



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

**A report on**

**St Gwladys Bargoed School**

**Church Place  
Bargoed  
CF81 8RN**

**Date of inspection: June 2023**

**by**

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

## About St Gwladys Bargoed School

Name of provider	St Gwladys Bargoed School
Local authority	Caerphilly County Borough Council
Language of the provider	English
Type of school	Primary
Religious character	
Number of pupils on roll	433
Pupils of statutory school age	319
Number in nursery classes	79
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 23.0%)	27.4%
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 16.1%)	8.8%
Percentage of pupils who speak Welsh at home	
Percentage of pupils with English as an additional language	
Date of headteacher appointment	January 1999
Date of previous Estyn inspection (if applicable)	01/02/2015
Start date of inspection	12/06/2023

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](https://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

St Gwladys is an inclusive and nurturing school where pupils feel valued and cared for. There is an established culture of mutual respect. This is a strong feature that enables nearly all pupils to thrive, show resilience and embrace challenge within a positive working environment. The headteacher leads a team of dedicated staff who work collaboratively to develop pupil well-being and support them to be caring and successful learners. Leaders and staff support the headteacher effectively and there is a strong sense of teamwork across the school.

The school provides a well-developed curriculum that gives meaningful opportunities for nearly all pupils to develop resilience and experience challenge. Teachers ensure that lessons are well planned and build on pupils previous learning. They provide opportunities for nearly all pupils to work both independently and collaboratively. Very good use is made of the limited outdoor space, enabling all pupils to experience a wide range of high quality learning activities that promote the development of skills across the curriculum. This is a very strong feature in the early years. The school provides effective support for pupils with additional learning needs (ALN).

The governing body is supportive of the school and values the role the school plays in the local community. However, its role in challenging the school is not fully developed.

Pupils are proud of their school. They enjoy learning and speak with enthusiasm about their experiences and the roles they play as part of the school community. Parents appreciate the support and guidance they receive from the school. They attend a range of activities that enable them to support pupils in their learning and well-being.

The headteacher has been successful in developing a wide range of partnerships with other schools and organisations to improve curriculum delivery and professional development opportunities for all school staff.

There is a suitably strong culture of safeguarding throughout the school. However, during the inspection the team brought a few matters to the attention of school leaders, for example in relation to traffic management.

## Recommendations

- R1 Address the safeguarding issues identified by the team during the time of the inspection
- R2 Further develop the evaluation of pupils' learning, improvement work and grant spending

## 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 developing pupils' independence in the early years and how this continues as pupils move through the school, for dissemination on Estyn's website.

## Main evaluation

### Learning

During their time at school, nearly all pupils make good progress in developing a broad range of skills, knowledge and understanding. Most pupils with ALN make strong progress from their individual starting points.

Most nursery pupils show an excellent level of independence, accessing the different areas of provision confidently. They choose the areas where they would like to engage, and play well together, sharing and taking turns. Nearly all pupils explain in detail why they enjoy the different parts of a story and make age-appropriate predictions about what will happen next.

Nearly all nursery age pupils have well-developed physical skills, displaying good balance on the apparatus and when riding bikes in the outdoor area. They demonstrate good perseverance and creativity, for example when building a pirate's ship from different sized blocks.

Most pupils' speaking and listening skills are strong across the school. They listen carefully to their peers and value the views of others. Many pupils successfully share the purpose of their learning. For example, Year 3 pupils explain clearly how the advert their written adverts must persuade people to visit the imaginary adventure land that they designed. Most pupils in Year 6 make well considered contributions to class discussions, for example when talking about space exploration. They use a good range of vocabulary to present their views and supporting reasons.

Across the age range, most pupils are very keen to use the Welsh language in a range of contexts. Many older pupils introduce themselves confidently in Welsh. They respond with confidence to a variety of questions using a good range of connectives and vocabulary. They then respond with their own questions, to extend the conversation.

Most pupils in Year 2 are confident to discuss key features of books. They have strong comprehension skills, make predictions and use inference well, for example when discussing how a character in a book felt when others picked on them. Nearly all pupils in Year 4 read with confidence and fluency at an appropriate level. Most show perseverance with new, challenging words, and adopt an effective range of strategies to help them to read successfully. Nearly all pupils in Year 6 make strong

progress with their reading and apply their skills well across the curriculum. Many read with excellent expression. They speak with confidence about the different characters and their different characteristics. They explain why different books appeal to them.

