



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

A report on

**Birchgrove Primary
Heol Nant Bran
Birchgrove
SA7 9LS**

Date of inspection: January 2020

by

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

About Birchgrove Primary

Birchgrove Primary School serves the Birchgrove area of Swansea. There are 427 pupils on roll aged 3 to 11 years. Pupils are organised into 16 classes. The headteacher took up his post in November 2013. The school was last inspected in July 2014.

The three year average for pupils eligible for free school meals is around 21%. This figure is slightly above the Welsh average of 18%. The school has identified approximately 30% of pupils as having special educational needs, which is above the Welsh average of around 21%. Most pupils are of white British ethnicity and come from homes where English is the main language. Very few pupils speak Welsh at home.

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

During their time at the school, most pupils make at least good progress from their starting points while a few pupils make very good progress. They are very happy and confident individuals with a keen curiosity that the school nurtures successfully. Pupils relish the numerous opportunities they have to become part of one of the well-established leadership groups in the school and, as such, genuinely feel their contribution to 'The Birchgrove Way' is valued.

Teachers very successfully encourage pupils to contribute fully to their learning, through curriculum planning and in assessing their own progress. The staff of the school know their pupils exceptionally well and are quick to identify any vulnerability that may hinder their progress. Knowledgeable staff ensure these pupils have bespoke support so that they continue to thrive in forward-thinking learning environments.

The headteacher has a clear and purposeful vision for the school and its curriculum. All at the school successfully understand this vision, and as a result, they work together as a community. Over time, the school has successfully brought about improvements and sustained these in a meaningful way. Much of this has been achieved by supporting the professional learning of the staff and strengthening relationships with its parents.

Inspection area	Judgement
Standards	Excellent
Wellbeing and attitudes to learning	Excellent
Teaching and learning experiences	Excellent
Care, support and guidance	Excellent
Leadership and management	Excellent

Recommendations

R1 Share good practice in teaching and learning, including the outdoors, across the school

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 the work they do in relation to the professional learning undertaken at the school and also for their work in raising levels of attendance and maintaining these over time, for dissemination on Estyn's website.

Main findings

Standards: Excellent

During their time at the school, nearly all pupils make at least good progress in developing their skills from the starting points and a few make very good progress, this includes pupils with special needs.

Most pupils make very strong progress in the development of their speaking and listening skills during their time at the school. In the Nursery, many pupils listen attentively to traditional tales and are keen to answer questions or offer an opinion about what they have heard. By Year 2, many pupils are confident when discussing what they have learned and talk about their work with pride. Many pupils in Year 5 confidently and with clarity discuss word collages they have made about Victorian life. By Year 6, most pupils are highly articulate and confident when creating and presenting their ideas. A few pupils plan and produce an engaging and informative video to help their peers stay safe online and skilfully adapt how they speak for the benefit of their audience.

As they begin school, most pupils develop quickly strong basic phonic skills and apply these effectively to their independent writing. By Year 2 most pupils develop an understanding of more complex sounds and read and understand increasingly challenging texts. They are confident when discussing what they have read and make well informed predictions about what may come next. By Year 4, most pupils are ready to read and analyse more complex books, such as 'Charlotte's Web'. By Year 6, nearly all pupils have studied a broad range of genre as a stimulus, this includes an in-depth appreciation of the language and themes within Wilfred Owen's poem, 'Dulce et Decorum Est.'

Many pupils in the nursery enjoy mark making and many are beginning to spell their own name. By Year 2 most pupils write with increasing length, using a range of genre. They write recounts of the Great Fire of London before creating their own vibrant 'Great Fire of Birchgrove' stories using precise and lively vocabulary, such as 'the whole of Birchgrove was destroyed in seven minutes'. In Year 4 most pupils plan letters and successfully write them using the correct features. Most pupils show a strong awareness of syllables, such as when writing Haiku poems about autumn. Many pupils choose highly imaginative vocabulary to successfully engage their reader, such as 'the quirky parents cartwheeled to the crystal clear water and cannonballed into the pool'. Most pupils use hooks and rhetorical questions highly effectively to open their writing. By Year 6, many pupils write empathetically from the point of view of an injured war soldier, for example, 'the doctors arrived at the speed of a snail'. Nearly all pupils edit and improve their work effectively, often selecting and using similes, metaphors or personification to liven their writing.

