



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

**A report on**

**St Joseph's R.C.  
Ashvale  
Tredegar  
Blaenau Gwent  
NP22 4AQ**

**Date of inspection: January 2018**

**by**

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

## About St Joseph's R.C.

St. Josephs Roman Catholic Primary School is in the Ashvale area of Tredegar, Blaenau Gwent.

The school has 112 pupils on roll, including 5 part time nursery pupils. There are five classes, three of which are mixed age.

Around 35% of pupils are eligible for free school meals. This is well above the Wales average of 19%. The school states that around 18% of pupils are on the additional learning needs register, which is just below the Wales average of 21%. There are a very few pupils with a statement of special educational needs. Nearly all pupils are white British. Very few pupils speak Welsh at home but a few pupils speak English as an additional language.

The headteacher took up his post in September 2017 following a three-year period as acting headteacher. The school's last inspection was in October 2012.

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

Nearly all pupils at St. Josephs Roman Catholic Primary make good progress as they move through the school. They acquire appropriate literacy and numeracy skills and learn to apply these effectively across the curriculum. Teachers and support staff know their pupils well and work as a cohesive team to help pupils achieve their potential. The quality of teaching is good. The curriculum is broad and offers a wide range of interesting learning experiences. Nearly all pupils enjoy coming to school and have positive attitudes to learning. They have good manners and show respect for one another and for adults. The school benefits from strong leadership and governance with a clear focus on providing a secure future for pupils through good quality learning experiences.

<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>Good</b>
<b>Leadership and management</b>	<b>Good</b>

## **Recommendations**

R1 Improve pupils' oracy skills in Welsh in key stage 2

R2 Develop outdoor learning in foundation phase

R3 Ensure governors act as critical friends

## **What happens next**

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

## Main findings

### Standards: Good

Most pupils enter the school with levels of skills, knowledge and understanding that are below those expected for pupils of their age. During their time at school, nearly all make good progress. Pupils who are eligible for free school meals achieve at least as well as other pupils by the time they reach Year 6, as do pupils for whom English is an additional language.

Almost all pupils make rapid progress in developing skills in speaking and listening as they move through the foundation phase. By the time they are in the Reception class, pupils collaborate effectively on tasks in more formal and free play situations. For example, a group of four boys and girls worked hard to create a teddy bear house out of blocks, subsequently guarding it together to ensure that the bear enjoyed a good sleep. Towards the end of the foundation phase, most pupils talk in pairs confidently to share their ideas. They listen well to answers given by others, showing appropriate respect. As pupils move through key stage 2, most continue to develop their speaking and listening skills well. By Year 6, most pupils use technical vocabulary accurately and are confident to explain their thinking. They listen well to the views of their peers and build on the thoughts of others.

Most pupils throughout the school make good progress in developing their reading skills. By Year 2, many pupils read with good expression and understanding. They clearly enjoy what they read and use their knowledge of letters and sounds well to read unfamiliar words. In key stage 2, many express a preference for genre and name a favourite author. By Year 6, most pupils use the blurb, contents and index of a book effectively. Many pupils access higher order skills in order to infer and predict, for example, predicting a plot line based on the attitude of one of the characters in an early scene in a book. Most pupils use their reading skills well to gain information on topics across the breadth of the curriculum.

In the foundation phase, most pupils make rapid progress in developing their knowledge of appropriate sentence structures, forming letters correctly, spelling simple words accurately and extending their vocabulary well. Towards the end of Year 2, many pupils use capital letters and full stops consistently. Most pupils follow the conventions of simple genres, for example, when writing a letter to Father Christmas and describing 'pesky seagulls' in a descriptive piece of writing. Most pupils continue to make good progress in writing in key stage 2. Almost all pupils set out work neatly and present it well and with pride. However, by Year 6, only a very few pupils join writing in a cursive style. Almost all pupils spell correctly and use appropriate vocabulary in context. For example, Year 6 pupils use connectives such as 'eventually' and 'furthermore' when arguing a case that sponge is the best material for toilet hygiene in Roman times. Almost all pupils in Year 6 write appropriately for a good range of genres. Most pupils use grammar properly, although this is not consistent. They use commas and full stops appropriately, but only a few use more sophisticated punctuation. Almost all pupils throughout the school write at the same level across the curriculum as they do in literacy lessons,

