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a Hyfforddiant yng Nghymru

Her Majesty's Inspectorate
for Education and Training in Wales

A report on
Hirwaun Primary School

**Glannant St
Hirwaun
Aberdare
CF44 9NF**

Date of inspection: September 2011

by

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



During each inspection, inspectors aim to answer three key questions:

Key Question 1: How good are the outcomes?

Key Question 2: How good is provision?

Key Question 3: How good are leadership and management?

Inspectors also provide an overall judgement on the school's current performance and on its prospects for improvement.

In these evaluations, inspectors use a four-point scale:

Judgement	What the judgement means
Excellent	Many strengths, including significant examples of sector-leading practice
Good	Many strengths and no important areas requiring significant improvement
Adequate	Strengths outweigh areas for improvement
Unsatisfactory	Important areas for improvement outweigh strengths

The report was produced in accordance with Section 28 of the Education Act 2005.

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Context

Hirwaun Primary School is a community school situated in Hirwaun village at the top of the Cynon Valley in the unitary authority of Rhondda Cynon Taf. The school serves a mixed catchment area consisting of private and local authority housing and contains pockets of social and economic disadvantage.

There are 219 pupils aged three to eleven years in the school. Pupils are organised into six single-aged classes for children from six to eleven years, and one additional class of 45 reception-aged pupils and full-time and part-time nursery children. Approximately 41% of pupils are entitled to free school meals, which is above the local authority average and almost twice the all-Wales average. Around 16% of pupils have additional learning needs, including one pupil with a statement of special educational needs. The school has identified 2% of pupils as coming from ethnic backgrounds. Almost all of these pupils come from homes where English is the predominate language. No pupils are identified as Welsh speaking. There are four looked-after children in the school.

The school has achieved a number of external awards, which include Phase 3 of the Healthy Schools Award and its second Eco School Green Flag Award.

Since the last inspection in 2005, the senior leadership of the school has changed with a new headteacher and deputy appointed from within the school.

The 2010-2011 individual school budget per pupil for Hirwaun Primary School is £3,093, which compares with a maximum of £9,064 and a minimum of £2,553 for primary schools in Rhondda Cynon Taf. The school has the 77th highest budget per pupil out of the 116 primary schools in Rhondda Cynon Taf.

Summary

The school's current performance	Good
The school's prospects for improvement	Adequate

Current performance

Hirwaun Primary is a good school because:

- many pupils achieve good standards and make appropriate progress in their learning;
- data is used effectively to identify extra support for pupils;
- most pupils have a positive attitude to their work;
- learning experiences are varied and successfully engage most learners;
- teaching is good; and
- a caring ethos develops pupils' good attitudes to health and wellbeing effectively.

Prospects for improvement

The school's prospects for improvement have strengths that outweigh areas for development.

The strengths are that:

- the headteacher, senior leadership team and governors have an appropriate vision and clear aims and are strongly committed to raising standards;
- governors are well informed to act as the school's critical friend;
- there is a strong sense of teamwork amongst all the staff; and
- recent initiatives in reading and writing have brought about improvements in many pupils' standards.

The areas for development are that:

- self-evaluation does not include the views of all stakeholders;
- the review cycle is too complex and leads to too many focused priorities; and
- improvement targets do not always identify clear benefits to pupils, which makes the measuring of success difficult.

Recommendations

In order to improve, Hirwaun Primary needs to:

- R1 continue to improve pupils' reading and writing skills in the Foundation Phase;
- R2 further develop pupils' skills in speaking and listening, reading and writing in Welsh;
- R3 ensure greater consistency in teachers' marking;
- R4 review and refine self-evaluation processes and the self-improvement cycle;
- R5 focus more clearly on key priorities for improvement and identify how these will be achieved; and
- R6 address the safeguarding and health and safety issues identified during the inspection.

What happens next?

Hirwaun Primary School will produce an action plan that shows how it will address the recommendations. Progress in addressing the recommendations will be monitored by Estyn.

Main findings

Key Question 1: How good are outcomes?

Good

Standards: Good

Over time, most pupils make sound or better progress as they move through the school, often from a low entry point. Gains made by seven-year-olds are built on in lower key stage 2, with good progress made by many pupils by 11 years of age. Generally, most pupils have good recall of previous learning and apply their skills, knowledge and understanding well in new situations.

