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Arolygiaeth Ei Mawrhydi dros Addysg
a Hyfforddiant yng Nghymru

Her Majesty's Inspectorate
for Education and Training in Wales

A report on
Usk Church in Wales Primary School
Monmouth Road
Usk
Monmouthshire
NP15 1SE

Date of inspection: November 2010

by

Stephanie James

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

Usk Church in Wales Voluntary Controlled Primary School serves the market town of Usk, in Monmouthshire, and surrounding villages. The area is relatively advantaged and prosperous. Approximately four per cent of pupils are entitled to free school meals, which is much lower than national and local authority averages.

The school caters for pupils from four to eleven years. Children start school in the reception class in the September following their fourth birthday. There are currently 228 pupils on roll, which is around a hundred less than when the school was last inspected in the autumn of 2004.

Nearly all pupils are of white ethnic origin and speak English at home. No pupils speak Welsh as a first language. The school has identified around 16 per cent of pupils as having special educational needs (SEN). This is below the national average of approximately 20 per cent. Four pupils have a statement of SEN.

The head teacher was appointed in September 2005 and a new deputy head teacher took up his post in September 2009. Two teachers in the Foundation Phase were absent because of illness during the inspection. Their classes were being covered by supply teachers. The school secretary has also been absent since the beginning of the autumn term.

The 2010-2011 individual school budget per pupil is £3413, which compares with a maximum of £14200 and a minimum of £2965 for primary schools in Monmouthshire. The school has the 23rd highest budget per pupil out of the 34 primary schools in Monmouthshire.

Summary

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

Current performance

The school's current performance is adequate because:

- most pupils make satisfactory progress;
- the overall quality of teaching and assessment is adequate;
- most pupils' standards of wellbeing are good;
- the quality of care, support and guidance is good;
- moral and social development is good;
- standards of behaviour are good; and
- pupils' attendance is consistently above local and national levels.

Prospects for improvement

The school has adequate prospects for improvement because:

- there is insufficient clarity in the overall strategic direction of the school and senior staff and governors are not involved enough in shaping it;
- although the deputy head teacher has introduced a number of relevant new initiatives, they have not had time to embed in the school's practice;
- the involvement of staff, governors, parents and pupils in the school's self-evaluation process is under-developed; and
- planning for improvement is not sharply focused on the most important priorities.

Recommendations

In order to improve, the school needs to:

- R1 ensure that the quality of teaching is consistently good throughout the school so that pupils' standards of achievement are raised, particularly those of more able pupils;
- R2 use a wide range of assessment strategies more effectively to help pupils move forward in their learning;
- R3 develop rigorous self-evaluation procedures that include all interested parties, identify the most important targets for improvement and regularly evaluate progress towards meeting them;
- R4 enable senior managers and governors to participate more fully in determining the strategic direction of the school; and
- R5 continue to work with the local authority to reduce the deficit budget.

What happens next?

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

In accordance with the Education Act 2005, I am of the opinion, and HMCI agrees, that this school is in need of significant improvement.

Main findings

Key Question 1: How good are outcomes?

Adequate

Standards: Adequate

There has been a fluctuating trend in pupils' performance at the end of key stage 2 over the last three years. The number of pupils attaining the expected level 4 or above in English, mathematics and science combined, the core subject indicator (CSI), is consistently above the national and local authority average. However, when compared with the performance of pupils in schools with similar numbers eligible for free school meals, pupils' performance has varied between the upper and lower 50 per cent. When compared with the performance of pupils in schools in similar circumstances, the 'family' of schools, the number of pupils attaining the CSI at the end of key stage 2 is consistently below average.

Trends in the number of more able pupils attaining the higher level 5 at the end of key stage 2 over the last three years are above national figures, but consistently below those of more able pupils in the 'family' of schools.

