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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

**Maerdy Community Primary School
Graig Wen
Ferndale
Rhondda Cynon Taff
CF43 4TW**

Date of inspection: January 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:

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

Maerdy Community Primary School is situated in Maerdy, which is at the head of the Rhondda Valley and in the Rhondda Cynon Taf local authority. The school serves an area that is socially and economically disadvantaged.

The school was formed in September 2010 after the amalgamation of the local infant and junior schools. There are 227 pupils aged three to eleven years on roll that are mainly taught in eight mixed-age classes. The school also hosts a class that caters for 10 key stage 2 pupils with complex needs from across the local authority.

The school has identified around 24% of pupils with additional learning needs, including two pupils that have a statement of special educational needs. Approximately 40% of pupils are entitled to free school meals, which is well above the local authority and all-Wales averages. Five pupils are looked after by the local authority. All pupils speak English as their first language and nearly all pupils are of white British ethnic origin.

The headteacher and deputy headteacher were appointed in September 2010 to lead the new school. They were previously employed as the acting headteacher and acting deputy headteacher of Maerdy Junior School. For the first two terms, the school operated on split sites. After major refurbishment to the old junior building, the school came together on one site in May 2011. This is the first inspection of Maerdy Community Primary School.

The individual school budget per pupil for Maerdy Community Primary School in 2011-2012 means that the budget is £3,705 per pupil. The maximum per pupil in the primary schools in Rhondda Cynon Taf is £6,499 and the minimum is £2,591. Maerdy Community Primary School is 38th out of the 114 primary schools in Rhondda Cynon Taf in terms of its school budget per pupil.

Summary

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

Current performance

The current performance of Maerdy Community Primary School is adequate because:

- most pupils make good progress in English and mathematics;
- the school's performance is generally in-line with that of similar schools;
- all pupils enjoy coming to school and are enthusiastic learners; and
- pupils' behaviour is exemplary.

However:

- pupils' standards in science and Welsh are judged as adequate; and
- pupils' numeracy and information and communication skills are not well developed.

Prospects for improvement

The school's prospects for improvement are good because:

- the headteacher and governors have successfully amalgamated the two former schools and secured the support of all parents and the local community;
- all stakeholders share the strategic vision for the school;
- the school has established a wide range of effective systems to analyse its work; and
- the school development plan appropriately prioritises raising pupils' standards.

Recommendations

In order to improve the school needs to:

- R1 improve the standards of pupils' work in science and Welsh and the presentation of pupils' work in general;
- R2 improve pupils' ability to use and apply their skills in numeracy and information and communication skills across all areas of the curriculum;
- R3 improve the consistency of planning for skills to ensure that the development of literacy and numeracy underpins pupils' learning experiences;
- R4 analyse a wider range of information, including pupil performance data, to inform target-setting and improvement planning; and
- R5 use the current self-evaluation systems to drive forward school improvement more robustly.

What happens next?

Maerdy Community Primary School will draw up an action plan which shows how it is going to address the recommendations. Estyn will monitor the school's progress.

Main findings

Key Question 1: How good are outcomes?

Adequate

Standards: Adequate

In English and mathematics, most pupils make good progress over time. In science, pupils' standards are only adequate at best and pupils do not apply the skills of scientific enquiry well enough.

Over the last three years, pupils have performed well in assessments at the end of key stages 1 and 2. They have performed consistently above the average for the family and generally in line with pupils in other similar schools. However, the assessment of pupils who achieve above the expected level at the end of each key stage is occasionally too generous. These assessments do not always reflect current standards in the school.

Pupils generally work productively in lessons and respond with enthusiasm to tasks set.

Pupils in the Foundation Phase listen attentively and respond confidently to questions. They explain their feelings and ideas well. In key stage 2, most pupils have very well developed speaking and listening skills. They listen carefully to adults and their peers, and contribute to discussions by building on the ideas of others.

Recent improvements in the provision for reading are beginning to have a positive impact on pupils' standards and rates of progress. In the Foundation Phase, many pupils are developing appropriate strategies to read unfamiliar words and to make sense of texts. In key stage 2, more able pupils read quite fluently and have a good sight vocabulary. They are able to find relevant information and answer factual questions readily. However, many pupils struggle to make inferences.

Many pupils in the Foundation Phase are able to convey meaning through writing simple sentences. By the end of key stage 2, many pupils write competently for a range of purposes across the curriculum. They use an interesting range of words and are usually able to extend their ideas. More able pupils generally write extended pieces well. Across the school, pupils' presentation and spelling skills are weak.

