



*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**

**Blaendulais Primary School  
Standert Terrace  
Seven Sisters  
Neath  
SA10 9AA**

**Date of inspection: May 2012**

**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:

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

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

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Publication Section  
Estyn  
Anchor Court, Keen Road  
Cardiff  
CF24 5JW

or by email to [publications@estyn.gov.uk](mailto:publications@estyn.gov.uk)

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## Context

Blaendulais Primary School is in the ex-mining community of Seven Sisters in the upper Dulais valley within the local authority of Neath Port Talbot.

The school is a maintained primary school for 123 pupils, including 23 nursery children. The mainstream pupils are taught in four mixed-age classes. There are also two learning support classes for pupils from across the local authority who have moderate or severe learning difficulties. About 40% of pupils have additional learning needs, including 16 who have statements of special educational needs.

About 56% of pupils are entitled to free school meals, which is well above the average for the local authority and Wales. The school is the seventh most challenged in its family of schools. The area it serves is socially and economically disadvantaged. Nearly all pupils are of white British ethnic origin and no pupil speaks Welsh as their first language.

The last inspection of the school was in May 2006. Since then, there have been significant staffing changes, including the appointment of a new headteacher and acting deputy headteacher in September 2011.

The individual school budget per pupil for Blaendulais Primary School in 2011-2012 means that the budget is £5,250 per pupil. The maximum per pupil in the primary schools in Neath Port Talbot is £21,718 and the minimum is £2,648. Blaendulais Primary School is fifth out of the 71 primary schools in Neath Port Talbot in terms of its school budget per pupil. The school budget per pupil includes the provision for pupils in the learning support classes.

## Summary

<b>The school's current performance</b>	<b>Good</b>
<b>The school's prospects for improvement</b>	<b>Good</b>

### Current performance

The overall performance of the school is good because:

- mainstream pupils achieve the level expected of them at the end of key stages 1 and 2 at a high rate when compared with the average for schools with a broadly similar proportion of pupils entitled to free school meals;
- pupils make good progress in developing their literacy skills, often from low starting points;
- the intervention programmes to develop pupils' literacy skills are having a positive, measurable impact;
- pupils in the learning support classes are making good progress in relation to their individual learning targets;
- pupils work conscientiously and enjoy their work in all classes;
- the quality of teaching is good overall;
- the school works very well in partnership with parents, local community organisations and the local authority; and
- the school is a well-ordered community with very good relationships between staff and pupils that support teaching and learning well.

### Prospects for improvement

The prospects for improvement are good because:

- the headteacher has a clear vision for improving the school and there is effective teamwork across the school;
- subject co-ordinators undertake their roles well and focus appropriately on standards in their evaluation of work across the school;
- staff analyse a wide range of performance data and track pupils effectively;
- the improved focus on standards has led to more effective planning; and
- self-evaluation systems and processes involve all staff well and there is a strong culture of improvement.

## Recommendations

In order to improve, the school needs to:

- develop pupils' confidence in using Welsh at an appropriate level across the school;
- ensure that more able children receive enough challenge in their work through well-planned extension activities in classes;
- improve the way the governing body considers issues relating to the curriculum and standards so they can be more of a 'critical friend' of the school; and
- improve the quality of the outdoor areas for Year 1 and Year 2 pupils..

### What happens next?

The school will draw up an action plan, which shows how the school is going to address the recommendations. Estyn will invite the school to prepare a written case study, describing the excellent practice identified during the inspection.

## Main findings

### Key Question 1: How good are outcomes?

Good

#### Standards: Good

The baseline assessment of mainstream pupils in the reception class shows that in most years between about a quarter and a third of pupils are significantly below average in terms of their knowledge, understanding and skills when they start full-time education.

Overall, most pupils make good progress as they move through the school. Many pupils that start with weak literacy skills develop their skills to an appropriate level for their age by the time they leave school.

Many speak confidently to each other and to adults about their work. They listen well to stories, explanations and instructions. Pupils talk effectively about what and how they learn from a young age.

Pupils make good progress in acquiring reading skills. Many pupils make significant gains in their reading skills as a result of well-managed literacy interventions. During the Foundation Phase, they develop a growing awareness of sounds at the beginning and within words and they benefit from effective shared and guided reading sessions. During key stage 2, many pupils make considerable progress in developing their reading skills further. All pupils can break down difficult words they encounter for the first time into their constituent sounds and use the context of the passage to make informed guesses about a word's meaning. Many pupils enjoy reading and can explain well their preferences for favourite authors and genres.