Across the school, most pupils make rapid progress in developing their numeracy skills from a low starting point. In the foundation phase, most pupils use number skills well in practical situations such as when buying items from a shop. They solve word problems successfully and make good progress in developing written methods of calculation. Most pupils make good progress in applying numeracy skills across the curriculum. By Year 2, many pupils recall number facts at an appropriate level for their age. Most measure effectively using appropriate equipment. For example, Year 2 pupils measure the size of a sword for a prince as part of their topic on the theme of a fairy tale. Most pupils make appropriate progress in data handling. They use bar charts and pictograms effectively and interpret them accurately in relevant contexts. In key stage 2, most pupils make good progress in developing number skills. They understand place value well and, by Year 6, they add and subtract to two decimal places. Almost all use a good range of strategies for calculation in number such as using the grid method for long multiplication. Many older pupils make good progress in solving problems and using numeracy skills across the curriculum. However, this is not consistent across the key stage. Most pupils make good progress in using data handling in appropriate practical situations. They do so regularly in science, for example, choosing to show the effect of exercise on the body by constructing a line graph.

In the Foundation Phase, almost all pupils become adept at using a wide range of information and communication technology (ICT) skills across the curriculum. In Year 2, many pupils log on to a laptop independently, write stories into a word processor, drop pictures into text, search the internet for information, make leaflets, film each other and use quick response codes effectively. They have a good knowledge of e-safety. Almost all pupils continue to make good progress through key stage 2. They use databases well to present information, for example, pupils in Years 3 and 4 compile an informative database about sharks. A minority of pupils develop a good understanding of coding by attending an after-school coding club. By Year 6, almost all pupils use their ICT skills confidently and purposefully in a wide variety of contexts.

Many pupils make satisfactory progress in developing their basic skills in Welsh. By Year 2, many pupils are enthusiastic speakers who engage well in a question and answer session at the end of each day using their knowledge of numbers and colours accurately and repeating simple phrases. . However, as they move through key stage 2, pupils do not continue to build well enough on their oracy skills. Although by Year 6, most pupils answer simple questions and respond to written questions in their books accurately, this is at too low a level

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

Nearly all pupils feel happy and safe in school. They are extremely polite towards each other, staff and visitors and nearly all are kind and caring. This is especially evident at playtimes through the 'buddy stop' system, when pupils on the school council sit and play games with younger pupils. For example, they organise purposeful skipping games. Most pupils understand the importance of staying safe on the internet. Most pupils know whom to go to if they have a concern and they have confidence in staff to address any issues that arise quickly and efficiently.

Most pupils are very aware of the needs of others and support a number of worthwhile causes. For example, foodbank donations and a backpack collection to support education in Malawi.

A majority of pupils develop their physical skills well by taking part in clubs such as football and Zumba. Many also participate enthusiastically in Mini Vinnies catholic club and other clubs for coding, reading, music and Spanish. Nearly all pupils understand the importance of a healthy diet and eat well at break and lunchtimes.

All groups of pupils have good opportunities to play an active role and take responsibility in the school. Many pupils' participate in school council and eco council purposefully. For example, the eco committee has developed the school grounds successfully with plants and a willow dome. This contributed well to the schools success in achieving its first eco flag. A few pupils develop their leadership skills well as digital leaders, spiritual leaders and as members of the 'Criw Cymraeg'.

Nearly all pupils engage confidently with learning experiences and they persevere and succeed well with new learning challenges. For example, Year 2 pupils participate enthusiastically in making a bug hotel in the school grounds. Nearly all pupils self-evaluate and improve their work by responding purposefully to teachers marking. This is a strength of the school.