Many pupils in reception classes write with growing confidence and show a good understanding of basic punctuation. By the time they reach Year 2, many pupils spell familiar words accurately and the more confident pupils produce interesting pieces of writing. In Year 5 many pupils write highly thoughtful factual pieces based on their discussions about migration, immigration and identity. They use a range of appropriate vocabulary and use varied punctuation to create impact in their writing. The highly effective culture of developing pupils' reading and writing is evident in the high standards achieved by many Year 6 pupils. They engage maturely with sophisticated texts and produce an excellent range of highly effective written work. For example, they scrutinise the text to discover if they feel that Hugo, the author, has a good quality of life.

Most nursery and reception pupils' numeracy skills are developing well. In the reception class, most pupils count to 20 and back down to zero accurately with their peers. Most Year 1 pupils create tally charts based on the numbers of different models of rainforest animals they find in the outdoor provision. They use the data to create accurate pictograms. Many count confidently using hundreds, tens and units, for example when timing how many steps they can take in 120 seconds. Many Year 3 pupils apply their numeracy skills successfully by using numbers to 1000 to plan different aspects of a party. They skilfully calculate different costs for elements such as food and decorations.

Most older pupils have strong mathematical skills and apply them confidently in a wide range of contexts across the curriculum, for example when investigating work looking at the numbers of supporters from different countries that had gone to the world cup in Qatar. Many show a sound understanding of negative numbers in the context of looking at the average temperature in different countries across the Northern Hemisphere.

Throughout the school, most pupils use information and communication technology (ICT) with confidence. Many younger pupils access appropriate software independently to develop their literacy and numeracy skills as part of daily routines. Most older pupils refine their oracy skills through making podcasts on the topic of space. Nearly all pupils use ICT packages to record their work, including home tasks, effectively.

Most pupils plan, implement and review their work when collaborating on enterprise projects. For example, pupils work successfully when different year groups are challenged to make a profit from a small investment, such as Year 2 pupils who aim to make a pound grow.

Most pupils demonstrate strong creative skills. They compare the work of different artists and show a sensitive appreciation of texture and tone. Nearly all children play a good range of percussion instruments enthusiastically both in class and in the outdoor learning areas.

## **Well-being and attitudes to learning**

Most pupils feel safe in school. They have very strong relationships with staff built on mutual respect. As a result, they trust staff and know who to speak to if they are worried or upset.

Nearly all pupils display exemplary behaviour in classrooms, and when moving around the school. Most are extremely courteous towards their peers, staff and visitors alike. However, a few pupils are late each morning and this causes disruption to the start of the day for classes across the school.

Across the school, nearly all pupils show a positive attitude to their activities and a high level of commitment to their work. For example, nearly all pupils in nursery and reception classes develop a high level of independence from an early age.

Most pupils show confidence when speaking to adults and their peers. Nearly all pupils actively participate in their learning and show their enjoyment and are enthusiastic to talk about it. For example, most pupils show delight in listening to stories and considering what might happen to the characters. Nearly all pupils select tasks with different levels of challenge and give their reasons for choosing a particular option. Many older pupils explain why the task they have chosen is likely to extend their skills. Most pupils respond well to opportunities to give sensible and interesting suggestions about what they would like to learn in their class topics.

During group discussions about aspects such as the future of space tourism, many older pupils collaborate well to consider different enquiry questions that they would like to discuss. This is a strong feature of the school. Most pupils are developing a sound awareness of the importance of thinking for themselves and forming their own opinions about different issues. Most Year 6 pupils evaluate the different possible viewpoints on matters, such as global warming and whether humanity should pursue options to travel to different planets or concentrate on looking after the Earth and its natural resources.

From an early age, many pupils develop as ambitious independent learners. In the nursery and reception classes, many respond maturely to their teachers' high expectations. Most pupils contribute thoughtfully to different activities and show a high level of perseverance during lessons. When they face a particularly challenging activity, most pupils collaborate and support each other to succeed. For example, in Year 1, pupils read a digital clock and have to replicate the time on an analogue clock.

Most pupils respond well to opportunities to evaluate their own learning. They use feedback from adults effectively to improve their work and to develop their skills. Many pupils demonstrate effective leadership skills in pupil voice groups. They are confident to express and share their ideas, for example with staff and the school community in assemblies. They use strategies, such as questionnaires, to gather pupils' views about aspects of school life and influence change, for instance to bring about improvements to the school's reading corners. Most pupils feel that staff and leaders listen to their ideas and consult them about aspects of school life.

Pupils develop a good understanding of equality and diversity issues. For example, the Language Ambassadors hosted a Languages Connect Us week to learn about other countries around the world.

Most pupils know how to stay safe online, follow procedures and keep passwords safe. Most pupils talk about the need to be healthy through a balanced diet and physically active. However, a minority of pupils do not always put this knowledge and understanding into practice and bring squash into school to drink throughout the day.