Many pupils' speaking and listening skills are developing appropriately. Very young children in the Foundation Phase answer the telephone confidently in the hairdressers to make appointments. At the end of the Foundation Phase, pupils' use their drama skills well in the pirate ship role-play area. Older pupils in key stage 2 listen well, speak confidently and make sensible suggestions in investigative work.

In the Foundation Phase, pupils' early reading skills develop slowly but, by the end of the phase, many abler pupils read with a good degree of accuracy and understanding. These pupils also write short pieces independently, although handwriting and presentation are of very variable quality. While younger pupils have a good understanding of letter sounds their lack of quick recall of high frequency words hinders their reading progress.

In key stage 2, older and more able pupils read with fluency and expression and show good understanding of what they have read. These pupils write confidently using different styles and genres. However, very few pupils write at length and this aspect of their work is underdeveloped.

Generally, most pupils apply their literacy skills well across the curriculum. For instance, in lower key stage 2, pupils collect and present information well in a variety of forms about life in the Second World War. In the Foundation Phase, older pupils write interesting 'juicy poems' as part of a healthy eating project.

Pupils in the Foundation Phase make good progress in following instructions given in Welsh and in using simple Welsh phrases. Older pupils in key stage 2 show a developing understanding of a range of sentence patterns and vocabulary. However, they generally lack confidence in using Welsh orally in more informal settings. Throughout the school, pupils' reading and writing skills in Welsh are underdeveloped.

Pupils with additional learning needs make good progress in their time in the school. Pupils who are entitled to free school meals achieve less well on average than other pupils, although they do better than pupils in other similar schools.

In four of the last five years, seven and 11-year-old pupils have achieved well compared to pupils in similar schools. In 2010-2011, the performance of pupils was not as good as in previous years but remains close to or better than the averages for

the family of schools. Boys in both key stages generally achieve as well as girls in mathematics and science, particularly at the higher levels, but do less well in English. The performance of boys also compares favourably with that of boys in other similar schools.

Wellbeing: Good

Most pupils have a positive attitude to their work. They show high levels of enjoyment and enthusiasm in what they do and are keen to do well. Many pupils listen intently and discuss their activities with interest and understanding. These pupils co-operate well as pairs or in groups and make confident contributions in classroom discussions. They respect each other's point of view and can justify decisions and opinions.

Behaviour is consistently good in classes and around the school. Pupils are helpful and respectful of each other and of the adults at the school. 'Young Leaders' in the school readily take responsibility for organising playground games and resources and in mediating any playground disagreements.

Pupils' decision-making skills are developing appropriately. Members of the school council, for instance, decide how to spend money raised as a result of their fundraising efforts. Pupils agree class rules and make choices about what they want to learn. Older pupils make decisions about how to evaluate their work. However, pupils are not yet fully involved in making decisions about school life, such as having a formal role in self-evaluation. Many pupils are regularly involved in community activities. These include performing at concerts, painting murals in the village and fund raising for local and national charities.

Pupils are well prepared for life and work outside school. Very young children, for example, learn to treat resources with care and take responsibility for 'tidying away'. Many older pupils act responsibly, manage their time effectively and know what they need to do to improve.

Most pupils are aware of the importance of developing a healthy lifestyle and how to achieve it. Pupils feel safe in school and are keen to engage in the varied after school activities, such as football and Spanish Club.

Attendance has increased steadily in recent years until 2009-2010 where it fell below that achieved by similar schools. Unpublished data for 2010-2011 shows improved attendance but it remains just below the family and all-Wales average. In spite of the school's efforts to encourage punctuality, a few pupils come late to school almost every day.

Key Question 2: How good is provision?

Adequate

Learning experiences: Good

Generally, there is a good range of stimulating and enriching learning experiences that meet the needs of most pupils. Teachers work together well to plan tasks in English, mathematics and topic work and use their subject expertise effectively.

Extra support for pupils with additional literacy and numeracy needs is effective and has a positive impact on pupils' standards. However, pupil groupings in key stage 2 do not always challenge the more able pupils enough.

Overall, the school makes appropriate provision for the development of pupils' communication, numeracy and information and communication technology skills. On a few occasions, opportunities are missed to develop pupils' investigative skills and pupils are not always encouraged to work independently. Recent literacy initiatives including focused reading sessions and a cluster writing project have impacted positively upon pupils' skills in reading and writing, particularly in key stage 2.

