



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

A report on
Our Lady's R.C. Primary School

**Miskin Road
Miskin
Mountain Ash
RCT
CF45 3UA**

Date of inspection: June 2022

by

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

This report is also available in Welsh.

About Our Lady's R.C. Primary School

Name of provider	Our Lady's R.C. Primary School
Local authority	Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council
Language of the provider	English
Type of school	Primary
Religious character	Catholic
Number of pupils on roll	113
Pupils of statutory school age	76
Number in nursery classes	20
Percentage of pupils eligible for free school meals over a three-year average (The national percentage of pupils eligible for free school meals over a three-year average in Primary is 21.3%)	20.2%
Percentage of pupils identified as having additional learning needs (a) (The national percentage of pupils identified as having an additional learning need in Primary is 22.2%)	4%
Percentage of pupils who speak Welsh at home	0%
Percentage of pupils with English as an additional language	0%
Date of headteacher appointment	01/09/2017
Date of previous Estyn inspection (if applicable)	11/12/2012
Start date of inspection	27/06/2022

Data reported is sourced from the latest available Pupil Level Annual School Census. These figures may be slightly different to those observed during the inspection.

Further information is available from the Welsh Government My Local School website: mylocalschool.gov.wales

- a. The term 'additional learning needs' is being used to describe those pupils on the SEN/ALN register of the school.

Overview

The pupils at Our Lady's Roman Catholic Primary School clearly love coming to school where most make good progress in their social and academic skills. There is thoughtful and effective provision for pupils with additional learning needs (ALN). The school's vision, 'Growing together in faith, love and knowledge', clearly reflects the aims of the school.

Pupils understand how much staff care for them and there is a feeling of mutual respect between adults and pupils. Pupils contribute well to a variety of groups and committees, and enthusiastically share examples of where their influence has had a positive impact on school life. Teachers plan engaging activities for pupils to make progress in their literacy, numeracy and digital skills. In the best practice, they provide opportunities for pupils to make decisions about what and how they learn. Provision for pupils to apply their skills in other areas of the curriculum is underdeveloped.

All staff collaborate effectively to create an ethos which ensures a key role in promoting effective learning at school. They are ambitious for pupils to succeed and support them successfully to develop positive attitudes to learning. Overall, pupils make strong progress from their starting points and make good progress with their skills in English and mathematics. Staff have been successful in developing pupils' skills in Welsh, so that by the time they leave Year 6 most pupils are able to speak confidently and use increasingly complex sentences. Governors know the school very well and fulfil their role as critical friend, asking challenging questions about decision-making, which supports the headteacher in moving the school forward. Parents know that leaders and governors make decisions in the best interests of the pupils.

Recommendations

- R1 Address the site security issues identified during the inspection
- R2 Provide beneficial opportunities for pupils to decide what and how they learn, and support them to apply their skills effectively across all areas of learning
- R3 Develop and use the outdoor spaces consistently to enhance pupils' learning

What happens next

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

Main evaluation

Learning

A majority of pupils enter school with skills at a level expected for their age. Most pupils throughout the school, including those with ALN, make good progress across the curriculum.

Most pupils in nursery and reception classes develop their speaking and listening skills quickly, learning new vocabulary in the context of meaningful activities. By the time they reach Year 1, pupils' listening skills play a significant part in their learning, for example when engaging effectively in role play as they sell ice cream to each other. In Year 2, pupils combine their speaking and listening skills effectively to relate sensitively and purposefully to one another. Most older pupils work very well collaboratively. They listen attentively and respond to the contribution of others well, even when they have something that they are keen to say themselves. By the time they reach Year 6, most pupils discuss challenging topics with impressive maturity. This enables them to discuss demanding topics, such as human rights, effectively. They are reflective listeners, showing empathy and sensitivity.

Most pupils develop their reading skills rapidly. The youngest pupils learn the sounds of letters quickly. By Year 2, most pupils know how to tackle unfamiliar words and have a number of effective strategies for doing so. Many more able readers can name favourite authors and genres. Most pupils in Years 3 and 4 continue to make good progress in their reading skills. They know how to use an index and glossary and discuss the plot in stories intelligently. By the time they reach Years 5 and 6, most pupils are fluent readers. They make inferences from their reading and understand how authors write for effect.