In the nursery, most pupils develop effective early numeracy skills. For example, they count objects to 10 and beyond with independence. Through the foundation phase, pupils build upon these skills and by Year 2 most pupils are able to read, write and order three digit numbers. They multiply, divide and halve numbers and objects to 100. Most pupils pay for goods and give accurate change from one pound. They interpret data and use tally charts to record information effectively. Most pupils are

confident when using centimetres and metres to measure with increasing accuracy. In lower key stage 2, most pupils work with numbers to 1000 with confidence, often solving problems using a range of strategies that are familiar to them. They calculate the perimeter and area of simple shapes accurately. Most pupils are confident using Venn diagrams to sort information and accurately create bar charts and pie charts from the wide variety of data they collect. By Year 6, most pupils work confidently with large numbers and convert currency accurately. Through their cross-curricular work, most pupils enjoy the challenge of using fractions and scale amounts to adjust recipes to accommodate different numbers of people, such as when planning a Victorian banquet. Pupils calculate accurately the area of more complex shapes, including triangles, and the size of angles.

Standards in information and communication technology (ICT) are very strong across the school. In nursery, many pupils are beginning to understand what an email is and many pupils are beginning to save their work. By the end of the foundation phase, pupils use tablet computers confidently to support their learning to make pie charts and bar graphs, for example, when linked to a pocket money challenge. In Year 4, most pupils conduct comprehensive research into countries and construct interesting databases. Stemming from an interest into topical news on the Australian bush fires, pupils in Year 6 create their own enquiry into comparing temperatures. They use this information to investigate the possibility of using a small programmable computer to predict the outbreak of bush fires.

Across the school, nearly all pupils enjoy learning Welsh. They are enthusiastic and speak with good pronunciation. In reception, nearly all pupils sing Welsh songs enthusiastically and confidently name parts of the body. By Year 1 most learn to sound the letters of the Welsh alphabet correctly and in Year 2 many pupils are confident when taking part in a meaningful conversation. In Year 5, nearly all pupils read the story of Oliver Twist using intonation to show their understanding. By Year 6, pupils are able to write informatively about other countries.

Wellbeing and attitudes to learning: Excellent

Throughout the school, nearly all pupils display exceptionally high levels of wellbeing. They enjoy school and most pupils show very positive attitudes to their learning. Working relationships between pupils and staff are outstanding, and this helps almost all pupils to feel safe and valued. A very strong feature of the school is the respect and courtesy that pupils show towards each other, adults and visitors.

Nearly all pupils' behaviour is exemplary. They settle in lessons quickly and move between tasks sensibly and efficiently. Nearly all pupils behave calmly and responsibly in class and while moving around the school. Their willingness to work individually, in pairs and in groups is an outstanding feature of the school. Nearly all pupils take great pride in their work and their presentation in books reflects this.

Most pupils throughout the school show resilience when completing challenging tasks. All pupils take part in planning their termly projects and this results in very high levels of interest and engagement in their work. Nearly all pupils enjoy the opportunity to regularly work alongside their parents, for example with their young enterprise projects, and this further motivates pupils. In Year 2, nearly all pupils talk

enthusiastically about their topic on fire and dragons where all pupils became 'Dragonologists'.

Nearly all pupils feel secure in school and have a good understanding of how to keep themselves safe, including when working and playing online. This is supported well by the work of the 'smart scouts' online safety group. For example, they used green screen technology, music making and video apps to produce a short film for their peers about the dangers of making new friends online.

Nearly all pupils understand the importance of making healthy choices when choosing a snack and the contents of their packed lunches. In the foundation phase they enjoy trying new healthy foods and most pupils can explain the need to eat a balance of different food groups to maintain a healthy diet. By key stage 2, nearly all pupils are aware of the importance of keeping fit and understand how exercise plays a key part in keeping healthy.

Nearly all pupils show very good levels of concentration in their work and are keen to progress in their learning. They work hard and complete learning tasks to a high standard. They feel the school values them highly as individuals and this contributes to improvements in their self-confidence and their progress as they move through the school. From a very early age, most pupils have a good understanding of what they need to do to improve their work and, by the end of key stage 2, this is very secure.

Pupils embrace enthusiastically the numerous opportunities they have to undertake leadership roles and this is a very strong feature of the school. The school council, rights ambassadors, criw Cymraeg and smart scouts digital leaders are among a wide range of leadership groups within the school. Members take their roles very seriously and produce plans which detail their actions for the year ahead very clearly. They represent and support other pupils maturely. For example, pupil committees share presentations of their vision for school in assemblies and have taken responsibility for changing the way golden time operates. This resulted in an enhanced choice of activities for all to enjoy. The pupil leadership group, comprising of representatives from each of the other pupil groups, meet together with the senior management team, governors and headteacher to make strategic decisions about the school. Recently, they have held talks about upgrading some pupil facilities that have worn over time.