### **Teaching and learning experiences**

The school's curriculum provides a good balance of stimulating experiences across all areas of learning. Planning for the development of pupils' literacy, numeracy and digital skills is effective. Teachers ensure that pupils have beneficial, opportunities to apply and develop these skills progressively in their work across the curriculum as they move through the school.

A notable strength is the development of a thriving culture of oracy through the careful sequencing of planned opportunities to discuss philosophy and drama. Teachers plan engaging contexts for learners to develop these skills. For example, in Year 5, pupils discuss, with enthusiasm, the mummification process.

Teachers use engaging texts that enable all pupils to develop a range of skills across the curriculum. For example, through the topic 'Curiouser and Curiouser', pupils use the text as a basis for developing their skills in mathematics and science to explore NASA's Mars Rover project. This approach gives opportunities to provide authentic contexts and meaning in pupils' learning.

A particular strength is how the school approaches provision and pedagogy for the youngest pupils. The environments, experiences and roles of adults are expertly planned and implemented and provision is highly effective in developing confident and capable, independent learners.

The school community shares high aspirations for the development of Welsh language skills and celebrates Welsh culture with pride. Provision ensure that most pupils demonstrate good use of oracy and reading skills in Welsh. This includes a project in Year 4 where pupils consider 'What I love about Wales' and learn about the myth of Capel Gwladys in Year 5. There are meaningful opportunities to research the contributions and lives of people from a range of ethnic backgrounds, such as Betty Campbell and Harriet Tubman.

The school embraces a multi-lingual approach to curriculum design that includes a celebration of the diversity of culture within its community, and the wider world. In addition to ensuring that the Welsh language is prominent throughout the day, staff and learners regularly use French phrases. For example, younger learners sing 'Frère Jacques' as they move around the school.

Teachers provide a diverse range of enriching activities, resources and experiences. They make effective use of the available outdoor space and of visits to visit local points of interest, such as the statue of the miners. These experiences help to broaden all learners' understanding of their heritage and locality.

Skilful behaviour management ensures high standards of learning and progress and warmth and respect for all. Teachers have high expectations of all pupils and provide valuable opportunities for them to contribute to their learning experiences. They create inclusive and challenging learning environments that stimulate curiosity and collaboration.

Nearly all teachers provide beneficial opportunities for pupils to edit their own work and assess against agreed success criteria. Many older pupils support classmates by editing each other's work making useful suggestions. Support staff provide purposeful guidance and encouragement. Often, through effective observation, they provide useful prompts or questions for pupils. Most teachers explain concepts and expectations clearly and give clear instructions that enable learners to understand how to be successful.

Teachers' subject knowledge is strong and those with particular expertise share their knowledge and skills well with others. They use effective questioning to assess understanding and develop pupils' thinking. Staff use helpful prompts for pupils who have provided inaccurate or incomplete answers to develop thinking and improve their work. As a result, most pupils routinely say that they need to rethink rather than be discouraged by failure. When questioning reveals misconceptions, teachers address these either individually or as a whole class. For example, they identify the need to review a common misconception in multiplication work in Year 6.

### **Care, support and guidance**

The nurturing, inclusive and caring ethos is a strength of the school. Pupils and staff have strong relationships based on mutual trust and respect. Staff are highly creative and have effective systems to support pupils' emotional needs and enjoy going to school. For example, younger pupils sing enthusiastically going into class.

The school promotes pupils' moral, social and cultural development well through a range of meaningful experiences that include work about International Women's Day and the benefits of learning Welsh.

The school provides additional well-being activities for identified pupils. For example, the Seeds to Empathy project provides pupils with the chance to work alongside a mother and baby each week, to see the baby grow and understand how to build positive relationships.

There are appropriate systems to identify the individual needs of learners. Regular meetings with teachers ensure that most pupils benefit from a wide range of interventions that the school provides, for example the development of oracy skills. However, leaders do not always evaluate the impact of these interventions sufficiently.

The ALN co-ordinator has established good partnerships with cluster schools and the local authority. Strong cluster links to ensure that pupils with ALN access valuable additional transition support. These pupils are better prepared for moving to the comprehensive school.



The school has an open-door policy that fosters strong relationships with parents and ensures that concerns are addressed swiftly. Most parents believe that the school responds to their concerns in a timely and appropriate manner and provides tailored support for pupils' individual needs. There are many useful opportunities for parents to engage with the school to support their child's learning, for example through reading cafes and cookery classes. Many parents enjoy taking part in Jigsaw Family Group sessions that promote positive relationships at home. Most pupils enjoy sharing the impact of attending the group. Pupils noted that the group had led them to spend more time together as a family talking and playing games away from digital devices. School staff engage the experiences of families effectively in their lessons about different cultures. For example, a pupil's grandmother visited the school to share her knowledge about life in India, and for pupils to experience the food and customs.

