



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

A report on
Ysgol Gynradd Gymraeg Castellau

**Castellau Road
Beddau
Pontypridd
Rhondda Cynon Taf
CF38 2AA**

Date of inspection: October 2023

by

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

This report is also available in Welsh

About Ysgol Gynradd Gymraeg Castellau

Name of provider	Ysgol Gynradd Gymraeg Castellau
Local authority	Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council
Language of the provider	Welsh
Type of school	Primary
Religious character	None
Number of pupils on roll	236
Pupils of statutory school age	186
Number in nursery classes (if applicable)	32
Percentage of statutory school age pupils eligible for free school meals over a three-year average <i>(The national percentage of pupils eligible for free school meals over a three-year average in the primary sector is 23.0%)</i>	7.8%
Percentage of statutory school age pupils identified as having additional learning needs (a) <i>(The national percentage of pupils identified as having an additional learning need in the primary sector is 16.1%)</i>	2.5%
Percentage of statutory school age pupils who speak Welsh at home	30.5%
Percentage of statutory school age pupils with English as an additional language	0.0%
Date of headteacher appointment	01/09/2018
Date of previous Estyn inspection (if applicable)	01/05/2015
Start date of inspection	16/10/2023

Data reported is sourced from the latest available Pupil Level Annual School Census. These figures may be slightly different from 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 headteacher is an energetic and conscientious leader who has a highly effective influence on the school and its community. Along with the deputy headteacher and the staff, who work highly successfully as a team, he ensures that the school provides an effective, homely, familial and Welsh learning community for children in the area. The school is a very inclusive community that promotes the well-being of pupils and staff extremely well. Staff identify the specific needs of pupils at an early stage and use the thorough knowledge they have of their progress to plan the next steps for them. As a result, nearly all pupils are happy at the school and most make good progress from their starting points.

Staff have high expectations of pupils and encourage them to give of their best in everything they do. They plan valuable and purposeful experiences for them, which ensure that they enjoy learning and develop their knowledge, skills and understanding continuously. Teachers develop pupils' literacy and numeracy skills effectively, alongside several other skills. However, teachers do not provide enough opportunities for pupils to develop the full range of digital skills. They also do not encourage pupils to use and develop their independent learning skills effectively enough.

The school provides beneficial opportunities for pupils to identify with the local community and the wider world and provides important opportunities for them to take part in performances at the school, in the local community and more widely. Most pupils undertake their leadership responsibilities maturely. They do this through the school's wide range of children's councils. They discuss their responsibilities confidently and give sensible reasons for making specific decisions.

Leaders have an extremely productive relationship with parents and ensure that they have effective communication processes with them to enable them to raise any issues that may affect their children's learning and well-being. Governors support the school well and hold leaders to account appropriately, when necessary.

Recommendations

- R1 Provide comprehensive opportunities for pupils to develop all aspects of the Digital Competence Framework
- R2 Ensure regular and suitable opportunities for pupils to develop their independent learning skills

What happens next

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

Main findings

Learning

Most pupils, including those with additional learning needs (ALN) and those who are eligible for free school meals, make good progress from their starting points.

Most pupils in the nursery and reception classes follow simple instructions and listen attentively to stories and presentations by adults. Most pupils in Year 2 listen with interest to the contributions of others and respond sensibly in Welsh, by varying their tone of voice where necessary. Most older pupils develop their oral skills skilfully in Welsh and English. They communicate effectively and contribute purposefully to class discussions, expressing their opinions clearly and maturely. For example, Year 6 pupils succeed in holding a sensible discussion for and against placing ingredient labels on food packaging.

Most pupils in the nursery and reception classes enjoy listening to stories and re-reading them to their friends and adults. Year 1 pupils begin to familiarise themselves with the content of books and use this information to place events in order effectively. By Year 2, many read with increasing fluency and use appropriate methods to build unfamiliar words. Many older pupils read intelligently in various contexts in both languages. Year 4 pupils, for example, gather simple information, such as researching the history of firefighters through the ages. By Year 6, they read a range of appropriate texts and apply their skills effectively to support their learning in various contexts.

Most pupils' writing skills develop well during their time at the school. The youngest pupils make marks by using various media and begin to form letters and simple words. Many pupils in the reception class spell simple words correctly when writing stories about their homes. By the end of Year 2, many write descriptive and interesting pieces with increasing accuracy, for example when re-writing stories such as *'Yr Iâr Fach Goch'* ('The Little Red Hen'). As pupils move through the school, they develop their skills appropriately and begin to vary their sentences and use a range of appropriate vocabulary when writing. At the top of the school, most write to a high standard in Welsh and English. For example, they write a personal diary in Welsh and give a detailed explanation of how a record player works in English. Most present their work neatly.