Most pupils develop a worthwhile awareness of sustainability through the work of the eco-committee and healthy lunchtime monitors. They actively encourage others to reduce the use of plastic around the school as well as to eat healthily. Nearly all pupils are aware of what can be recycled and enthusiastically support this programme.

Most pupils develop a beneficial understanding of equality and fairness through well-developed personal and social education programmes and whole-school events, for example exciting cooking workshops with parents and visits to Swansea Bay to conduct a litter pick. From this, some of the driftwood collected became up-cycled into craft items for sale in the Christmas fayre to raise money for the eco committee's development fund.

Teaching and learning experiences: Excellent

The strong and respectful relationships between staff and pupils are an outstanding strength of the school. Nearly all pupils feel cared for and valued and, as a result, make good progress in their learning. All staff establish high expectations of pupil achievement and behaviour, to which nearly all pupils respond to very positively.

Nearly all teachers encourage pupils to develop independence and resilience by persevering with tasks or using specific strategies to self-help. This includes the well-resourced learning environment they have created. In key stage 2, teachers provide pupils with challenging problems and teach them effective strategies to solve them. This helps to create a valuable culture of independent learning. For example, pupils talk with their neighbours and discuss the strategies they will use, making comments such as 'the column method will be faster to use today than chunking.' Teachers have a very good knowledge of their subjects and apply a wide range of effective teaching styles very successfully. Nearly all staff teach at a good pace and use highly effective questioning to assess the progress pupils are making. As a result, nearly all pupils make good progress in lessons and produce high-quality work of which they, and their teachers, are proud.

All teachers know their pupils and their next steps in learning very well. Following most lessons, teachers provide rapid feedback that enables pupils to extend their understanding effectively. Most pupils across the school are aware of their individual targets and refer to them frequently. In key stage 2, teachers set precise targets for rapid improvement initially and then provide pupils with the opportunity to identify their own progress targets. Teachers give pupils regular meaningful opportunities to self-assess their work as well as to assess the work of their peers.

The headteacher has steered the school's vision for developing an exciting and engaging curriculum for all pupils. This has involved all staff and has evolved over time, following reflection and action research, to create 'The Birchgrove Way'. This highly effective approach is evident in all classes and benefits from the honest voice of pupils, who openly share their views of what it is like to be a learner at the school. As a result, leaders have created a culture where staff take carefully considered risks with their teaching that lead to an innovative reshaping of the curriculum, teaching and the learning environment.

The teaching of important key skills in literacy and numeracy occurs in highly effective short, focused sessions. Teachers develop these skills through innovative learning experiences and authentic contexts across the curriculum. Pupils contribute initial ideas about what and how they will learn and teachers skilfully weave these into highly imaginative learning activities, such as when examining models from the digestive system of Tudors and Vikings to work out which era they were from by analysing the foods each ate. In all classes, teachers create an ethos of high expectations. They encourage pupils to select activities and the level of challenge that is appropriate to their needs. As a result, across the curriculum, pupils produce work of a quality that is at least equal to that created during specific literacy and numeracy lessons. In particular, the provision for numeracy across the curriculum is very strong.

Leaders manage the curriculum robustly and ensure it is consistent and progressive by carefully mapping and monitoring the coverage of important skills. Groups of subjects form areas of learning and each area of learning lead works imaginatively and collaboratively with staff. This builds capacity within the school and the confidence of nearly all staff members to take risks.

The school applies the principles of the foundation phase effectively to support pupils' learning. The highly effective use of outdoor learning in the foundation phase is beginning to roll into key stage 2, further consolidating the consistent and progressive approach the school has created as its 'way'. However, this is at an early stage in its development and not all tasks planned for the outdoor environment in key stage 2, take full advantage of the features of learning in the natural world.

The school takes into account its context in Wales and the world and arranges worthwhile visits from guest speakers to inform its pupils. Visits arranged by teachers to important places in Wales, enrich pupils understanding of its history and culture. As a result, pupils are making good progress in becoming ethically informed citizens of Wales and the wider world.

Care, support and guidance: Excellent

The school is a very calm and caring community, where staff and pupils show an exceptional level of respect for each other. Teachers and learning support assistants know their pupils very well and respond quickly, sensitively and effectively to their emotional and learning needs. The school's highly supportive ethos and high-quality provision enables nearly all pupils to develop very positive attitudes to learning, strong co-operation and valuable social skills.