Nearly all pupils have a good understanding of class routines and move between activities calmly. They settle quickly and work purposefully. They demonstrate respect for the contributions of others and work well collaboratively. Nearly all pupils take responsibility for their actions and take good account of the feelings of others. Standards of behaviour are consistently high across the school.

Attendance rates are good and have improved steadily over the last four years. Most pupils arrive promptly at the start of the school day.

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

The quality of teaching across the school is good. Most teachers have appropriate curriculum knowledge and develop positive working relationships with pupils that encourage good behaviour effectively. This improves most pupils' sense of wellbeing and enthusiasm for learning. Most teachers have high expectations and plan interesting lessons that challenge pupils to achieve well. At the start of lessons, they communicate lesson objectives and success criteria clearly, to all pupils. In nearly all classes, teachers revisit learning objectives purposefully during the plenary session. Nearly all teachers make good reference to previous learning and lessons proceed at a suitable pace. The support that teaching assistants provide for pupils in classrooms and withdrawal groups is particularly effective in helping them to make good progress in improving their basic skills. Foundation phase staff are excellent language models and provide a rich and varied diet of oracy skills, which encourages all pupils to communicate effectively with one another. Across the school, the quality of teachers' questioning and verbal feedback to pupils as they carry out tasks in formal and informal situations is good. This helps pupils to know how well they are doing and links successfully to written instructions about what they can do to improve their work

The school has a wide range of relevant assessment procedures that provide an accurate and inclusive profile of all pupils' abilities. Teachers make good use of this information to inform the next steps in individuals' development and to identify those who need additional support.

The provision to develop pupils' Welsh language skills in the curriculum is effective. Teachers planning makes suitable links with the rich industrial and historical features of the community. Pupil visits to Big Pit in Blaenavon and the castle at Caerphilly are an effective way of sharing the culture, history and heritage of Wales. As a result, Year 6 pupils talk enthusiastically about the rich history of the coal industry in the Eastern valleys of Wales. Year 2 pupils remember their visit to Caerphilly fondly and their pictures and written reports of the visit appeared in the school magazine.

The school provides a broad and balanced curriculum for pupils with due attention to pupils' social and emotional development. Teachers in the foundation phase provide high quality and imaginative activities across all areas of learning. These activities create purposeful links across the curriculum and build on previous work well. The practical nature of the learning experiences motivates boys and girls equally well. For example, giant teddy bear footprints found in the Reception classroom caused great excitement. However, there are not enough opportunities for the pupils to use the outdoor environment for imaginative and creative play or to develop suitable investigative skills.

Teachers also plan motivating topics in key stage 2. They engage the pupils well by allowing them to influence the way the topic is to develop. The cycle of topics allows purposeful development of science skills and a good balance of experiences in the humanities and arts.

Planning ensures that pupils acquire the necessary skills in literacy, numeracy and ICT to support their work across the curriculum well. Teachers plan purposeful, progressive opportunities for pupils to practice and develop these skills.

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

The school promotes healthy eating and drinking very well. For example, staff select a few pupils to receive a golden ticket for healthy eating every Friday enabling them to sit on a special table. Staff promote the importance of taking regular exercise very well. They provide for pupils to be active on a daily basis. For example, through the 'fit for life' sessions when pupils record their number of steps using pedometers.

Leaders track pupils' progress well. Systems identify the progress of specific groups and individuals clearly. Staff use this information well to target effective support for identified pupils including those with additional learning needs and those for whom English is an additional language. The additional learning needs co-ordinator works effectively to ensure that provision for pupils who need additional support is strong. Well-trained staff plan and deliver effective support through withdrawal groups. As a result, most targeted pupils make good progress in line with their ability.

The school develops pupils' personal and social education successfully. It fosters aspects of care, fairness and equality well. Staff promote catholic values and ethos, respecting multiculturalism, aspects of diversity and anti-racism successfully. There is a clear emphasis on promoting the school's agreed values, and this has a positive influence on pupils' behaviour.