Most staff use Welsh appropriately in the classroom and around the school. They provide a suitable range of opportunities for pupils to learn about their locality, and the history and culture of Wales.

The eco committee and the eco code encourage pupils to think in a responsible way about conservation issues. Pupils' understanding of global citizenship is developing appropriately through relevant topic work.

Teaching: Good

The quality of teaching is good. Most teachers demonstrate up-to-date subject knowledge and use this well to ensure that activities engage and motivate pupils. Teachers share the learning intentions of lessons consistently with pupils and actively encourage older pupils to evaluate how well they are doing. Teachers generally question pupils effectively and are successful in promoting pupils' wider thinking skills.

All teachers and assistants are good language models. Adult support is well focused and makes a significant contribution to pupils' learning and wellbeing. Relationships between all staff and pupils are strong and pupils feel able to take risks and learn from their mistakes. All staff provide praise and encouragement for pupils, especially for those who are less confident. This has a positive impact on pupils' self-esteem and wellbeing.

Assessment for learning is developing appropriately throughout the school, particularly amongst the older pupils in key stage 2. Teachers usually assess and track pupils' progress well. Older pupils are familiar with their learning targets and talk confidently about strategies for improving their own work. Most pupils engage well in self-assessment and peer-assessment activities. However, there is inconsistency in the way that teachers mark pupils' work. Marking does not always show clearly what pupils need to do in order to improve.

Reports to parents meet statutory requirements and provide them with good information on their child's progress and areas to improve.

Care, support and guidance: Unsatisfactory

The school provides a happy and caring environment where pupils develop good attitudes to health and wellbeing.

Younger children in the Foundation Phase benefit from the careful monitoring of their levels of wellbeing and involvement. As a result, pupils' self-esteem and confidence have improved through well-planned and targeted activities.

Pupils' personal development is promoted well through the school's personal and social educational provision. As a result, most pupils have a good understanding of how to manage their feelings and how to treat others fairly and with respect.

The school generally has appropriate policies and arrangements for promoting healthy living and pupils' wellbeing. Pupils learn how to keep safe and there are clear strategies to encourage good behaviour. Any bullying is taken seriously and immediately dealt with. Consequently, pupils report that they feel safe in school.

The school does not have an appropriate policy for safeguarding. Procedures for dealing with safeguarding issues are not fully developed. In addition, a health and safety issue was brought to the attention of the school during the inspection.

Learning experiences successfully promote pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. For instance, the study of Islam in key stage 2 has encouraged pupils to consider the importance of symbols in religion.

Transition arrangements are good, both into the nursery and on leaving the school for secondary education.

Arrangements for the identification and monitoring of pupils with additional learning needs are clear and comprehensive. Pupils' individual learning needs are identified early on and staff ensure that these needs are met. Learning support assistants provide good quality support for pupils, particularly with literacy. This impacts significantly on the progress of these pupils. Child friendly individual education plans ensure that pupils are fully engaged in measuring their own progress.

The school makes effective use of a wide range of outside agencies to support pupils' learning and wellbeing.

Learning environment: Adequate

The school has established a caring, welcoming and orderly environment where every child is valued. The school is fully inclusive and treats all pupils equally. All have the opportunity to access the full range of the school's provision.

Good use is made of available resources in the outdoor area and in the community and these enrich the curriculum. Pupils make regular visits into the community as part of topic work and the outdoor environment provides a rich source of material for developing pupils' physical and scientific skills.

The quality of accommodation in the school is variable. The infant building is of good quality and is well maintained. However, recent drainage problems in the infant hard play area have led to flooding, putting the infant hall out of use for physical activities. The junior building is in need of repair and toilet facilities are poorly ventilated. Displays are generally attractive in both the infant and junior buildings. Role-play

areas in the Foundation Phase classes and a few interactive displays in the junior building, such as the Second World War display, enhance pupils' understanding of the curriculum.

Resources for learning are generally good, although computers and software in the Foundation Phase are old. The recent purchase of new interactive whiteboards in each class and additional laptops has improved information and communication technology provision.

Key Question 3: How good are leadership and management?	Adequate
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Leadership: Adequate

The headteacher, senior leadership team and governors have developed an appropriate vision and clear aims for the school. These have at their core the raising of standards and improvements in provision.

