



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

**A report on**

**Risca Primary School  
Danygraig Road  
Risca  
Newport  
NP11 6DB**

**Date of inspection: November 2018**

**by**

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

## About Risca Primary School

Risca Primary School is in the Ebbw valley, just north of Newport in the Caerphilly local authority. There are currently 326 pupils on roll, including 29 part time nursery pupils. There are 12 mixed-ability classes. Each year, the school receives about 30 pupils from a local infant school at the start of Year 3.

The three-year rolling average of pupils who are eligible for free school meals is 15%, which is below the national average of 19%. Nearly all pupils speak English as their home language and a very few pupils speak Welsh as their first language. The school has identified 11% of pupils as having additional learning needs, which is well below the national average of 21%. There are a very few pupils with a statement of special educational needs.

The headteacher was appointed in April 2009. The school's most recent inspection was in January 2013.

The school is currently a pioneer school and is working with the Welsh Government and other schools to take forward developments relating to the curriculum and professional learning.

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

Overall, nearly all pupils make very good progress as they move through the school. They develop very strong literacy skills and solve real-life number problems very well. All pupils learn independently and productively across the school. Pupils are polite and very caring towards each other and show pride when talking about their community. The classrooms and corridors are colourful, stimulating and interesting spaces.

The quality of teaching and assessment is consistently strong across the school. Pupils are influential in what and how they learn. They work with staff to shape a vibrant and engaging curriculum which contains many authentic learning experiences. As a result, learning matches pupils' needs and interests well. Provision to develop pupils' creative skills is excellent, especially in art.

The headteacher and deputy headteacher lead a conscientious team of staff, who provide highly interesting and varied learning experiences for pupils. Staff are reflective practitioners with high expectations of pupils and themselves. They are forward thinking and share their findings and successes openly with other schools across the region.

| <b>Inspection area</b>                     | <b>Judgement</b> |
|--------------------------------------------|------------------|
| <b>Standards</b>                           | <b>Excellent</b> |
| <b>Wellbeing and attitudes to learning</b> | <b>Good</b>      |
| <b>Teaching and learning experiences</b>   | <b>Excellent</b> |
| <b>Care, support and guidance</b>          | <b>Good</b>      |
| <b>Leadership and management</b>           | <b>Excellent</b> |

## **Recommendations**

R1 Improve attendance

R2 Ensure that targets are specific and measurable for pupils with additional learning needs

## **What happens next**

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

Estyn will invite the school to prepare a case study on its work in relation to Professional Learning and distributed leadership for dissemination on Estyn's website.

## Main findings

### Standards: Excellent

The majority of pupils enter the school with language, numeracy and social skills that are at or above those expected for their age. Nearly all pupils, including those with additional learning needs and those eligible for free school meals, make good progress and achieve high standards by the end of key stage 2. The school has sustained these high rates of progress over time.

Nearly all pupils are articulate and convey their knowledge, understanding and feelings clearly. They make good contributions in discussions, ask and answer relevant questions confidently and listen carefully to other pupils' responses. Most use rich, well-chosen vocabulary and have a secure understanding of complex words. For example, in Year 2, pupils use relevant scientific vocabulary to explain clearly to one another why there is no sound in space. In Year 5, pupils use evocative words and phrases confidently, such as 'delusional' and 'wrinkly as a walnut', when describing a character in a story.

Most pupils in the foundation phase develop a secure understanding of phonics and use this very well to help them to read. In the nursery, pupils read their own names and begin to understand the relationship between letters and sounds. By the end of Year 2, pupils use a wide range of strategies to read unfamiliar words successfully and more able pupils read confidently with good levels of expression and comprehension. Most pupils in key stage 2 make very good progress in reading. They show a positive attitude to reading and enjoy talking about books and authors. By the end of key stage 2, most skim and scan texts effectively and retrieve specific information accurately.