Most pupils' mathematical skills develop well as they move through the school. They calculate answers confidently in line with their age and stage of development and apply their understanding of numbers to a variety of mathematical contexts, such as handling data and money and measuring length and weight.

In the nursery class, most pupils begin to count objects confidently in the play areas, such as the number of chestnuts in a bucket. By Year 2, most place numbers in the correct order, use various methods to double and solve simple mathematical problems correctly. By the time pupils reach the top of the school, most have a sound understanding of place value, which enables them to calculate confidently. For example, they find the largest number they can make from eight specific digits. Most pupils use their mathematical skills confidently in activities in other areas of the

curriculum. For example, the oldest pupils create nets of different three-dimensional shapes to create a model of buildings in the village as part of the theme '*Y Byd Gwaith*' ('The World of Work').

Most pupils have a sound knowledge of e-safety. Most develop many of their digital skills appropriately, when provision allows. A majority of the youngest pupils, for example, use digital devices appropriately to create graphs to identify the hair colour of their peers. By Year 6, most create multimedia presentations about different disasters and such, along with spreadsheets to be used to create graphs. However, pupils' ability to handle data and model digitally is limited.

Most pupils develop their creative skills consistently well across the school. The youngest pupils experiment with natural materials to create a collage of their homes and the oldest pupils work with different materials to construct bridges as part of their work on inventors. Many play instruments to various standards and perform regularly in front of their peers and in concerts.

Well-being and attitudes to learning

The well-being of pupils and their positive attitudes to learning are prominent strengths of the school. Nearly all pupils feel that adults respect them and treat them fairly. This contributes highly effectively to the friendly and inclusive ethos that is a core part of the learning community. The '*Llaw yn Llaw*' well-being scheme is highly successful provision. It encourages the oldest pupils, for example, to care for their youngest peers by welcoming them to the nursery and reception classes daily. Most pupils treat others in their class with the same respect as the adults in the school.

During learning sessions and break times, most pupils are very well behaved. They undertake their tasks with enthusiasm, confidence and resilience. Most persevere consistently, particularly when solving problems. For example, they concentrate well for an extended period when building bridges with moving parts in an architecture workshop. If pupils find their tasks difficult, they discuss with their peers first before seeking support from teachers.

Most pupils respond appropriately in situations that affect their emotional well-being. Nearly all appreciate the contribution of all staff to their well-being and state that they make them feel safe within the school. They know whom to approach for support, when necessary. The '*Cwtsh Cysur*' is a valuable haven where staff can use their expertise to support pupils' emotional well-being calmly and successfully. Pupils feel safe from physical and verbal abuse and are confident that adults deal quickly with any alleged instances of bullying.

Nearly all pupils engage well with new tasks, experiences and ideas that are unfamiliar to them. For example, Year 3 pupils have worked diligently on a successful environmental project when adapting the habitat at Llantrisant Common to attract the rare marsh fritillary butterfly back to the area. Overall, pupils do not use and develop their independent learning skills robustly enough. Most respond successfully to regular guidance from staff as they complete their tasks. They respond positively to their feedback and feedback from their peers on their efforts in learning activities. This encourages them to understand exactly what they need to do to succeed and make progress in their skills.

Most pupils have a sound understanding of the need to eat healthily and use this knowledge to make sensible decisions in their everyday lives. They explain confidently why it is beneficial to eat healthy snacks and why food with too much sugar and fat should be avoided. Most develop their physical skills well and appreciate the importance of keeping fit. They enjoy taking part in the various physical education sessions and extra-curricular sports clubs that are held at the school.

Many pupils develop a sound understanding of the importance of being moral citizens by comparing life in Wales with life in countries such as India and Singapore. Pupils across the school explain acts of injustice as part of their work on rights. For example, they study different elements of the United Nations' children's rights each month. This enables them to treat others with empathy and support various charities, such as the International Mental Health Day appeal.

Most pupils undertake their leadership responsibilities maturely and many of them are enthusiastic members of a wide variety of school councils. They discuss their responsibilities confidently and give sensible reasons for making specific decisions. They report back to their peers about their work and most feel that leaders listen to their views. For example, they contribute jointly to creating the class rules, or their 'Charter,' at the beginning of each term. The pupil's voice has been established firmly and has a regular influence on the school's work. One successful example, which has now been embedded across the school, is the way in which the '*Criw Cymraeg*' has adapted a language token scheme to encourage all pupils to communicate consistently in Welsh.