Pupils move well from emergent to more controlled and independent writing as they move through the school. In the Foundation Phase, more able pupils can write simple sentences readily and use basic punctuation marks with growing confidence. Many pupils use words and basic sentence patterns appropriately from stories they have read. During key stage 2, pupils generally write in a good range of sentences and organise their writing well according to its purpose, such as an account, a story or an argument. Most pupils know when to use a suitable range of punctuation marks and many use paragraphs in their work appropriately.

Pupils make a good start in learning Welsh in the Foundation Phase. Many in key stage 2 have a sound grasp of numbers in Welsh and have a basic vocabulary for everyday items. However, few pupils make enough progress in their speaking, reading and writing skills in Welsh as they move through key stage 2.

Pupils with additional learning needs in mainstream classes and those with statements of special educational needs in the learning support classes make good progress towards meeting their individual targets.

In 2011, mainstream pupils achieve the expected level (level 2 in key stage 1 and level 4 in key stage 2) very well when compared with relative performance levels in schools with a broadly similar proportion of pupils entitled to free school meals and

the family of schools. In both key stages, the performance of mainstream pupils in 2011 placed the school in the top 25% of similar schools in English, mathematics and science. The performance of pupils has varied over the last three years, but the overall three-year trend indicates at least good performance in English, mathematics and science when compared with that of schools with a similar proportion of free school meals.

Where there are significant differences between the performance of boys and girls at the end of key stages 1 and 2, it is usually because there is a particularly large cohort of boys or girls in the year group in that specific year. Usually, pupils entitled to free school meals do as well as other pupils.

### **Wellbeing: Good**

Pupils are keen to learn. They concentrate well during sessions, respond readily to questions and always try hard to do their work. They co-operate particularly well with each other, share toys and equipment in a friendly way, and take turns appropriately. The quality of their behaviour around the school is good. Pupils in mainstream classes and in the learning resource centre mix well together.

Pupils feel safe in school and they show a good level of respect for adults and each other. Their moral, social and life skills are developing well, particularly among older pupils.

The school council and eco-committee take a lead role in making sure pupils have a voice in the school. They gather the views of other pupils well. Pupils with responsibilities undertake their roles very conscientiously and they are having a positive impact on areas of school life.

Overall, there is an upward trend in attendance and over the last two terms the rate has increased to just over 93%, which is above the school's own target. There have been two fixed-term exclusions over the last year for appropriate reasons and for a suitable length of time.

<b>Key Question 2: How good is provision?</b>	<b>Good</b>
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### **Learning experiences: Good**

The school curriculum provides good learning opportunities for pupils. They have a good range of stimulating experiences in school and take part in a suitable range of extra-curricular visits. Teachers undertake detailed, well-organised planning of the curriculum. This ensures that pupils cover the required subjects of the National Curriculum and religious education, build progressively on what they have learned before and develop appropriate skills in literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology across the curriculum. The curriculum meets the requirements of pupils with special and additional learning needs well.

Provision for the Welsh dimension across the curriculum is sound in both key stages. However, the provision for pupils' Welsh language development across key stage 2 does not build progressively enough on pupils' early progress in Welsh in the Foundation Phase.

The provision for sustainable development is good overall. Pupils have particularly good opportunities to learn about global issues, for example through the school's close links with a primary school in China. Learners have appropriate opportunities to learn about healthy lifestyles.

### **Teaching: Good**

Teachers have good up-to-date knowledge of the subjects they teach and can answer pupils' questions and develop their understanding well. They establish good working relationships with pupils and sound classroom routines that support effective learning. Teachers and other adults manage pupils' behaviour well in classes and around the school.

Teachers deploy learning support assistants effectively in classes and they make a significant contribution to the quality of pupils' learning. At the start of lessons, teachers communicate learning objectives well to pupils and review them regularly at the end. They provide a good range of stimulating activities that engage the interest and enthusiasm of pupils in most cases. However, on a few occasions, the pace of lessons is too slow, and more able pupils in key stage 2 are not always challenged enough to achieve as well as they can.

The quality of teachers' marking and their verbal feedback to pupils are good. Teachers set out clearly what pupils are doing well and what they need to do to improve their work or maintain good progress. Teachers mark pupils' work effectively against specific assessment criteria that they share with pupils. There is a good amount of self-assessment and peer-assessment by pupils based on shared criteria. Teachers monitor and track pupils' progress effectively across the school at the level of the individual pupil, class and year group. As a result, teachers know the current level of pupil performance and usually use the information to plan effectively and to set appropriate objectives for their lessons. The school keeps parents and carers well informed about their child's achievement, wellbeing and development.