Many pupils do not have good recall of number facts and this hampers their ability to apply their numeracy skills across the curriculum. In information and communication technology, pupils are competent in a few areas, such as word processing, creating power points and researching information, but their range of skills is limited overall.

Although pupils use incidental Welsh enthusiastically, they lack confidence as speakers or listeners even when the subject matter is at a relatively simple level. Pupils' vocabulary is limited and their knowledge of commonly-used sentence and question patterns is not secure. This limits their progress in reading and writing in Welsh.

Pupils in the complex needs class make good progress from their starting points. In general, most pupils with additional learning needs make at least appropriate progress in developing their literacy skills.

In both key stages, boys do not achieve as well as girls. However, the difference in performance is less than the average for the family of schools and is not significant. Although pupils who receive free school meals do not generally achieve as well as those pupils not receiving free school meals, the difference in performance is smaller than that of similar schools.

Wellbeing: Good

Behaviour in the school is exemplary. Pupils support each other very well and usually make the right choices without interventions from adults. As a result, there is a calm and friendly atmosphere throughout the school.

All pupils feel valued, happy and safe in school. They show respect, care and concern for each other and speak confidently to staff and visitors. Most pupils act maturely and take responsibility for their actions.

Nearly all pupils have a very good understanding of how to keep themselves healthy and physically fit. Many pupils take part in after-school sports clubs and older pupils run a healthy food tuck shop.

Pupils participate very well in activities and display enthusiasm and interest in their work. Their involvement in planning their learning and making decisions about how they learn is in its early stages.

The school's links with the community are strong. Many of these have been developed by the school council and eco committee. Pupils are keen to take on additional roles and they take their responsibilities seriously. There are good channels of communication between members of the school council and other pupils. School councillors have been instrumental in making improvements to the school's environment and planning fund-raising events.

Attendance is improving and compares well to levels in other similar schools. Most pupils arrive punctually in the mornings.

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

Teachers generally plan well together to design a balanced curriculum that meets the needs of many pupils. However, teachers do not always adapt their planning well enough to take account of the range of ability in their classes. Planning to develop pupils' subject skills is developing appropriately in most subjects but in science it is not yet refined enough to develop pupils' scientific knowledge or enquiry skills.

Planning to develop pupils' literacy skills underpins most learning experiences in Year 5 and Year 6. In other classes, planning is not as well developed, and pupils'

opportunities to apply their skills at the appropriate level are often limited. Pupils' opportunities to write at length are sometimes constrained by an over-reliance on work sheets and writing frames. The provision for developing pupils' skills in numeracy and information and communication technology across the curriculum is not developed enough.

Pupils benefit from a good range of trips and visits to enhance their learning experiences. The school makes very good use of its charitable donations to ensure that pupils in Year 5 and Year 6 have the opportunity to visit a residential outdoor activity centre or have an overnight stay in London every year. These opportunities are very much appreciated by pupils and parents. Volunteers and visitors to school also contribute well to broadening pupils' experiences. The school has an appropriate range of extra-curricular activities.

There is a detailed scheme of work for the development of Welsh skills across the curriculum. Teachers' whole-school planning sets out good opportunities to develop pupils' understanding of the heritage and culture of Wales. Most Welsh lessons are delivered during teachers' planning and preparation time. The majority of teachers reinforce this work in other sessions, but this is not consistent.

The eco-committee has a good understanding of conservation and promotes sustainability issues well to other pupils. The school's curriculum provision generally develops pupils' understanding of education for sustainability and global citizenship. The link with a school in Uganda helps pupils to understand their responsibilities as members of a global community.

Teaching: Good

Teachers and support staff use a variety of teaching methods that keep pupils interested and enthused. Most lessons proceed at a good pace and there is a good balance between teacher instruction and pupil activity. Teachers consistently share learning outcomes and success criteria with pupils.

Staff generally have up-to-date subject knowledge. They develop excellent working relationships and establish positive learning environments. They manage pupils' behaviour very effectively.

In the best lessons, teachers use effective questioning techniques that encourage pupils to think for themselves. In a minority of lessons, teachers miss opportunities to develop pupils' literacy, numeracy, Welsh and information and communication skills across all subjects and areas of the curriculum.

Staff have a good knowledge of assessment for learning strategies and use these well in lessons. Pupils are effectively involved in judging their own performance and that of their peers against relevant success criteria.

Teachers mark pupils work regularly. Their comments are generally very positive, but they do not often set out targets for the pupils to achieve next time. As a result, pupils are not always well informed about how to improve their work.

The school has appropriate procedures for assessing and monitoring pupils' progress. Formal systems to track pupils' progress consistently across all subjects are not fully developed.