Teaching and learning experiences

All staff have a highly productive working relationship with pupils. They foster a stimulating and engaging environment for them, which encourages them to enjoy learning. Staff have high expectations of pupils, which encourages them to give of their best in their tasks. Most model correct language patterns and encourage pupils to use spoken Welsh correctly, regularly and confidently. The school promotes the advantages of learning Welsh and being multilingual successfully. By working with the other schools in the cluster, staff have also begun to develop the basic French skills of the oldest pupils. This prepares them well to develop this further at secondary school.

Staff identify the specific educational needs of pupils well and provide purposeful activities to address them. For example, pupils who join the school later in their school career and who have not previously been taught through the medium of Welsh have daily language sessions with a specialist teacher. This ensures that these pupils develop their Welsh language skills quickly to support them to gain full access to the curriculum through the medium of Welsh.

Teachers plan valuable and interesting experiences for pupils, which ensure that they enjoy learning and develop their knowledge, skills and understanding continuously. The curriculum is broad and appropriate, and builds well on pupils' previous skills. This supports most pupils to acquire knowledge and develop their literacy and numeracy skills well over time. Teachers also provide pupils with opportunities to develop most aspects of their digital competence. However, teachers do not provide

broad learning experiences that ensure that pupils develop the full range of digital skills.

Staff have made good progress towards establishing the principles of the Curriculum for Wales by experimenting enthusiastically over time and evaluating the effectiveness of their approaches on learning regularly. The curriculum now builds consistently on pupils' knowledge, understanding and skills to ensure progression in their learning as they move through the school. One of the strengths of the school's curriculum is the natural way in which it promotes the cultural nature and heritage of the local area and Wales. As a result, most pupils have a thorough knowledge of their local area or '*cynefin*' and a strong sense of belonging to the village of Beddau and their place within Wales and the wider world.

The school uses trips and visits to places of interest successfully to enrich the term's theme, to inspire pupils and develop their understanding of specific areas of learning. For example, their visits to a local forest to pick up litter and measure water pollution encourages them to take ownership of caring for nature.

One of the school's main attributes is the way in which teachers and classroom assistants use their knowledge of pupils' progress to plan the next steps for them. They observe them continuously and gather information about their understanding by questioning them skilfully while learning during their tasks. As a result, they have a good knowledge of pupils' needs and provide suitable activities for them, which support them to make continuous progress. They provide them with beneficial and timely oral and written feedback to encourage them to understand what they are doing well and what they need to do to improve. They provide regular opportunities for pupils to respond to this feedback. This motivates them to take appropriate responsibility for their own learning.

Care, support and guidance

The school is a homely and inclusive haven that promotes the well-being of staff and pupils highly effectively. It is a happy and caring community and its arrangements for safeguarding pupils meet requirements and are not a cause for concern. The supportive and friendly working relationship between staff and pupils is an obvious strength. This is reflected in the behaviour and courtesy of pupils and most pupils' attitudes towards their learning. All staff ensure that pupils with ALN receive good support. This supports them to engage successfully with their learning and enjoy the life and work of the school.

The school has effective processes for tracking and monitoring the attendance, progress and well-being of pupils, including those with ALN. Staff identify pupils' specific needs at an early stage and provide them with suitable support. Under the purposeful guidance of the ALN co-ordinator, classroom assistants support pupils very successfully. They use a range of suitable methods and support programmes well to improve their well-being and develop their basic skills. During well-being interventions, staff provide opportunities for pupils to discuss any concerns they have in a safe and supportive space. Staff work closely with the families of these pupils and liaise well with specialist external agencies, where appropriate, to support them. As a result of monitoring and evaluating provision regularly, most pupils with ALN make good progress against their targets.

The school has appropriate arrangements to promote healthy eating and drinking and it works effectively with partners in the public sector, such as the police and the school nurse, to support pupils' learning and well-being well. A combination of learning activities and sessions by specialists ensure that pupils have a sound understanding of issues relating to forming safe relationships and living a healthy lifestyle.

The school provides beneficial opportunities for pupils to learn about their place in the local community and the wider world. This includes providing valuable opportunities for them to develop their understanding of the importance of being conscientious and sensitive citizens. All staff help pupils to understand issues relating to values, equality, diversity and inclusion purposefully. Ethical aspects and equality permeate all aspects of the school's life and work effectively and reinforce the inclusive culture that exists within its community well. Staff present and reinforce positive spiritual, moral and social values to pupils regularly in learning activities and collective reflection sessions.