The school has a rigorous comprehensive and well-organised system to gather information about pupils' progress and achievements as they move through the school. Staff use the tracking system very effectively to monitor the progress of pupils in their class regularly. They use this information to carefully plan the next steps in pupils' learning and to identify any under achievement in order to target the specific support required very quickly.

The school's provision to support pupils with weaker literacy and numeracy skills is highly effective. Staff develop well-tailored individual plans to meet pupils' additional needs successfully. They plan measurable targets for improvement and track pupil progress rigorously. The school provides a wide range of purposeful intervention programmes to improve pupils' literacy and numeracy skills. Well-trained staff deliver the programmes highly effectively. As a result, nearly all targeted pupils make very good progress from their individual starting points. Nearly all pupils acquire the necessary skills to become independent learners. By the time pupils leave the school, most have reached at least the expected level. Intervention sessions that focus on pupils' wellbeing are effective and they enable pupils to participate in lessons successfully, by enriching their self-esteem and co-operation skills.

Staff promote pupils' understanding of the importance of values such as tolerance and the entitlement to be free of harassment and discrimination successfully. The school promotes the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and this work strongly permeates the whole school.

The school has appropriate arrangements to promote healthy eating and drinking. Its wellbeing team monitor school packed lunches and reward those who bravely try new healthy options. Staff encourage pupils effectively to participate in regular sporting activities via its wide range of extra-curricular activities. As a result, most pupils understand the importance of choosing a healthy lifestyle. A very strong feature in the school is how pupils plan their learning. In foundation phase they 'plan our provision' on the pop board and in key stage 2 pupils plan their own missions. Staff respond well to their pupils' suggestions. This means that nearly all pupils are enthusiastic and highly motivated about what they learn and, as a result, they become resilient learners.

The school provides a good range of opportunities for pupils to learn the importance of staying safe, for example, by highlighting the dangers of substance misuse and teaching about internet safety rules. The school's arrangements for safeguarding pupils meet requirements and give no cause for concern.

There is a strong and productive relationship between the school and parents. The school communicates effectively with them and operates an open-door policy. As a result, parents are very aware of the school's activities and events. Staff provide useful training sessions for parents so that they are able to support their children at home, for example, with mathematics and reading. These sessions have good rates of attendance by parents who value the information they receive. The school monitors attendance very rigorously; all stakeholders understand the importance of good attendance and this is evident in the high levels of attendance maintained over recent years.

The school provides valuable opportunities for pupils to understand their culture and heritage through well-planned trips and visits, which inspire pupils at the beginning of their topic work. The school organises very successful tea dances which foster pupils' very good understanding of older people's experiences especially during World War Two. Pupils have good opportunities to understand other cultures, for example, through teaching a Chinese Dragon dance to foundation phase pupils in order to celebrate Chinese New Year. Pupils have valuable opportunities to perform in concerts and the eisteddfod.

Leadership and management: Excellent

The headteacher provides highly effective, innovative and transformational leadership for the school. He has worked with staff, pupils and parents to develop and implement a highly effective vision that drives a culture of continuous improvement and high standards of learning and wellbeing for all. The school's vision incorporates a focused commitment to developing pupils' understanding of their rights and responsibilities as young citizens.

The headteacher benefits from the support of the highly effective and skilled senior leadership team he has built. They have high expectations of all pupils and provide a caring and stimulating learning environment for all to flourish in. The vision is evident throughout the school and the core aims of ensuring that pupils enjoy learning is an integral part of the ethos. As a result, nearly all pupils are keen and highly motivated to learn and most make very good progress during their time in school.

The headteacher builds the leadership capacity of staff at all levels successfully. All staff have clearly defined roles and responsibilities exemplified in detailed job descriptions. Nearly all staff take on a lead role to support improvement. For example, a teaching assistant leads on the delivery of specific speech and language strategies and provides training for other staff. The school's administration officer manages the school site. As a result, all staff feel valued and are very proud of the positive contribution that they make to the life and work of the school. Teamwork is a real strength, and as such, teachers and support staff work together effectively, to ensure there are common approaches to nearly all aspects of their work. For example, as a result of the consistent way that staff include pupil's voice in planning and designing the curriculum, levels of pupils' engagement and behaviour across the school are exemplary.