In key stage 1 in 2010, the number of pupils attaining the CSI (level 2 or above in English, mathematics and science combined) was below the national and local authority average. It was well below the average performance of pupils in the 'family' of schools. Twenty per cent of that year group had SEN and this had a negative influence on overall results. However, there has been a declining trend in pupils' performance at the end of key stage 1 over the last three years. Pupils' results have been consistently in the lowest 25 per cent compared with schools where a similar number of pupils are eligible for free school meals. Results have also been consistently in the lowest 25 per cent of the 'family' of schools.

The gap between the performance of boys and girls in key stage 1 is bigger than the national gap. It is also bigger than the gap between boys' and girls' performance in the 'family' of schools, except in their performance in mathematics at level 3, where boys outperform girls.

Over the last three years in key stage 1, trends in the number of pupils attaining the higher level 3 in English and mathematics are consistently below the average of pupils in the 'family' of schools, but generally in line with their performance in science. The percentage of pupils gaining level 3 is consistently higher than national percentages in English and science. However, the percentage attaining level 3 in mathematics does not always compare favourably with the national picture.

Many children's attainment on entry to school is above expectations. In a minority of classes, most pupils make good progress over the course of a year. However, scrutiny of pupils' previous work and the school's data on their progress show that, overall, most pupils make adequate progress as they move through the school. Given their above average starting points, more able pupils could often achieve

more. Many pupils with SEN make good progress and achieve well relative to their abilities.

Standards in pupils' speaking and listening skills are good. Most pupils listen attentively to their teachers. Many pupils make good progress in their reading skills but more able pupils could often read more demanding texts. Although they write in a good range of genres, most pupils make adequate progress in their writing skills.

In the Foundation Phase and key stage 1, many pupils understand and respond well to a range of simple questions and instructions in Welsh. In key stage 2, the majority of pupils make adequate progress in using their bilingual skills. Their progress in the skills of reading and writing in Welsh is inconsistent but satisfactory overall.

Wellbeing: Good

Nearly all pupils have good knowledge and understanding of healthy living and say that they feel safe in school. Behaviour is good. Most pupils are polite, courteous, and respectful of others. Attendance rates are above the average for the 'family' of schools and consistently exceed national and local authority targets.

Most pupils like school, have positive attitudes to learning and enjoy the range of activities offered. When given the opportunity, most pupils effectively evaluate their own learning in lessons such as drama in Year 4/5 and physical education in Year 3/4, where they make relevant comments about the good features and points for development in one another's performance. Throughout the school, however, few pupils are aware of individual targets for improvement or how they can develop their learning in aspects of their work such as writing.

Current members of the school council and eco club are not yet actively involved in making decisions. In previous years, the council has been proactive in promoting improvements in the school and the local community, through campaigns on issues such as healthy eating and improving the school environment.

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

A broad, balanced curriculum meets learners' needs. There is a good range of extra-curricular activities for older pupils in key stage 2, but fewer opportunities for younger pupils. The international primary curriculum has recently been introduced and is beginning to have a positive impact on pupils' learning experiences in key stage 2. The provision of homework is inconsistent and does not always build well on pupils' learning experiences in school.

Opportunities for the development of pupils' communication, numeracy and ICT skills across the curriculum are identified in all teachers' lesson plans and in many classroom displays. In the best lessons, teachers encourage pupils purposefully to use these skills but they are not consistently well promoted in all classes.

The use of incidental Welsh is developing adequately through a variety of initiatives. However, it is not being consistently well used across the school. The promotion of pupils' knowledge and understanding of the cultural, economic, environmental and historical characteristics of Wales is satisfactory.

Although the current eco club is not yet functioning, previously a good range of activities designed to promote pupils' understanding of sustainable development were effective. As a result, the school has achieved the silver eco schools award.

Experiences such as children's study of 'Diwali' in the Foundation Phase and a 'diversity project' in Year 4/5 make a good contribution to pupils' understanding of cultural diversity. The majority of pupils understand the 'fair trade' policy. Overall, however, the development of pupils' awareness of global citizenship is inconsistent across the school.

