some withdrawal groups for specific purposes.

The many trips and visits are linked to the themes and often act as a starting point to stimulate learning. The curriculum is enhanced by adult visitors, such as artists, story tellers and theatre groups.

Provision for the development of skills is excellent. All skills are planned systematically and delivered effectively through a wide range of practical activities. These give children opportunities to practise and consolidate their learning in meaningful ways.

Homework is provided regularly and supports the work of the school. All pupils have homework books and work is completed weekly.

There is good provision to promote Welsh language development. All teachers allocate sufficient time to teach Welsh, as well as encouraging its use incidentally. Lesson plans identify opportunities to promote bilingualism, while initiatives such as 'Helpwr Heddiw' and incidental Welsh help to promote its use. Y Cwricwlwm Cymreig is evident in all classes and pupils have a strong sense of being Welsh.

The school provides an excellent foundation for pupils to gain an understanding of the importance of looking after and re-using the earth's resources. Pupils are given exceptional opportunities to learn about others in different parts of the world. At present they have very strong links with a school in Botswana and an orphanage in Poland.

Teaching: Excellent

The quality of teaching is excellent. All staff have a very sound understanding of how to teach pupils of this age. All have very high expectations and plan and teach with flair and imagination.

Across the school teachers clearly explain what they want their pupils to achieve in the time available. They extend their pupils' learning by asking very carefully constructed questions and by making subtle suggestions. A particular strength is the way in which all teachers and their support staff work closely and very effectively together to meet individual needs. This has a very positive impact on the progress all pupils make.

The school's extensive procedures for tracking pupils' progress are rigorous, detailed and highly effective in informing future planning.

Assessment for learning procedures throughout the school are excellent. Strategies to encourage self-evaluation are used consistently throughout the school and pupils discuss learning objectives and success criteria with confidence. They are fully involved in their learning and set realistic targets alongside staff to move their learning forward.

All parents receive the school's initial assessment of what their children are achieving. The annual end of year reports are informative and clearly and accurately identify individual progress. They also offer good advice to help future improvements.

The school encourages all parents to discuss their children's progress at any time.

Care, support and guidance: Excellent

The school's provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is excellent.

There is an exemplary programme of work to ensure all aspects of health, including mental and emotional health. Discussion very successfully develops pupils' confidence and self-esteem.

There are very well-produced policies giving very clear guidance on all aspects of health, including appropriate age-related sex education and first aid.

The school makes every effort to promote good attendance. Records show that attendance for each class is minutely analysed each month and the school works

very closely with all agencies related to child health and safety, including the educational welfare officer.

The school has procedures and an appropriate policy for safeguarding.

The school has good and highly effective links with relevant external agencies, which benefits pupils. It initiated the service of the local authority education welfare officer to work with parents to promote good attendance, even though pupils are below statutory school age.

Provision for additional learning needs is a good feature of the school. Particular strengths are the use of early identification, assessment and monitoring procedures to identify pupils who need additional learning support. These measures contribute significantly to raising pupils' achievement. There is appropriately planned provision for every pupil with additional learning needs, including the more able.

Individual achievement plans, together with more able and talented challenge boxes for school and home, meet the needs of pupils well. Individual play plans contain clear, realistic targets which support pupil progress effectively. The well-qualified and experienced additional learning needs co-ordinator, class teachers and parents review and evaluate the plans regularly.

The school provides exceptional support to parents, their families and the wider community. All staff know their pupils and their families very well and as a result offer extensive and well-targeted support to each pupil.

Learning environment: Excellent

The school has an excellent caring and inclusive ethos where pupils and staff are highly respected and valued.

All pupils have equal access to the curriculum and are encouraged to contribute their ideas freely. The ethos is underpinned by the principles of basic rights for all children, family values and core aims.

All staff encourage pupils enthusiastically to celebrate differences and to challenge preconceived ideas. Pupils feel safe and know that adults will deal with their concerns quickly.