Annual reports to parents meet statutory requirements and parents or carers are well informed about their child's progress.

Care, support and guidance: Good

The school's strategies are having a positive effect on the level of attendance and pupils are highly appreciative of its efforts to eradicate bullying. The use of peer mediators is effective in monitoring behaviour and resolving issues across the school.

There are good arrangements to promote healthy living and wellbeing. Pupils' social and moral development is very well promoted through a wide range of activities. There is good provision for enhancing pupils' spiritual development through daily acts of worship and appropriate curriculum planning. The provision to develop pupils' cultural understanding is sound.

The school makes good use of the support and advice it receives from a wide range of external agencies. Partnership working provides timely support to individual pupils and their families. The programme to improve pupils' emotional wellbeing is particularly effective.

Pupils' progress against targets in their individual education plans is tracked effectively and parents are kept well informed about their child's development. There are appropriate procedures for identifying pupils with additional learning needs, but interventions are sometimes not undertaken early enough to benefit the youngest pupils. The additional programmes to support pupils in developing their basic skills are well run and are helping to improve pupils' standards in reading and mathematics. Provision to support pupils in the complex needs class is excellent.

The school has procedures and has an appropriate policy for safeguarding.

Learning environment: Good

This is a fully inclusive school where all pupils have equal access to the school's provision. The arrangements for those with a disability are particularly good. Pupils are encouraged to challenge stereotypes and to have high aspirations for their futures.

The school is an excellent example of how to convert an existing junior building to meet the needs of pupils in a newly-combined primary school. It is very well maintained and has a number of good features such as the shared research areas between classes. These areas are generally used well to foster pupils' collaborative working and investigational skills. The outside areas have also been particularly well adapted to enhance the learning environment. Pupils in the Foundation Phase do not always make full use of these spaces. Pupils are highly appreciative of the quantity and quality of learning resources at their disposal.

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

Leadership: Good

The headteacher has a vision for the school driven by the aspiration to support all pupils to achieve the best they can whatever factors of social deprivation they have to overcome. The strategic direction is one shared by senior leaders and communicated well to all school staff. Leaders have responded energetically and purposefully to the challenge to establish a single primary school from the former infant and junior schools.

The impact of this leadership can be seen in the way staff work together to enthuse and engage all pupils in learning. The school has implemented a good range of initiatives to improve pupils' skills of reading, speaking and listening across the curriculum.

Staff roles and responsibilities are well defined and the leadership structure is appropriate. Distributed leadership roles are developing well throughout the school although they are not yet influential enough in raising standards. Appropriate performance management arrangements are in place.

The school is working well with the local authority on a number of national and local priorities. Its successful encouragement of parents to take advantage of provision for family learning is excellent.

The governing body is well informed and governors are aware of school priorities and pupils' performance. Governors are very supportive of the school. They take part in learning walks, listen to pupils' views and observe lessons. Governors are beginning to challenge the school more robustly about the standards it achieves. There are suitable sub-committees and structures in place to ensure that statutory requirements are met.

Improving quality: Adequate

Leaders have introduced a wide range of effective procedures to evaluate the school's work. As part of this self-evaluation, the school involves key stakeholders, including parents, pupils, staff and governors.

While the self-evaluation processes are helping to bring about improvements and to identify suitable priorities, they are not always used rigorously enough. Subject leaders now take responsibility for monitoring and evaluating work in their subjects. While this work is developing well, their evaluations are sometimes too generous.

The school's current analysis of performance data helps to identify the importance of improving standards in some areas. However, leaders do not yet analyse a wide enough range of data to ensure that they identify correctly all areas for improvement.

The school development plan prioritises important areas for development. The well written and costed plan includes realistic timescales and success criteria to help measure progress and assess effectiveness.

Members of staff have good opportunities to increase their professional knowledge and skills through continuous professional development. There are productive examples of collaboration and shared learning with other schools. There is a developing culture of sharing effective practice within the school.

Partnership working: Good

The school works closely with parents and they value the support given to their children in school generally and especially through the process of amalgamating the two schools. This positive relationship is reflected in the pupils' attitude to school and their positive contribution to school life.

Staff and governors have developed strong community links and these are reflected in the involvement of community representatives in the work of the school. The Community Choir, for example, contributes regularly to celebration events.

The school has built effective partnerships with a range of outside agencies to meet the particular needs of more vulnerable individuals and groups of pupils. There is good evidence of the positive impact of these partnerships on pupils' wellbeing and behaviour.

The helpful partnership with Flying Start facilitates smooth transition to school for children and their families.