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

The school liaises effectively with a wide range of specialist agencies, for example the police, psychologists and counsellors, to provide appropriate support for pupils. Pupils and parents are very positive about how well the school helps pupils to achieve emotional wellbeing and physical health. Learning experiences promote pupils' personal development effectively, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. The support for pupils in the learning support classes is good. The school identifies pupils' learning needs in mainstream classes quickly and effectively and this ensures that their needs are met successfully. The school has procedures and has an appropriate policy for safeguarding.

### **Learning environment: Good**

Pupils have an equal opportunity to access the full curriculum and all areas of school life. There are clear procedures and policies to follow in relation to any harassment or oppressive behaviour. Staff and other pupils treat pupils with disabilities very sensitively.

Inside the school, accommodation is particularly attractive and provides a stimulating learning environment for pupils. Resources are of good quality. The quality of displays in classrooms and communal areas is very good.

The outdoor play area for nursery and reception children is a very suitable learning environment where children can experience a wide range of activities. The outdoor area for key stage 2 pupils is also good. However, the surface of the yard for Year 1 and Year 2 pupils is uneven and there is no outdoor equipment in the yard to engage pupils' interest.

<b>Key Question 3: How good are leadership and management?</b>	<b>Good</b>
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### **Leadership: Good**

Since her relatively recent appointment, the headteacher, supported effectively by the deputy headteacher, has provided clear direction and purpose in taking the school forward. She has shared her values and high expectations successfully and has established clear, well-understood priorities for the development of the school.

Leaders focus effectively on raising the standard of pupils' work. Subject co-ordinators in literacy and numeracy contribute effectively to the consistent progression of pupils' skills as they move through the school. The establishment of a team with the responsibility for all aspects of wellbeing, including sustainable development and healthy living, has led to strong developments in these areas.

The performance management procedures are well established and staff have agreed relevant objectives for their personal and professional development.

Governors receive regular updates on the school's performance from the headteacher. Governors are beginning to use performance data in analytical ways and this has enabled them to recognise the need to focus robustly on standards. They accept the need to work more effectively as a critical friend to the headteacher and they are beginning to develop more understanding of curriculum matters.

Leaders and managers in the school have implemented policies and initiatives successfully to meet national and local priorities. For example, staff are developing a skills-based approach to planning the curriculum, are using assessment for learning strategies regularly and have established the Foundation Phase well.

### **Improving quality: Good**

The self-evaluation report presents a clear picture of the school's performance, its strengths and areas for development. It comes to firm and accurate judgements about the standards of pupils' work.

The headteacher has revised monitoring procedures effectively to include lesson observation, scrutiny of books and talking to teachers and pupils. All staff are fully involved in all aspects of self-evaluation in the school. The headteacher consults pupils and parents regularly by means of questionnaires. Staff listen and respond to the views of the school council and eco committee very well. The senior management team use all the information gathered through the self-evaluation

process purposefully in order to identify relevant priorities for the school development plan.

### **Partnership working: Excellent**

The school works very effectively with a wide range of partners to plan its provision for pupils. These have a very positive effect on pupils' achievement and welfare. Staff work closely with parents both informally and in planned workshops to support pupils' learning. There are very good arrangements for the transition of Year 6 pupils to the local secondary school. There are good writing and number portfolios for Year 2 pupils in place, established by a professional learning community of cluster schools, and these are having a positive impact on raising standards. The school uses services provided by the local authority purposefully to support pupils, particularly those with additional learning needs and those in the classes for pupils with moderate to severe learning difficulties.

Links with the community are strong and very diverse. The school holds concerts and services in local places of worship and pupils benefit from a wide range of stimulating visits and visitors to school. The school's extensive partnerships with local businesses, with the Dove (Dulais Opportunity for Voluntary Enterprise) workshops organised by Swansea University and other agencies, have a particularly positive effect on pupils' learning in a range of subjects across the curriculum. There is excellent liaison with a wide range of agencies, particularly Communities First, to provide a two-week life skills programme for Year 6 pupils at no cost to their families. This has broadened pupils' horizons and increased their confidence and self-esteem in an exceptional way. The school has recently developed this successful initiative further by sharing its excellent practice with neighbouring primary schools.

### **Resource management: Good**

Teachers are deployed well to make the best use of their knowledge and skills and to deliver the curriculum effectively. They use the time given for preparation, planning and assessment purposefully. Support staff make a valuable contribution to pupils' learning across the school, both in the Foundation Phase and in the groups of pupils withdrawn for additional support in literacy skills. The headteacher, supported by the local authority and the governing body, manages the allocation of resources efficiently and effectively to meet priorities identified in the school development plan. Pupils benefit from a good level of interesting learning resources, and from a stimulating learning environment.