In whole-school sessions, staff and pupils discuss children's rights and how to be good citizens within society. They refer to the United Nations' articles on children's rights and the need to treat everyone respectfully. As a result, pupils enjoy taking part in community events, including fundraising activities for local and national charities. In the school's older years, teachers provide purposeful opportunities for pupils to develop their understanding of sustainability. For example, pupils have been given an opportunity to meet the constituency's Member of the Senedd to draw their attention to environmental issues.

The school helps pupils, including those from different groups such as those who are eligible for free school meals, to take responsibility and contribute to the school and the wider community. All pupil voice councils are wholly inclusive and include members of all specified groups within the school. These committees provide regular opportunities for pupils to make important decisions about their school life. Teachers also provide regular opportunities for the oldest pupils to develop their understanding of business enterprise. For example, Year 6 make products to be sold in the Christmas fair. This develops their awareness of the world of business, profit and loss well.

Important opportunities are provided for pupils to develop their self-confidence by taking part in performances at the school and in the wider community. For example, valuable opportunities were planned recently for pupils to visit the Welsh National Opera and perform at the Llangollen International Eisteddfod.

Teachers provide a range of opportunities for pupils to complete their work to the highest possible standard. However, provision does not always allow them to use and develop their independent learning skills effectively enough.

The school's procedures for monitoring pupils' punctuality and attendance are robust. Leaders contact families promptly to discuss any concerns and use appropriate external agencies effectively, where necessary.

Leadership and management

The headteacher is an energetic leader who ensures that the school's strategic procedures are robust and effective. He has a clear vision for the school, which is based on providing an effective, homely, familial, and Welsh learning community for children in the area. He conveys this vision clearly to staff, pupils, parents, governors and members of the local community.

The headteacher, deputy and staff work together effectively as a team. They have high expectations of themselves and the pupils. They demonstrate high professional values and conduct, which contribute positively towards ensuring that the school is a safe and homely haven that values the well-being and education of its pupils. They foster a strong culture of safeguarding and monitor the well-being and progress of all pupils highly effectively. Leaders manage staff performance continuously to praise them for their professional achievements and encourage them to improve any specific areas that they agree need improving.

The school has detailed, comprehensive and robust self-evaluation procedures. All staff contribute directly to implementing these procedures. Governors, pupils and parents also contribute to them occasionally. These procedures are based on various sources of first-hand evidence and provide an accurate picture of the current situation and contribute specifically to setting priorities for the improvement plan. The school's procedures for improvement are also comprehensive and aim to ensure improvements in the areas that have been identified as priorities.

Professional learning activities for staff are based on national and local priorities, in addition to their specific needs. These activities focus directly on maintaining and improving pupils' progress and well-being. The recent focus includes improving the digital skills of staff, planning and monitoring the curriculum and establishing effective outdoor learning approaches, among other things. Leaders monitor the effect of professional learning activities on teaching and, subsequently, on pupils' progress and well-being.

Governors ensure that they provide a sensible balance of support and challenge for leaders. They hold discussions with staff and visit the school regularly to evaluate provision and standards. As a result, they have a sound understanding of its strengths and areas for improvement. This enables them to contribute knowledgeably to specific discussions to set strategic priorities for the school and fulfil their roles effectively. They manage the school's funding prudently. This includes the pupil development grant, which is used appropriately to promote learning and reduce the effect of poverty on pupils' educational attainment. They ensure that the school has appropriate arrangements to promote healthy eating and drinking.

Leaders have a highly productive relationship with parents and ensure that they have effective communication methods with them to enable them to raise any issues that may affect their children's learning and well-being. They provide them with opportunities to express their views on provision and respond to their comments in a timely manner, where appropriate. For example, following a request from parents, staff have adapted the format and content of the reports on their children's progress. Leaders also hold useful sessions to inform them about important issues, such as the

recent changes to the curriculum and different ways in which they can help their children to learn at home.

The school has very effective links with Partneriaid Addysg Pontypridd (Pontypridd Education Partners), which is the local cluster of schools. Together, staff from these schools work closely to plan different aspects of the curriculum and appropriate methods for assessing pupils, based on current guidelines. This ensures that the expectations of leaders in this cluster of schools are consistent.

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/members of the management committee 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, middle leaders, and individual teachers to evaluate the impact of the school's work
- meet pupils to discuss their work 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 lessons, including learning support groups and the specialist resource base (where appropriate), 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 (where appropriate) and in outdoor areas
- visit the specialist resource base within the school to see pupils' learning (where appropriate)
- observe and speak to pupils at lunch and break times and at a sample of after-school clubs
- 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 (<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 going to press. Any enquiries or comments regarding this document/publication should be addressed to:

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