Most pupils in reception class make beneficial progress in learning to form letters and continue this into Year 1. Most Year 2 pupils develop their writing skills very well covering a wide variety of different writing genres, for example when writing a persuasive letter to a pirate to avoid walking the plank. Most pupils from Year 3 to Year 6 make sound progress in their punctuation and grammar and learn to spell complex words accurately. They begin to write in paragraphs, extending their vocabulary to use technical words purposefully.

Most pupils use their well-developed literacy skills as a powerful tool for learning across the curriculum. They also make good progress in developing their numeracy skills, but these are not applied across the curriculum as frequently. Pupils throughout the school gain a good understanding of number. By the time they reach Year 2, most can calculate the change from a pound and complete simple division by grouping equally. Most pupils in Years 3 and 4 read and write co-ordinates in the first quadrant and use digital time accurately. Pupils in Years 5 and 6 develop into competent mathematicians in the basic number skills. They subtract numbers up to 10,000 and use line graphs to plot the temperature in different countries.

Most younger pupils make very strong progress in their ability to speak Welsh. By Year 2, many begin to use Welsh confidently and recall previously learnt sentence patterns well. Most pupils in Years 3 and 4 continue to acquire new vocabulary

rapidly and, by Years 5 and 6, most can extend sentences and hold a simple conversation on a broad range of topics.

Most pupils throughout the school use their digital skills appropriately to enhance their learning. For example, younger pupils give directions to programmable toys in order to make them move. Older pupils use a range of multi-media software, for example making a movie to say goodbye to the outgoing Children's Commissioner for Wales.

Pupils develop their thinking skills effectively. Younger pupils work hard at tasks that demand some contemplation and are well equipped to explain their thinking. Older pupils discuss complex issues intelligently, particularly to their rights and global concerns. However, their skills to plan, execute and evaluate using these advanced skills is underdeveloped.

Most younger pupils make good progress in developing their creative and artistic skills. They use a good range of media, for example creating transient pictures with natural objects in the woodland area. In Years 1 and 2, they interpret the music of Karl Jenkins in paint, using their hands to create textures and colours that reflect what they are hearing.

The school has high aspirations for its pupils. For example, Year 6 pupils visited and toured a university campus where children undertook workshops in digital programming and completed scientific experiments.

Wellbeing and attitudes to learning

Pupils feel safe and valued members of a warm and caring family. They are very proud of their school and appreciate the positive impact of the school's Catholic ethos. Nearly all pupils show respect for the whole school community and develop strong relationships with each other and adults. Nearly all pupils demonstrate excellent behaviour throughout the school day.

Nearly all pupils appreciate the way that they are listened to and supported. They feel confident that they can approach any member of staff with a concern. For example, pupils leave notes through 'worry monsters' and 'I wish my teacher knew...' boxes to communicate concerns privately. Pupils also enjoy 'check in' sessions at the start and end of each week as it supports their emotional well-being effectively

Most pupils are considerate and treat others fairly, in particular, pupils who join the school feel welcomed and supported when they start. Pupils who require additional support to manage their emotional needs respond well to support. Most pupils value diversity and celebrate everyone's differences. For example, they wear odd socks to celebrate World Down's Syndrome Day. Older pupils would recommend the school to others unreservedly.

Nearly all pupils develop as healthy, confident individuals and understand the importance of living a healthy lifestyle. Most pupils speak confidently about the healthy choices that they make during the day. Most pupils know how to stay safe on-line by taking part in Safer Internet Day each year.

Nearly all pupils have an excellent understanding of their rights. They rightly consider themselves to be ethically informed citizens and are proud of this fact. Pupils lead an increasing variety of pupil groups effectively, some of which have a track record of impact on provision and learning opportunities. For example, the Senedd influences what equipment is on the yard at playtimes. These groups are beginning to re-establish following the pandemic.

Pupils feel empowered to establish action groups to tackle issues that they feel passionately about, for example the 'cleaning gang', which is a group of older pupils who take responsibility for keeping areas of their school clean and tidy during lunchtime. When given the opportunity, pupils think of worthwhile learning experiences and engage well in activities.