Overall, standards of pupils' written work at the school are very high. From the outset, they record letters, phrases and simple words, developing confidence quickly. In the reception class, they write an effective range of simple sentences about what they have experienced, for example, 'I can see a big shiny moon.' By the end of the phase, most write clearly in extended pieces of writing in a variety of genres, using exciting and specific vocabulary. For example, Year 2 create information booklets about penguins, which are well structured and contain specific vocabulary and relevant facts. By the end of key stage 2, nearly all pupils write at length for a wide range of purposes and audiences to a very high standard. They plan and improve their work thoroughly, using imagery well to produce effective and convincing work, such as 'A gentle breeze swept sand around their legs, clinging to their skin. The tide was rising, eating away at the rest of the beach.' Most pupils develop into accomplished, independent writers across all aspects of the curriculum.

Most pupils in the foundation phase have well-developed mathematical skills for their age. They work confidently, and often independently, with number, shape, space and measure. For example, Year 2 pupils use standard units to measure the capacity of a range of real-life objects accurately. Most pupils develop very strong problem-solving and reasoning skills as they progress throughout the school. Most pupils make very good progress in developing their numeracy skills and apply their skills exceptionally well in real-life contexts. For example, when studying India, Year

4 pupils calculate the cost of an Indian meal accurately and apply a discount voucher confidently. Year 6 pupils subtract large numbers quickly and accurately when comparing the population of cities in France.

Across the school, most pupils make effective use of a wide range of information and communication technology (ICT) skills to support their work across areas of learning. Nearly all pupils in the foundation phase are confident users of a variety of programs that enrich their learning effectively. For example, pupils in Year 2 use an application to create an eBook on subjects that are of interest to them. In key stage 2, nearly all pupils apply their ICT skills successfully throughout their work. For example, In Year 4, pupils create a presentation on aspects of Roman life.

Nearly all pupils develop strong Welsh language skills for their age and stage of development. Many communicate in Welsh with enthusiasm in classes across the school. Many pupils in the nursery begin to talk about the weather and by the end of the foundation phase most pupils are confident in the use of the patterns and vocabulary they have learnt, for example when talking about where they live. Pupils in key stage 2 respond well to simple questions on how they feel or what they like and dislike. They build well on their prior Welsh oral skills as they progress through the school. Pupils' writing in Welsh develops strongly. By the end of Year 4, most can write a dialogue of a telephone conversation confidently. By Year 6, they can write a recount of their activities during a previous holiday using the past tense.

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

Nearly all pupils display strong attitudes to learning. They are enthusiastic, engage very well in tasks, sustain their concentration and persevere for significant periods. This helps pupils to achieve high standards in classes across the school. In lessons, most pupils complete a substantial amount of interesting work to a high standard. For example, Year 6 pupils organise their thoughts very cogently in a letter concerning whaling and Year 2 pupils write convincingly about Adele penguins and their habitat. Nearly all pupils make valuable contributions to class discussions and they ask and respond to questions confidently and appropriately. Most pupils in the foundation phase show resilience when completing tasks independently. For example, Year 2 persevere well when creating a quiz on the solar system for adults and each other.

Nearly all pupils undertake activities with confidence and maturity. They behave exceptionally well in lessons and around the school. They are courteous and polite to each other, staff and visitors. Nearly all pupils know where to turn if they feel worried or upset. They develop a strong understanding of how to stay healthy and fit through exercise and having a well-balanced diet.

Most pupils have a strong voice in planning their own learning. They identify what and how they want to learn regularly and effectively. For example, younger pupils plan their learning for the topic 'To Infinity and Beyond'. In Year 5, pupils create focused web diagrams which guide their learning about aspects of Cardiff Bay, such as the buildings, nature, sounds and travel.

Pupil leadership groups have a positive impact on school life. For example, members of the school council organise beneficial activities during anti-bullying week and the digital leaders lead internet safety assemblies reinforcing the need for pupils to keep safe online. Playground buddies support their peers very well.

Pupils' attendance does not compare well with that in other similar schools and the amount of persistent absence is too high.

### **Teaching and learning experiences: Excellent**

Overall, the quality of teaching across the school is high. All teachers have strong knowledge of the subjects they teach and use this effectively when giving clear, concise explanations and instructions to pupils. Teachers and support staff have high expectations of their pupils and provide stimulating lessons that link with pupils' previous learning experiences very effectively. Teachers use a variety of questioning techniques very skilfully to extend pupils' responses and to check their understanding.