Excellent use is made of a very wide range of high quality resources available for teaching and learning. The school provides sufficient accommodation for the number of pupils on roll. The accommodation is very well maintained and excellent use is made of all available spaces including a small wooded area. The sensory room and the barn are excellent resources which are very well used by all classes.

Key Question 3: How good are leadership and management?	Excellent
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Leadership: Excellent

The quality of leadership is excellent. The headteacher provides a dynamic and thoughtful lead. She has a very clear vision for the school and a very well informed appreciation of how to meet the all-round needs of pupils.

All staff work very constructively together and have very high expectations of themselves and each other. They share their expertise and experience very successfully. They continue to develop their skills in order to provide the best for their pupils.

The senior management team has a very good understanding of the future needs of the school and plans rigorously to meet them. A particularly strong feature is the emphasis given to monitoring standards and the progress pupils make.

The school has made excellent progress in addressing local and national priorities, particularly in establishing basic skills in literacy, numeracy and information and communications technology. The school has had great success in implementing the Foundation Phase.

The governing body is well informed and well led by a chair and vice-chair, who are both regularly engaged with staff. Governors have a thorough understanding of how the school is performing. They with the headteacher and senior management team very successfully work as supportive yet challenging friends.

Improving quality: Excellent

The school's self-evaluation arrangements are excellent. The school rigorously analyses performance data very effectively and identifies relevant trends and progress over time. First-hand classroom observations, listening to pupils and the scrutiny of pupils' work enable the school to monitor and evaluate pupils' learning robustly and accurately.

The headteacher's high quality evaluation of standards of teaching and her innovative approach to lesson observation have a very positive impact on the excellent standards of teaching.

Self-evaluation procedures take good account of the views of pupils and parents. A predominantly strong feature is the way in which the school values their views. The school responds well to the support and challenge provided by local authority monitoring reports.

Information from self-evaluation is used very effectively to develop and prioritise improvement plans with a clear focus on improving skills. The plans include an appropriate range of relevant actions, well-defined timescales for completion and resources to be allocated.

The school has been highly effective in securing improvements over time. It has

made very good progress in implementing the recommendations of the previous inspection.

The headteacher and staff are actively involved in a wide range of professional learning communities within and beyond the school, which enables staff to share professional knowledge purposefully and successfully. For example, the school's innovative work in listening to young learners is exemplary.

The headteacher has contributed locally to training for teachers and regularly shares excellent practice with other professionals from the immediate local area, nationally and internationally.

Partnership working: Excellent

Partnership working is an outstanding feature of the school.

There are well established, excellent partnerships with parents and carers. The 'learn with me' days are very effective and parents are very positive about their worth. The 'Family Values' scheme is highly successful and encourages parents to undertake worthwhile activities with their children at home.

The headteacher also manages two pre-school settings and works very closely with them to ensure a smooth transition into nursery. Assessments are shared at an early stage and help to ensure pupils build very successfully on what they already know and can do. Opportunities to share resources help to ensure consistency between the settings. These arrangements are very effective and an excellent feature of the school.

The school shares examples of its best practice with others on a regular basis. Over recent years many teachers and education officers have visited to observe the school's work. In addition several teachers have contributed to training programmes within the local authority.

The school provides placements for students in further and higher education. Its role in supporting students and trainees is highly valued by the institutions concerned. There are excellent links with a very wide range of external agencies to support children's emotional and physical wellbeing.

Resource management: Excellent

Teachers have excellent subject knowledge to teach this age group. Support staff are highly valued and work very well as part of their teams.

Teaching resources are very well organised to support activities indoors and outdoors. Very good use is made of all available space. The recent addition of a large indoor play area provides an excellent transition from indoors to outdoors and is well used to develop physical skills.

The school has reviewed its management structure in order to implement fully the workload agreement. Arrangements to provide time for teachers to plan, prepare and assess are very effective and very good use is made of this time.

The school meets its statutory requirements for performance management.

The school very effectively uses additional monies from the Communities First initiative to fund large projects such as the new play area. The budget is carefully prioritised and monitored.

In view of the excellent progress made by nearly all pupils and the school's many outstanding features, the school provides very good value for money.