Nearly all pupils actively participate in their learning and remain on task for extended periods. They enjoy their lessons and develop well as ambitious and capable learners. Pupils respond well to feedback and make good progress as a result. Pupils' enthusiasm for learning is demonstrated by their commitment to participate in extra-curricular activities such as the 'Rights Knights,' where the pupils learn about a different country each week.

Owing to the coronavirus pandemic, inspectors will not report pupils' rates of attendance during the academic years of 2020-2021 and 2021-2022. Inspectors will, however, consider the school's provision for monitoring and improving attendance as part of inspection area 4 (care, support and guidance).

Teaching and learning experiences

Teachers and teaching assistants have effective working relationships with pupils. This is a strong feature of the provision and supports the effective teaching that takes place throughout the school. Staff are very sensitive to pupils' needs, treat pupils with respect and display a good sense of humour when interacting with them. Staff give pupils focused attention and take extra time after sessions to meet pupils' needs if required. However, they do not always provide enough beneficial opportunities for pupils to influence what and how they learn or support them to apply their skills effectively across all areas of learning.

The school's Christian values and Catholic faith is an integral part of the teaching and learning which is woven effectively into the curriculum. The school makes the most of the opportunities presented by Curriculum for Wales to embed these values into every aspect of school life.

The curriculum reflects the cultural, linguistic and diverse nature of Wales well, for example when celebrating the life of Elaine Morgan, a local author. The school plans appropriately to educate pupils about Black, Asian and Minority ethnic communities, for example by celebrating the lives of inspirational individuals such as Martin Luther King and Rosa Parks. The inclusive nature of the school's approach to individual rights is promoted very well in the curriculum. This plays a significant role in ensuring that pupils have respect for all minority groups and know that each person is unique and equal.

Teachers and support staff plan together well and make a significant contribution to the development of pupils' literacy, numeracy and digital skills. Their impact is shown in the way learning interventions enable pupils to make good progress. All staff have high expectations of pupil behaviour. Teachers and support staff display good subject knowledge in many areas of the curriculum. This is particularly evident in the teaching of reading and basic number. They use questions skilfully to develop pupils' thinking and understanding. However, teachers do not always provide enough opportunities for pupils to use their well-developed skills in all areas of learning.

The school provide after school clubs very well to enrich pupils' learning experiences. This is a strength of the school. The clubs are numerous and varied, catering for a broad range of skills and interests. They are very well attended by pupils from reception class up to Year 6. Whilst the school utilises the outdoor spaces well in some instances, in general these spaces are not used consistently as a stimulating and purposeful learning environment to support learners to develop their wider learning skills.

The school provides a variety of beneficial opportunities for pupils to develop their Welsh language communication skills. Teachers provide stimulating activities during formal lessons, which the pupils clearly enjoy; teachers are particularly imaginative in this respect. The school also promote these skills effectively in informal settings and incidental Welsh is modelled by staff very well throughout the school.

Teachers keep track of how well learning is progressing during sessions. They monitor and assess individual progress effectively by using different approaches such as questioning techniques. They use plenaries effectively during sessions to understand how well groups of pupils are progressing. They also evaluate pupil progress effectively at the end of a session and adjust planning accordingly for the next session.

Care, support and guidance

The quality of the care, support and guidance of the pupils is a significant strength of the school. Relationships are strong and staff and pupils show a high level of respect and appreciation for each other. As a result, nearly all pupils are proud of their school and its ethos. The school's Catholic ethos provides good opportunities for pupils to contemplate and value the importance of spirituality and reflection.

The school provides very effective social and emotional support. It delivers bespoke support programmes for individuals and groups. These have a positive impact on pupils' sense of well-being and helps pupils to talk about their feelings and use effective strategies to regulate their emotions. For example, Year 6 pupils are provided with additional sessions to consider any worries with transitioning to High School.

Parents value their relationship with the school. They appreciate the support and guidance given during the pandemic when regular contact with families ensured that pupils were able to continue to learn and make progress.