Members of staff work in school improvement teams with responsibilities for developing a variety of initiatives. This strategy is beginning to have a positive impact on the school as a learning community. However, links between these initiatives and overall school improvement priorities are not clear. In addition, the senior leadership team's strategic overview of school improvement is in the early stages of development. As a result, a few management systems are overly detailed and priorities for development are often not coherent enough.

Governors support the school well as a critical friend and they are generally developing a good understanding of how the school is performing compared with other similar schools. They have a clear understanding of school initiatives, the main strengths of the school and the areas that need to be developed. Their work is aided by very interesting and informative headteacher reports. However, governors are not yet involved enough in monitoring and evaluating standards and quality in the school.

The school is working well towards successfully introducing a few national and local priorities such as the Foundation Phase, Physical Education in School Sport (PESS) and a writing initiative developed between a few neighbouring schools.

Improving quality: Adequate

The school uses a range of first-hand evidence to support self-evaluation and this is generally developing well. Evidence mainly includes the performance of pupils and the outcomes of detailed classroom observations. However, the views of pupils, parents and governors are not yet collected in a formal manner. In addition, the school's review cycle is too detailed and, as a result, there are often too many areas for development for the school to review effectively.

The outcomes of the self-evaluation process are generally used to determine appropriate targets for school improvement. Many of these targets are clearly focused but a few do not indicate well enough how improvements will be achieved. The school has, however, successfully made some gains in improving standards and quality. For example, a recent focus on reading skills improved many pupils' reading ages considerably.

Progress in relation to two of the recommendations of the last inspection, including pupils' bilingual competence and the consistency of teachers' marking, has been insufficient.

The school is developing as a reflective learning community. However, although a strong culture of collaboration and teamwork exists within the school, there are few professional learning communities established to effectively share good practice.

Partnership working: Good

The school is developing an effective partnership with parents. The introduction of homework 'learning logs' provides parents with good opportunities to become more closely involved in their children's learning.

Successful transition links with pre-school pupils ensure that they are well prepared to join the nursery class. The school also has an appropriate range of links with the agencies that provide support for pupils with additional learning needs and pupils with special educational needs. These partnerships secure good outcomes for pupils' wellbeing and learning.

Effective partnerships exist with the local community and work with the environmental enforcement officer develops pupils' knowledge of and respect for their village. Partnerships with a number of sporting clubs enhance the range of physical educational work in the school and this has a positive impact on standards.

Transition plans agreed by the local secondary school and its feeder primary schools are sound and prepare older pupils well for the next stage of their education.

The cluster of schools also has effective procedures for standardising and moderating pupils' work in the National Curriculum core subjects. They also agree and produce joint documents such as an anti-bullying policy and a wellbeing policy. This provides for a consistency in approach that supports pupils' sense of security as they move into secondary school.

Resource management: Good

The school generally manages its budget well. There are a sufficient number of qualified teachers and support staff and these are deployed effectively. The school identifies and meets most of the needs of staff through its performance management procedures.

The school provides sound arrangements for planning, preparation and assessment (PPA) and leadership time. PPA time is well managed with higher level teaching assistants providing cover in each of the classes. The joint release of teachers during these sessions enables them to plan effectively together.

There is generally a good range of learning resources in the school with ICT and outdoor learning equipment recently given a high priority. These resources are managed and used well but their impact on the standards of pupils' achievements has yet to be evaluated.

Although the school accommodation has shortcomings and in some areas is in need of upgrading, staff generally use it effectively to provide an attractive environment for pupils' learning.

In view of the good progress achieved by most pupils, the good support provided for all pupils and the appropriate management of the budget, the school overall provides good value for money.

Appendix 1

Commentary on performance data

Pupils' performance in the core subject indicator (CSI), the expected level in English, mathematics and science, in both key stages, has been in the top quartile over the last five years when compared with performance in other similar schools.

Standards over time at the expected level and above in individual subjects are usually high in both key stages and generally compare favourably with the average for the family and Wales.

In key stage 1, when compared with performance levels in similar schools, pupils' performance has generally been in the top quartile for English, mathematics and science at the expected level (Level 2) and above (Level 3). Despite a fall in results in 2011, English remained in the top quartile, while mathematics and science were in the second quartile but remained above family and Wales averages. However, data shows falling trends in the standards of pupils' writing over the last two years.