In view of the good progress that pupils make from low starting points and the standards they achieve by the time they leave in Year 6, the school provides good value for money.

## Appendix 1

### Commentary on performance data

The baseline assessment of mainstream pupils in the reception class shows that in most years between about a quarter and a third of pupils are significantly below average in terms of their knowledge, understanding and skills when they start full-time education.

The performance data relating to the school is skewed by the outcomes for the pupils in the learning resource centre who have moderate to severe learning difficulties and who are included in the overall performance data for the school.

Looking at the performance outcomes for all pupils at the end of key stage 1, the proportion who achieved the expected level (level 2 or above) was significantly below the average for the family of similar schools in 2011. In English, mathematics and science, the performance of all pupils placed the school in the bottom 50% of schools with similar proportions of pupils entitled to free school meals. However, looking at the performance of mainstream pupils only (not including the data for the relevant pupils in the learning resource centre) then the school is doing well compared with the family of similar schools. In English, mathematics and science, the performance of mainstream pupils placed it in the top 25% of schools with a similar proportion of pupils entitled to free school meals.

It is a very similar situation at the end of key stage 2. Looking at the performance outcomes for all pupils at the end of key stage 2, in 2011 the proportion who achieved the expected level (level 4 or above) was below the average for the family of similar schools. In English, mathematics and science, the performance of all pupils placed the school in the bottom 50% of schools with similar proportions of pupils entitled to free school meals. However, looking at performance of mainstream pupils only, the school is doing well compared with the family of similar schools. In English, mathematics and science, the performance of mainstream pupils placed it in the top 25% of schools with a similar proportion of pupils entitled to free school meals.

The attainment of the higher than expected level (level 3) is generally weak in key stage 1 and below that of similar schools. For example, no pupil achieved level 3 in English in 2011. However, the attainment of the higher than expected level (level 5) in key stage 2 is generally good in English and mathematics, though weaker in science.

There is little pattern in the relative performance of boys and girls as their performance outcomes fluctuate markedly, mainly due to the relatively small size of each cohort and the way the proportion of boys and girls in each class varies greatly from year to year. For example, in 2011, there were twice as many girls than boys in the Year 2 class.

Overall, pupils entitled to free school meals do as well as their peers in key stage 1. In key stage 2, pupils entitled to free school meals do as well as, and occasionally slightly better than, their peers in gaining the expected level (level 4). However,

pupils entitled to free school meals tend not to do as well as their peers in gaining the higher than expected level (level 5).

## Appendix 2

### Stakeholder satisfaction report

#### Learner questionnaires

Forty-six pupils in key stage 2 completed the questionnaire.

All, or almost all, pupils:

- feel safe in school;
- believe that teachers and other adults in the school help them to learn and make progress and give them useful homework;
- know what to do and whom to ask if they find their work hard;
- feel that they are doing well and that the school helps them to keep healthy;
- believe that they have enough books, equipment and computers to do their work;
- feel that the school deals well with any bullying and they know whom to talk to if worried or upset;
- believe that the school provides lots of chances for them to get regular exercise; and
- feel that nearly all children behave well at playtime and lunchtime.

Many pupils:

- believe that children behave well so that they can get on with their work.

Pupils' views are generally similar to or slightly more positive overall than the views of pupils in other schools across Wales.

#### Parent questionnaires

There were nineteen responses to the parent questionnaire.

All, or almost all, that responded feel that:

- the school is well run;
- they are satisfied with the school;
- their child is safe in school and likes the school;
- the school helped their child settle well when they started at the school;
- pupils behave well;
- staff treat all children fairly and with respect;
- the school encourages their child to be healthy and to take regular exercise;
- they are comfortable about approaching the school with questions, suggestions or problems;

- their child is making good progress;
- teaching is good;
- staff expect their child to work hard and do their best;
- their child receives appropriate additional support in relation to any particular needs;
- the school helps their child to become more mature and take on responsibility;
- there is a good range of activities including trips or visits.
- the homework given builds well on what their child learns in school;
- they are kept well informed about their child's progress; and
- they understand the school's procedures for dealing with complaints.

These responses are generally more positive than the views of other parents or carers across Wales.

### Appendix 3

#### The inspection team

Barry Norris	Reporting Inspector
Rhiannon Harris	Team Inspector
Rhiannon Boardman	Lay Inspector
Simon Phillips	Peer Inspector
Ruth Williams	School Nominee

## Copies of the report

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