Staff know the pupils very well and provide worthwhile experiences to develop their understanding of spiritual, moral, social and cultural issues during classroom

activities and through educational visits. The curriculum provides frequent opportunities for pupils to focus on important values, such as honesty, fairness and faith, for example through pupils engaging in discussion work on racism. At the core of its curriculum, the school ensures that all pupils, especially the most vulnerable, develop a solid understanding of their identity, heritage and culture, and how they relate to the local community and the wider world. For example, pupils learn about and a minority take part in the local 'Nos Galon' race to learn about the history of their locality.

Provision for children with ALN is strong. The school uses effective systems for tracking and monitoring progress. They use the results of this to ensure that pupils with educational, emotional, social or health needs receive the provision and intervention that suits them best. Confident, thoughtful and knowledgeable staff deliver a valuable range of bespoke support programmes to support the development of pupils' academic and emotional skills. The school has given appropriate priority to the changes to statutory duties with regards to ALN reform. The school liaises well with external agencies and seeks the views of families effectively.

The school keeps good-quality records for attendance and absence from school and addresses persistent lateness well. Systems to support and challenge low attendance are effective and applied by leaders and staff consistently. The school works well with outside agencies to address issues of poor attendance.

The school promotes and supports a culture of safeguarding and well-being in the school community, including online safety aspects appropriately. Staff understand and implement the school's safeguarding requirements and procedures. However, during the inspection week, the team identified issues with site security.

Leadership and management

The headteacher provides effective and compassionate leadership and clear strategic direction for the development of the school. Her vision for the school is shared purposefully by all staff, pupils, parents and governors. Staff have created an inclusive culture where pupils feel secure and have a strong sense of belonging. Staff and pupils say that they feel part of a caring, faithful family. As a result, a thoughtful, inclusive ethos permeates through all of the school's activities. Staff work very well as a team and have successfully led many initiatives in the school, particularly focused on pupils' well-being. For example, the strong provision for pastoral care ensures that the school meets their emotional needs well.

Overall, the school's self-evaluation arrangements are thorough and purposeful and include all aspects of the school's work. Staff and governors work collaboratively and use all the information available efficiently to identify strengths and any areas for development. Evidence includes discussions with staff, staff meetings, listening to learners and scrutinising work. This information feeds into the school improvement plan purposefully and identifies relevant and appropriate actions and success criteria, which are timely.

The school is developing a solid track record of improvement. For instance, its self-evaluation processes identified a need to improve number skills of pupils across the

school. In response, teachers researched effective ways to do this and implemented approaches that have significantly improved the standards in mathematics.

The relationship between the school and parents is sound. The school operates an open-door policy and communicates appropriately with them using an on-line platform. Parents value this communication tool and find it helpful to understand what their children have been learning about during the day.

There is a worthwhile and relevant offer of professional learning and the headteacher encourages all staff to undertake research-based learning that directly links to the needs of the pupils. Following shared research between teachers and support staff around teaching and learning principles, staff made changes to their teaching approaches. For example, in mathematics, they have begun to implement manipulatives to support all pupils. This had a positive impact on pupils' learning and engagement. School leaders are committed to staff development. They create opportunities for teachers to grow into leadership roles and for support staff to progress their careers. For example, many of the support staff have recently completed degrees in education.

The school has effective procedures to manage the performance of all staff based on their individual professional needs and the school's priorities. The school benefits from strong links with cluster schools on several levels. They work closely with their small Catholic cluster and are involved in a valuable collaborative project with the Aberdare cluster of schools. This has focused on developing a cohesive approach to the Curriculum for Wales and more specifically, a shared understanding of areas of learning and experience.

The school has a sensible expenditure plan, which ensures that it has enough resources to meet pupils' needs purposefully. However, the resources for outdoor learning are not managed effectively enough to move learning forward to meet expectations for outdoor learning.

Governors support the school to manage and organise its resources effectively. This includes good use of the pupil development grant, which is used to fund extra staff. The school's governors are very knowledgeable and highly experienced. They keep up to date with national developments and standards of education, which provides a beneficial context for helping them to monitor and provide robust challenge about the school's work. They have a detailed understanding of the school's strengths and areas for improvement and use this knowledge thoughtfully, to support the headteacher in moving the school forward. Governors ensure that the school has effective policies and procedures to promote the importance of healthy eating and drinking among pupils.

Evidence base of the report

Before an inspection, inspectors:

- analyse the outcomes from the parent/carer 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/carers 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)

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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