Pupils have a range of purposeful opportunities to take on leadership roles across the school through a range of pupil voice groups. For example, Criw Cymraeg promote pupils' use of Welsh effectively when selling fruit in the snack shop every day.

There are many worthwhile opportunities for pupils to be active and healthy. These include brain breaks and running the daily mile. Partnerships with a local university provide beneficial enrichment for physical activities, health and well-being for Year 5 pupils on open campus days with PE students facilitating activities.

Opportunities to participate in purposeful cooking lessons are provided within the curriculum, enabling pupils to plan healthy meals. Provision takes place both in lessons and extra-curricular clubs. The school promotes the importance of healthy eating and drinking. However, a minority of pupils bring squash rather than water into school.

Lifelong learning skills are a priority for the school. The school has supported nearly all pupils to set up a venture, writing a business plan and selling their products to make a profit after repaying their loan. This enables pupils to learn valuable life and business skills.

A broad range of extra-curricular clubs cater well for pupils' interests. These include gardening, eco awareness and dance. This results in a good range of experiences for pupils. Staff provide worthwhile opportunities for pupils to perform, including the choir visiting the local care home and key community events.

In general, there is a suitably strong culture of safeguarding within the school. During the inspection, the team brought issues relating to traffic management procedures and numbers of pupils arriving late to the school's attention.

### **Leadership and management**

The headteacher has successfully developed a vision for the school within the community that reflects inclusion, equity and diversity. She works closely with all staff to ensure that the well-being of the pupils is at the heart of the school's ethos. Staff have clear roles and responsibilities that ensure that nearly all pupils, including those with ALN, and those from disadvantaged backgrounds, make good progress over

time. The senior leadership team work effectively in developing a curriculum that is stimulating and meaningful, where every pupil is encouraged to embrace the core values of resilience and challenge.

Leaders and staff address national education priorities successfully. Leaders encourage staff to try new approaches to teaching and learning that embrace the principles of Curriculum for Wales. School leaders work methodically to adopt the new national requirements for pupils with ALN. The school uses its pupil development grant funding to give high levels of support for disadvantaged pupils. However, the evaluation of the impact of this support is not sufficiently robust.

Leaders use resources effectively to ensure that the school is equipped to meet the needs of all pupils. The school makes very effective use of the limited space in the outdoor areas. This includes an efficiently organised outdoor area for pupils to use in nursery and reception classes that supports pupils to develop a range of social, literacy and numeracy skills. This facilitates the development of pupils' independence from a young age.

All members of staff have improvement targets that link closely with the school's improvement plan and their personal professional development priorities. Professional learning is a very strong feature of the school. School leaders work purposefully to enable all school staff to develop professionally. For instance, leaders promote a culture of professional enquiry effectively. This work influences practice across the school and supports continuous improvement. The school often undertakes enquiry work in partnership with other local schools. This work is effective, for example, in supporting nearly all pupils to improve their oracy skills.

Leaders monitor teaching regularly, using a range of appropriate strategies to identify what teachers do well and identify areas for improvement. When evaluating the impact of provision, leaders consider a range of standardised assessments competently and this provides them with helpful information on a few areas of pupils' skills, such as spelling and reading. However, self-evaluation work does not always focus well enough on identifying strengths and areas of development in pupils' learning over time.

Members of the governing body are highly supportive of their school. They undertake their duties across a range of committees with enthusiasm, bringing professional expertise to the role. Though governors have a broad awareness of school improvement priorities, they do not participate robustly enough in the school's self-evaluation processes. As a result, governors do not have a comprehensive understanding of the school's strengths and areas for improvement. This limits their ability to fulfil their role as a critical friend, for example in relation to the effectiveness of the school's use of the pupil development grant.

Although governors are aware of the need to promote healthy eating and drinking, they do not monitor this consistently. The school has appropriate processes in place to monitor and to promote regular attendance. Pupils are attending school more regularly compared to last year and the school is working to improve levels of attendance to pre-pandemic levels, though a few pupils are late arriving at school. This causes disruption in starting daily school routines.

The school community is strong. Parents and families engage enthusiastically with the school, attending a range of events that assist them in supporting their child's learning. These include useful information workshops that explain how the school is responding to the new curriculum expectations in drama, dance and digital media.

## 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' well-being, 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](http://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 publication. Any enquiries or comments regarding this document/publication should be addressed to:

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