Appendix 1

Commentary on performance data

Currently there is no reliable national comparative data available to indicate the standards and progress of pupils in the school. However, over the last three years the school has rigorously maintained carefully constructed assessments of pupils' basic skills on entry and prior to them moving on to the next phase of their education. These are based largely upon data collected through a local authority initiative and latterly through the initial national baseline assessment processes.

Trends suggest that many pupils enter the school with low levels of basic skills in nearly all areas of development. Skills in speaking, communication and social development are particularly low. Pupils' physical development is mixed with many below the norm in their fine manipulative skills.

By the end of their year in the school nearly all make very good progress. Nearly all have levels of social and wellbeing development which are above those expected of four year olds. Their skills in thinking and in their social and emotional development are very good. They make good progress in their speaking and listening. However, this is often less pronounced, bearing in mind their starting points. In all areas of physical development they make exceptional progress, often functioning at the levels expected of six year olds.

Over time the assessments indicate that boys do not perform as well as girls in nearly all of the areas assessed. However, over the short time spent in the school, the difference is significantly less at the end of the year than it was at the beginning. The school quickly identifies pupils who are considered to be more able and talented and those who have significant additional learning needs. They all make at least good and occasionally very good progress.

Appendix 2

Stakeholder satisfaction report

Responses to parent questionnaires

Seventy parents completed the questionnaire. Nearly all had positive views of the school. All were satisfied with the school, felt that their children liked the school and were helped to settle in well when they started school.

All parents felt that their children were making good progress. They thought that their children behaved well and were well taught. They believed staff had high expectations of their children to work hard and to do their best. They said that homework given was helpful to their learning.

All parents had positive views about the way their children were treated. They believed that their children were encouraged to be healthy and to take regular exercise. They were confident that their children were safe in school and received appropriate support.

All parents said that they were well informed about their children's progress and were comfortable about approaching the school with questions, suggestions or complaints. They thought that their children were helped to be mature and to take on responsibility.

All parents believed that their children were well prepared for the next phase of their education and experienced a good range of activities, trips and visits. All thought that the school was well run.

A very few parents said that they were unaware of the school's procedures for dealing with complaints.

Responses to learner questionnaires

While the views of pupils were not sought through a questionnaire, over the course of the inspection they discussed informally with inspectors what they liked and disliked about their school.

All expressed very positive views and felt very happy and safe in school. They enjoyed coming each day and playing with their friends. They liked their teachers and the opportunities they had to learn.

Appendix 3

The inspection team

Mr Peter Mathias	Reporting Inspector
Mrs Gill Harrison	Team Inspector
Mrs Rhiannon Boardman	Lay Inspector
Mrs Menna Sweeney	Peer Inspector
Mrs Judith Stevens	School Nominee

Copies of the report

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

Under the Independent School Standards (Wales) Regulations 2003, the school must provide copies of the report to all parents of the school. Where a pupil is subject to placement by a local authority, a copy of the report should be sent by the school to each relevant authority.

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' (FPR) refers to the year group of pupils in a primary school who reach the age of five during the academic year. FYear 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	FPR	FPY1	FPY2	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:

Foundation Phase	Reception, 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

Glossary of terms – Primary

National Curriculum

Expected National Curriculum levels

- By the end of the key stage 1, at the age of seven, learners are expected to reach level 2 and the more able to reach level 3.
- By the end of the key stage 2, at the age of eleven, learners are expected to reach level 4 and the more able to reach level 5.

Core subject indicator in all key stages

The core subject indicator relates to the expected performance in English or Welsh first language, mathematics and science, the core subjects of the National Curriculum. Learners must gain at least the expected level in either English or Welsh first language together with mathematics and science to gain the core subject indicator.

All-Wales Core Data sets

Schools and local authorities may refer to performance relative to their family of schools. These families of schools have been created to enable schools to compare their performance to that of similar schools across Wales. Families include schools with similar proportions of pupils entitled to free school meals, living in 20% most deprived areas of Wales, having special education needs at school action plus or statemented and with English as an additional language acquisition less than competent.