Staff develop pupils' spiritual and cultural attitudes well. The school holds worthwhile celebration days. For example, a Polish culture day and the Jewish celebration of Shabbat. These days develop pupils' understanding of the wider world and different cultures effectively. Teachers provide all key stage 2 pupils with purposeful opportunities to lead assemblies linked to stories from the Bible. For example, themes such as 'World Peace Day', where teachers plan interesting opportunities for pupils to discuss and record ideas to make the world a better place. As a result, pupils have a good understanding of religious and moral issues, both in school and in the wider world.

The school provides a number of worthwhile opportunities across the school year for pupils to practice creative arts. For example, pupils take part in a range of concerts and assemblies including 'St Joseph's Got Talent'. In addition, a science and technology week allow pupils to develop self-confidence, perseverance and teamwork, for example when making spaghetti towers and tin foil bridges.

Parental engagement is strong. The school communicates effectively with parents using digital platforms and written progress reports. Home project bags for parents enable them to complete a practical homework activity with their child. For example, one of the more popular packs is the internet safety book, which encourages parents to have lots of fun on the internet with their child safely.

The school's arrangements for safeguarding pupils meet requirements and give no cause for concern.

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

The headteacher has a clear vision for the school, which he shares effectively with all staff. In the short time he has been in post, he has implemented many beneficial strategies successfully. He is promoting high standards of wellbeing and improved pupil outcomes by raising expectations. For example, the tracking of pupils has had a marked improvement on outcomes for all pupils. The headteacher receives valuable support from the new deputy headteacher, the governing body and the staff. All members of staff work tirelessly to create a positive whole-school ethos based on strong mutual support. The school is making good progress against Welsh Government priorities, including improving pupils' literacy, numeracy and ICT skills.

A sound performance management system contributes well to the professional development of all staff, including non-teaching staff. Processes link effectively to school priorities and are having a positive effect on raising pupil outcomes, especially in reading and writing skills. Leaders ensure valuable opportunities for the continuous professional development of teachers and assistants. Staff training is increasing staff confidence and curriculum expertise. For example, staff science training has improved the enjoyment, understanding and outcomes of older pupils in key stage 2.

The school's self-evaluation is an honest document that helps leaders evaluate fully the quality of the school's work. Senior leaders undertake a wide range of monitoring activities that provide them with an accurate picture of the strengths of the school and its areas for improvement. For example, formal observations of teachers and teaching assistants, scrutiny of pupils' work, learning walks, listening to learners and

stakeholder views all contribute to the process. The report is largely evaluative however, in a few instances there is an over reliance on what the school will be doing as opposed to what it has done.

Areas the school identifies for improvement link well to actions in the school's development plan. The current plan identifies important areas linked to pupil outcomes and devises effective plans for improvement. For example, to raise standards of attainment in numeracy across the school. Early indications are positive with far more numerical activities now planned in other areas of the curriculum as a result. Planned actions in school's previous plans have resulted in improved provision and outcomes for pupils. For example, better opportunities for writing across the curriculum are beginning to improve pupils writing skills.

There are strong links with parents, the church and the community. Transfer arrangements with the local catholic secondary school are effective. There are a variety of successful transition activities for pupils in Years 5 and 6.

The school uses its central budget appropriately to support improvements in the quality of provision and to raise standards. Senior leaders and governors plan and monitor the school's expenditure appropriately. Spending priorities link well to areas for improvement identified in the school development plan. Plans to use the pupil deprivation grant to improve outcomes for pupils eligible for free school meals focus appropriately on meeting their needs. For example, the school has entered into a service level agreement with the local library and purchased books, which have a specific appeal for identified groups of pupils. As a result, these pupils' interest in reading has increased and nearly all are now reading for enjoyment.

The governing body is supportive of the work of the school. The headteacher and senior leaders keep governors well informed but governors rely too heavily on information from the headteacher and do not challenge the school robustly enough as critical friends. Over the last three years, the governing body has worked diligently with the wider school community to recruit new members. This action has strengthened the governing body by broadening the range of skills available to it. For example, the appointment of a governor with specific skills in child protection procedures has improved the governing body's knowledge and understanding of safeguarding.

## 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:

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