Teaching: Adequate

The quality of teaching throughout the school is variable, but there are several examples of good practice upon which the school can build. Working relationships between teachers, support staff and pupils are generally good. In the best lessons, teachers make learning fun. They use a good range of approaches, including drama, practical activities and group work that successfully engage most learners. In a minority of lessons the pace is slow and pupils do not learn as much as they could.

Many teachers do not consistently and effectively modify work to meet the needs of the range of ability in the class. The same task is often given to all pupils, with the result that more able pupils, in particular, are not challenged enough. Teaching assistants are not always given sufficient direction to enable them to make best use of their skills to benefit the pupils.

Assessment systems are adequate. The quality of assessment for the Foundation Phase is generally accurate and comprehensive. The deputy head teacher is currently developing procedures to track pupils' progress. The quality of marking is variable. In the best practice, teachers mark work regularly and offer guidance on how pupils can improve their work. Target setting is inconsistent and at an early stage of development. Pupils are not involved in planning their own progress and are often unsure what they need to do to improve their work. Reports to parents are generally informative, but there is no clear indication of how parents can help their children or what the next stages of learning might be.

Care, support and guidance: Good

The school is a generally caring community that effectively supports pupils' wellbeing, although a few pupils do not feel able to approach staff for advice and guidance when required. It successfully promotes the benefits of a healthy lifestyle and has effective health and safety policies and procedures.

There is a clear behaviour policy and most pupils have a good understanding of rewards and sanctions. Most pupils think the school deals well with any bullying but a few do not feel that the school always deals with this effectively.

Good arrangements exist to promote pupils' personal development, especially their moral attitudes. The school has an effective personal and social education programme that includes social and emotional aspects of learning that are often developed well through class discussions.

There is a Christian ethos and pupils' spiritual development is satisfactory. Creative learning opportunities are generally good. Pupils' appreciation of religious and cultural diversity in Wales and the wider world is sometimes well developed through class topics and assemblies but is not consistent across the school.

Good use is made of specialist services when required and pupils receive useful information and support when moving on to secondary school.

The school has an appropriate policy and has procedures for safeguarding. Criminal Record Bureau checks are conducted on all who work with pupils.

The provision for pupils with additional learning needs (ALN) is good overall. Pupils with SEN are well supported both in mainstream classes and in withdrawal groups. There is a draft register of more able and talented pupils, but robust tracking of the progress of all pupils with ALN, together with the provision to develop the skills of more able and talented pupils, is under-developed.

Learning environment: Good

The school provides equality of opportunity and access to all aspects of its provision. All pupils were involved in reviewing and agreeing the school aims. Equality schemes and action plans meet statutory requirements.

Resources are of good quality and effectively meet pupils' needs. Sixteen new laptops have been purchased and the key stage 2 library has been refurbished. As a result, nearly all pupils think they have enough books and equipment to do their work.

The accommodation is well maintained and sufficient for the number of pupils. Although some classrooms are quite cramped, corridors are used well for practical activities. There are suitable toilet and changing facilities that include good provision for pupils with disabilities.

The school grounds include gardens and a 'forest school' area that are stimulating and well maintained. A recently installed 'trim trail' is popular with pupils during their break times and makes a positive contribution to their health and fitness.

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

There is insufficient clarity in the overall strategic direction of the school. Most members of staff work hard and are committed to their pupils but their efforts are not consistently and effectively directed towards meeting specific goals. Responsibility

for leading and managing the school is not shared sufficiently between the five members of the senior management team. Their meetings are not consistently and sharply focused on addressing key priorities.

Although the deputy head teacher has introduced a number of promising and relevant new initiatives, they have not had time to embed in the school's practice. A positive recent development has been the establishment of curriculum teams, with a dedicated leader, who formulate curriculum improvement plans. However, their work has not had enough time to have a positive impact on standards and the quality of the provision.