Leaders implement national priorities extremely well. They manage change thoughtfully and at a steady and realistic pace, this ensures planned actions lead to success, for example when improving pupils' Welsh speaking and digital skills. More recently, work to prepare for the new curriculum for Wales has ensured that all staff and pupils have a shared grasp of the purposes of the new curriculum and work together to develop exciting, real-life learning experiences, based on the ideas and needs of pupils. As a result, nearly all pupils relish the opportunities that extend their learning and enable them to apply their skills to a high standard.

The school has robust self-evaluation processes and a consistently strong track record of bringing about improvements. Leaders gather a wide range of information about the school's work and use this effectively to plan priorities for improvement. They seek the views of a wide range of stakeholders including pupils, parents and governors and listen and respond purposefully to what they say. For example, leaders improved opportunities for parents to visit classrooms to develop their understanding of teaching and learning strategies in response to suggestions from parents. Leaders and teachers are highly reflective practitioners and constantly strive to bring about improvements to the school's work in important areas. In recent years, there have been outstanding improvements in the levels of pupils' attendance and in their writing skills.

The school is committed to developing itself as a learning organisation. A notable strength of the school's leadership is the rich opportunities that it provides for staff to develop professionally. The strong focus on professional learning and action research reflects the very high priority leaders place on developing the knowledge and skills of all staff in their drive for improvement. A highly effective example of this is the way in which staff are organised into triads in order to improve their own classroom practice based on up to date educational research. All staff share their findings and results through planned professional sessions. This has resulted in teachers improving their own practice continually, based on sound research. The school's consistently high standards in teaching and learning and of developing an innovative curriculum has resulted in it regularly providing training and disseminating its exceptional practices to other professionals.

Governors know the school very well and play a key role in ensuring an effective strategic direction for the school. Their strategic input into self-evaluation procedures is highly effective. Learning walks and regular visits to school by governors has enhanced their knowledge of the school based on first-hand knowledge. The

headteacher and senior leaders provide detailed reports and presentations to governors regularly, outlining the work of the school. As a result, the governing body have a comprehensive knowledge and thorough understanding of the school's performance, enabling them to be effective critical friends.

The headteacher monitors finances rigorously and has strong support from the school administration assistant and governors. They make prudent decisions and purchase resources that enrich the curriculum and raise pupils' standards in all areas. Leaders distribute additional funding, such as the pupil development grant, efficiently to support the provision for pupils whose circumstances may make them vulnerable to underachievement. For example, staff deployment effectively delivers intervention programmes for pupils who need additional support with specific aspects of their learning. Across the school, the meticulous tracking of pupil progress results in most pupils making at least good and at times very good progress from their starting points.

Evidence base of the report

Before an inspection, inspectors:

- analyse the outcomes from the parent and pupil questionnaires and consider the views of teachers and the governing body through their questionnaire responses

During an inspection, inspectors normally:

- hold a meeting with parents to hear their views on the school and its effectiveness
- meet the headteacher, governors, senior and middle leaders (where appropriate) and individual teachers to evaluate the impact of the school's work
- meet pupils to discuss their work, to listen to them read and to gain their views about various aspects of their school
- meet groups of pupils in leadership roles, such as representatives from the school council and eco-committee
- visit a broad sample of classes, including learning support groups and undertake a variety of learning walks to observe pupils learning and to see staff teaching in a range of settings, including classrooms, support groups and in outdoor areas
- where appropriate, visit the specialist resource base within the school to see pupils' learning
- observe and speak to pupils at lunch and break times and at a sample of after-school clubs, where appropriate
- attend assemblies and daily acts of collective worship
- look closely at the school's self-evaluation processes
- consider the school's improvement plan and look at evidence to show how well the school has taken forward planned improvements
- scrutinise a range of school documents, including information on pupil assessment and progress, records of meetings of staff and the governing body, information on pupils' wellbeing, including the safeguarding of pupils, and records of staff training and professional development

After the on-site inspection and before the publication of the report, Estyn:

- review the findings of the inspection alongside the supporting evidence from the inspection team in order to validate, moderate and ensure the quality of the inspection

Copies of the report

Copies of this report are available from the school and from the Estyn website (www.estyn.gov.wales)

Estyn evaluates a provider's effectiveness using a four-point judgement scale:

Excellent	Very strong, sustained performance and practice
Good	Strong features, although minor aspects may require improvement
Adequate and needs improvement	Strengths outweigh weaknesses, but important aspects require improvement
Unsatisfactory and needs urgent improvement	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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