The school participates fully in activities with the local authority cluster of schools and is currently contributing to the shared development of a problem-solving resource pack for use in mathematics.

There are strong links between the school and the local secondary school to which most pupils transfer. These have an appropriate impact on transition to the next stage of education for older pupils.

Resource management: Good

The school manages its budget and additional trust funding well. It adjusts its spending appropriately in response to changing circumstances.

There are a sufficient number of qualified teachers and support staff and these are generally deployed effectively. The school identifies and meets the needs of all staff through well understood performance management procedures. There are appropriate arrangements for teachers' planning, preparation and assessment time.

The school identifies and allocates resources appropriately in line with the priorities identified in its school improvement plan. There is a very good range of learning resources that are well managed and generally used well.

The school provides a good standard of care, support and guidance. It manages its budget and trust fund efficiently and provides a high standard of accommodation. In view of the outcomes achieved by most of the pupils in English and mathematics, the school overall provides good value for money.

Appendix 1

Commentary on performance data

Over the past three years, in key stages 1 and 2, pupils' performance in the core subject indicator, the expected level in English, mathematics and science, has been consistently above the average for the family of schools and has generally compared well with the performance of pupils in other similar schools.

In key stage 1 in 2011, the performance of pupils continued to improve, with 81% of pupils achieving the expected level (level 2) in all three core subjects. When compared with the situation in other similar schools, the overall performance of pupils is in the highest 25% and above the local authority and all-Wales averages.

Pupils' performance in the individual subjects of English, mathematics and science has been consistently above the average for the family. In English, the performance of pupils is in the upper 50% when compared to that of other similar schools. Pupils' performance in mathematics is generally in the upper 50% when compared to that of similar schools. However, pupils' performance in science does not compare as favourably. The proportion of pupils, in 2010 and 2011, who attained the higher level (level 3) in English, mathematics and science was well above the average for the family of schools and in the upper 50% when compared to levels in other similar schools.

In key stage 2 in 2011, nearly two thirds of pupils achieved the expected level (level 4) in all three core subjects. This represents a downward trend and pupils' performance does not compare well with that of pupils in similar schools. However, when results of pupils in the complex needs class are disaggregated, pupils' performance places the school in the lower 50% but not the lowest 25% of similar schools.

In English, pupils' performance is just above the average for the family and in mathematics pupils' performance is the highest in the family. However, pupils' performance in science has been below the family average for the past three years. In English and mathematics, pupils' performance at the higher level (level 5) is significantly above the family average.

Overall, in both key stages, boys do not achieve as well as girls. However, the difference in performance is less than the average for the family of schools. Although, pupils that receive free school meals do not generally achieve as well as those pupils not receiving free school meals, the difference in performance is smaller than that of similar schools.

Appendix 2

Stakeholder satisfaction report

Learner questionnaires

One hundred and two pupils in key stage 2 completed the questionnaires.

Pupils' responses are generally more positive than the views of pupils in other schools in Wales. In particular, pupils are more positive about the behaviour of others both in classes and at break times. Only a very few pupils expressed negative views about the behaviour of other pupils.

All pupils think they are doing well in school and that adults help them to learn and make progress. They all feel that the school deals well with any bullying.

Nearly all pupils know whom to talk to if they are worried or upset or if they are finding work hard. As a result, they feel safe in school. Pupils agree that the school teaches them how to be healthy and that there are regular opportunities to take part in physical activities. Nearly all pupils think they have enough books and equipment and that homework helps to improve their work in school.

Parent questionnaires

Twenty parents completed the parent questionnaires. Parents' responses are generally more positive than the views of parents in other schools in Wales. All parents feel the school is well run and express a great deal of satisfaction with the school.

All parents state that their children were helped to settle into school when they first started and that their children like school and are happy and safe there. All parents think that teaching is good, that their children are expected to work hard and that their children are making good progress. Parents agree that their children are encouraged to be more mature and to take on responsibilities, which helps them to be well prepared when they move onto their next school.

All parents think that their children are treated fairly and with respect and that they receive enough additional support with their individual learning needs. All parents feel that school staff are approachable if they have any concerns or questions and they feel well informed about their children's progress. They are pleased with the school's range of activities, including trips and visits. Nearly all parents think that their children are encouraged to be healthy and take regular exercise.

A very few parents are not clear about what to do if they need to make a complaint.

Appendix 3

The inspection team

Liz Miles	Reporting Inspector
Stephen Lamb	Team Inspector
Edward Tipper	Lay Inspector
Amanda Stanford	Peer Inspector
Suzanne Belcher	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.