All staff have a positive working relationship with pupils. They use praise and encouragement effectively to keep pupils on task. Teachers deploy teaching assistants skilfully to facilitate pupils' learning within the classroom and to support those who have additional learning needs. As a result, pupils with additional learning needs make very good progress over time towards meeting their individual learning targets.

Teachers provide effective oral and written feedback to pupils about the quality of their work. Teachers use their ongoing evaluation of pupils' work to help shape their planning of pupils' future learning successfully. Teachers in all classes set out different success criteria for pupils at varying levels of ability and this helps pupils to assess their own work and that of other pupils effectively.

Teachers have constructed a carefully planned curriculum that addresses the requirements of the foundation phase and the national curriculum. They include exciting and creative approaches to learning in their lesson planning. The curriculum links pupils' learning to the four purposes of the new curriculum and places a high emphasis on pupil-led learning. It develops pupils' skills, knowledge and understanding extremely well across all areas of learning.

In the foundation phase, staff nurture pupils' independence and develop their skills effectively. There is a beneficial mix of adult-led and independent, child-led activities. The learning environment both in classrooms and outdoor areas is highly stimulating and engaging. It promotes pupils' independence and enjoyment of learning through real life experiences very well. For example, in the foundation phase, pupils can visit the space station to sign up to be an astronaut. In key stage 2, teachers have set up independent learning areas that engage pupils well outside each classroom.

Provision for developing pupils' creativity is an exceptional feature of the school. All key stage 2 pupils receive the opportunity to play a musical instrument and they take part in regular music making groups and performances. Weekly art lessons with a specialist teacher have resulted in pupils developing art work of high quality which they display in a designated gallery area within the school.

Teachers' careful construction of the curriculum supports the development of high standards in pupils' work in literacy, numeracy and ICT. For example, in the foundation phase, star challenges encourage pupils to access a balance of skills throughout their week independently. Throughout the school, staff encourage pupils

to be inquisitive about what they want to learn and they give pupils purposeful opportunities to share their findings with the class after their independent research. As a result of these highly effective arrangements, most pupils become confident independent learners.

Staff create an extremely positive Welsh ethos and promote the language highly effectively. Across the curriculum, the Welsh dimension has a high profile and is an integral part of pupils' learning.

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

The school provides effective support for pupils identified as having additional learning needs. As a result, most targeted pupils make good progress towards meeting their individual learning goals. There are efficient systems for identifying and tracking the progress of pupils in need of support, such as through teacher observation and a broad range of standardised assessments. Leaders use these systems well to provide effective support to pupils to ensure they are able to access the curriculum successfully either through in-class support or in small groups.

The school tracks pupils' wellbeing through a range of purposeful measures. It has beneficial strategies for pupils experiencing social or emotional difficulties and require support. The school prepares suitable individual education plans for pupils with additional needs, including pupil-friendly targets, which staff monitor and review regularly. However, in a few instances, targets are not specific enough to ensure that pupils make progress in line with their abilities and needs.

Annual reports give parents useful information on their child's progress and identify specific targets for improvement. In addition, pupils produce their own report, reflecting on their learning through the year and identifying their own personal targets. This helps learners to take ownership of their own learning in a purposeful way.

The school has a wide range of communication channels with parents. These include regular newsletters, a social media account and the recent introduction of an application that allows parents to view their child's work. The school organises beneficial workshops to help parents to support their child's learning. For example, following the introduction of a new spelling scheme, the school held a workshop to explain the new approach to parents.

The school provides useful curriculum opportunities for pupils to learn how to eat and drink healthily and the importance of taking regular exercise. Older pupils run a fruit tuck shop at breaktime. There is a wide variety of extra-curricular activities and clubs, which contribute successfully towards developing pupils' health and fitness. However, at lunchtimes, there are limited outside play resources for key stage 2 pupils.

The school has a range of strategies in place to improve attendance. However, these have had limited effect on improving attendance rates or the volume of persistent absence.



The school provides many opportunities for pupils to undertake leadership roles. There is an active eco club, a school council, school ambassadors, a Criw Cymraeg and digital leaders. This results in pupils having a strong sense of pride and ownership of their school.

The school's well-planned personal and social education programme develops pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development well. Regular school assemblies, charity fundraising and learning activities provide valuable opportunities for pupils to reflect on how they should treat others and to think of others less fortunate than themselves. For example, the school's sponsorship of a school in Africa helps to improve pupils' understanding of diversity and their roles as global citizens.