Members of the governing body are supportive of the school and well informed about pupils' results and the issues they raise. However, they are not yet fully involved in the school's self-evaluation process and in setting its strategic direction.

The school works closely with the local authority and agrees, in an annual audit, how it will take account of national and local priorities for development. It has taken good account of national priorities such as the transition from primary to secondary school and the promotion of healthy life styles. However, the effective translation of other agreed actions into the school's practice is not always sustained.

Improving quality: Adequate

Procedures for evaluating the quality of standards and provision and planning for improvement are not fully embedded. The school is beginning to analyse relevant data, including teacher assessments and the results of standardised tests. However, the information gathered is not always used successfully to devise strategies for improvement.

Managers and leaders have some opportunities to monitor their subjects and the quality of provision but the practice lacks consistency and is not sufficiently rigorous. Although members of staff discuss aspects of the curriculum and review pupils' progress, there is not yet a systematic, whole-school approach to promote improvement.

Parents have been issued with questionnaires in the past, but there are no formal arrangements to ascertain the views of the governing body, support staff and the community in terms of self-evaluation.

The school development plan contains a large number of target areas but it does not focus clearly enough on key priorities for improvement. Teachers' involvement in continuing professional development courses is not consistently linked to whole school priorities for improvement.

Networks of professional practice have been effectively established with other schools in the local area. Within the school, groups such as the Foundation Phase team meet regularly to evaluate and plan children's learning experiences. Sharing of good practice within the school is, however, at an early stage of development.

The school has made generally adequate progress in addressing key issues from the last inspection.

Partnership working: Adequate

The school has developed a satisfactory range of useful partnerships with local playgroups, employers and various community groups. It regularly welcomes students on work experience and actively promotes links with various sporting agencies.

Older pupils value the close links established with the two receiving secondary schools and there are several transition projects and an exchange of teaching staff. Parents usually receive appropriate information about the work of the school but formal links with parents are not as well developed.

The school works well with other schools in the local area, for example, to moderate and quality assure teachers' assessments of pupils' work in English, mathematics and science. Joint training days, where resources are effectively shared with partner schools, are held at least once a year on topics of common interest.

Resource management: Adequate

There is a sufficient number of suitably qualified staff to teach the curriculum effectively. Members of the support staff are, for the most part, deployed appropriately. Teachers make satisfactory use of their planning, preparation and assessment time.

Resources are generally used well. The standard of the accommodation is good. Indoors, available space is used effectively. However, the extensive outdoor areas and grounds are not used as much as they could be to enrich pupils' learning experiences.

Falling rolls over the last six years, and a high percentage of experienced staff, have caused pressures on the school's finances so that it is currently operating a deficit budget. Within the limits of its budget, however, spending decisions are not always efficiently linked to the most important priorities for improvement.

The finance committee of the governing body meets regularly to monitor the budget. The school has agreed a budget recovery plan with the local authority which is due for review in the light of changing circumstances. In view of the satisfactory standards attained by most pupils, the school provides adequate value for money.

Appendix 1

Stakeholder satisfaction report

Responses to parent questionnaires

Nearly all parents think their children like school. All agree that the school effectively promotes a healthy lifestyle. Around a half of parents do not think that homework builds well on what their children are learning at school. A significant minority do not agree that the school is well run. They are unclear about the school's procedure for dealing with complaints and do not feel comfortable about approaching it with questions, suggestions or a problem.

Responses to learner questionnaires

Without exception, pupils feel safe in school and think that it encourages them to keep healthy. All feel that members of staff help them to learn and nearly all agree that there are enough books, equipment and computers for them to do their work. Most pupils agree that children behave well at playtime and lunchtime but a few do not think the school deals well with any bullying. A few pupils do not agree that homework helps them to understand and improve their work in school.

Appendix 2

The inspection team

Stephanie James	Reporting Inspector
David Evans	Team Inspector
Catherine Jenkins	Lay Inspector
Julie Jones	Peer Inspector
Claire Gething	School Nominee

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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