In key stage 2, when compared with performance levels in similar schools, pupils' performance has generally been in the in the top quartile for English, mathematics and science at the expected level (Level 4) and above (Level 5). In 2011, pupils attaining the higher level in English did significantly less well than in previous years and results were below the family average. Standards in pupils' reading at the higher level contributed significantly to the fall in English results.

Pupils eligible for free school meals do less well overall than other pupils in the school, although the gap in performance is usually smaller than for the family and Wales. Pupils with additional learning needs make good progress in meeting their targets as they move through the school.

At seven years of age, girls in the school generally perform better than boys at the expected level, particularly in English. Over time, girls also slightly outperform boys at the higher level in English. However, boys' performance at the higher level compares favourably with the performance of girls in science and mathematics and with that of boys in the family and nationally in each core subject.

At eleven years of age, with the exception of 2010-2011, the performance of boys and girls at the expected level and above has been similar in mathematics and science. Boys' performance over time also compares favourably with that of boys in the family and nationally in these two subjects. Generally, boys do less well than girls in English at the expected level and above but their performance compares well with that of boys in the family and nationally.

Appendix 2

Stakeholder satisfaction report

Learners questionnaires

Ninety-seven pupils in key stage 2 completed the questionnaires. Inspectors also talked to individual pupils and representative groups of pupils across the school.

All pupils think that teachers and other adults help them to learn and make progress. They know whom to talk to if they are worried or upset and know what to do if they find their work hard. As a result, nearly all pupils state that they are doing well at school and feel safe there.

Nearly all pupils feel that the school teaches them how to keep healthy and that they have lots of opportunities to get regular exercise. Almost all pupils also feel that they have enough books and equipment and most feel that homework helps them to improve their work.

Nearly all pupils say that the school deals with bullying and all pupils feel that children behave well at break and lunchtimes. Most state that other children behave well in class, which allows them to get on with their work.

Parent questionnaires

Thirty-two parents completed the questionnaire and eleven parents attended the parents' meeting.

Overall, most are satisfied with the school and feel that it is well run. All parents consider that their children like school, feel safe and are helped to settle in well when they start school. All feel that the school encourages children to be healthy and take regular exercise. Most consider that pupils behave well in school.

All parents feel that teaching is good and children are expected to work hard. Many parents state that their children are making good progress and most believe that the school helps their child to become more mature and take on responsibility. Most parents feel that children are provided with appropriate additional support if needed, children are treated fairly and with respect, and that the school provides a good range of activities. Many parents feel that they are well informed about their child's progress and that homework is appropriate.

A few parents do not understand the school's procedure for dealing with complaints and are uncomfortable in approaching the school with questions, suggestions or problem.

Appendix 3

The inspection team

Bev Jenkins HMI	Reporting Inspector
Mike Maguire HMI	Team Inspector
Rhiannon Boardman	Lay Inspector
Christopher Millis	Peer Inspector
Bethan Hill	School Nominee

Copies of the report

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

Under the Independent School Standards (Wales) Regulations 2003, the school must provide copies of the report to all parents of the school. Where a pupil is subject to placement by a local authority, a copy of the report should be sent by the school to each relevant authority.

Year groups and key stages

Schools use a common system of numbering year groups from the start of compulsory schooling to 18 years of age. This system emphasises the importance of continuity and eases communication among schools, governing bodies, parents and LEAs.

The term 'Reception' (R) refers to the year group of pupils in a primary school who reach the age of five during the academic year. Year 1 refers to the year group of pupils who reach the age of six during the academic year and so on. Year 13 is the year group of students who reach the age of 18 during the academic year.

Primary phase:

Year	R	Y1	Y2	Y3	Y4	Y5	Y6
Ages	4-5	5-6	6-7	7-8	8-9	9-10	10-11

Secondary phase:

Year	Y7	Y8	Y9	Y10	Y11	Y12	Y13
Ages	11-12	12-13	13-14	14-15	15-16	16-17	17-18

The four key stages cover the following year groups:

Key stage 1	Year 1 and Year 2
Key stage 2	Year 3 to Year 6
Key stage 3	Year 7 to Year 9
Key stage 4	Year 10 and Year 11