The school is an inclusive, caring community where all pupils are valued and treated equally. The school integrates pupils at Year 3 from a neighbouring infant school sensitively, helping these pupils make the transition successfully.

The school's provision and ethos help to ensure that nearly all pupils' behaviour is exemplary. Staff treat all pupils with respect and encourage them to become enthusiastic learners. As a result, nearly all pupils are polite and well-mannered, showing respect for those around them.

The school provides excellent opportunities for pupils to develop their expressive and creative skills. This contributes highly effectively towards ensuring that pupils enjoy their learning experiences and show high levels of motivation and interest in their work. For example, following the visit of two evacuees to talk about their wartime experiences, pupils created an animated film and performed a play to reflect on their experiences purposefully.

The school provides valuable opportunities for all pupils to participate in a wide range of extra-curricular activities, particularly through the provision of 'Risca University' and the broadcasting in the school of 'Risca Radio'. This develops pupils' aspirations, self-confidence and communication skills.

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

### **Leadership and management: Excellent**

The experienced headteacher provides strong, effective and purposeful leadership. She has very high expectations of pupils and staff. She has a clear vision for the development of the school, which she shares purposefully with all pupils, staff and governors. The deputy headteacher and other senior leaders have a good balance of knowledge and skills, which complement those of the headteacher extremely well. This purposeful leadership team works effectively together to implement the actions set out in the school development plan and to ensure continuous improvements. They are very enthusiastic and committed to promoting teaching of high quality and the provision of stimulating learning experiences in all classes.

The headteacher has shared responsibilities effectively across staff at all levels. Staff display high professional standards and are keen to develop their professional

skills further. All members of staff are responsible for specific aspects of the school's work. They work together well and contribute skilfully towards maintaining high quality of teaching and strong achievement by pupils, particularly through the focused work of the highly effective curriculum teams. The consistency in the quality of teaching across the school and the purposeful, collective way that staff deliver agreed policies and practices underpin much of the school's successful provision, particularly in relation to the delivery of the curriculum.

A highly effective feature of the school is the provision of varied and purposeful opportunities for staff to develop professionally. Performance management procedures enrich the staff's professional development successfully and have a positive effect on standards. The school has embraced school-to-school working which they undertake across a wide range of schools. As a pioneer school for professional learning, it shares good practice with other schools on developing excellence in teaching and supporting teachers new to the profession. Members of staff lead on areas of good practice throughout the region. For example, the excellent learning environment and its impact on the standards pupils achieve act as an example of best practice for other schools to consider.

Members of the governing body are enthusiastic and highly supportive of the work of the school. The headteacher and senior leaders keep them thoroughly informed about developments and pupils' progress. They have a secure understanding of the strengths of the school and areas for development. They meet regularly and offer constructive support and challenge to the leadership team when agreeing strategic decisions. Governors gather first-hand evidence of aspects of the school's work by undertaking learning walks which increases their knowledge and understanding. For example, they have considered the quality of classroom displays and bilingualism throughout the school. This process is at an early stage of development in enabling governors to ask searching questions about progress.

A strong culture of continuous self-evaluation, which focuses firmly on pupils' outcomes, is well established. The school has a clear timetable for monitoring its activities and uses a range of evidence to evaluate its work purposefully, such as lesson observations and the scrutiny of pupils' books. These processes enable leaders to identify, monitor and evaluate the school's performance effectively. Staff make very extensive use of this information to identify a detailed list of improvement actions. The school's improvement plan sets out relevant and measurable actions clearly. There is a rigorous climate of targeting and challenging pupils to reach their full potential and to make achievable improvements.

The school has an extensive range of resources of good quality. Leaders ensure purposeful use of the school's budget to improve provision and to maintain high standards. Leaders manage expenditure prudently and ensure it links carefully to priorities and actions in the school development plan. Senior leaders are successful in ensuring substantial income through a variety of projects where the school shares its expertise with the local authority and other schools. This work impacts strongly on the quality of teaching and pupils' standards.

The school makes effective use of the pupil development grant to improve standards of literacy and numeracy, and nearly all targeted pupils make at least good progress.

## 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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