



Rhagoriaeth i bawb – Excellence for all

Arolygiaeth Ei Mawrhydi dros Addysg
a Hyfforddiant yng Nghymru

Her Majesty's Inspectorate
for Education and Training in Wales

A report on

**Gwaunfarren Primary School
Alexandra Avenue
Merthyr Tydfil
CF47 9AF**

Date of inspection: December 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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This document has been translated by Trosol (English to Welsh)

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Context

Gwaunfarren Primary School is a community school for boys and girls from three to 11. It admits children to the nursery at the age of three. The entry of children into the nursery is controlled and administered by Merthyr Tydfil Local Authority. The 276 pupils, who include 30 part time nursery children, come mainly from owner-occupied houses in the immediate area of Penydarren, with an increasing minority who live on the Gurnos estate. Around 23% are eligible for free school meals, which is a little above the national average. Currently, no pupils are “looked after” by the local authority.

The school opened in 1970 but has been remodelled and extended recently. The school building and teaching areas are surrounded by spacious outdoor learning facilities. The school has 10 classes. These are organised into three single age classes and two mixed-age classes in the Foundation Phase. There are three single-age classes and two mixed-age classes in key stage 2. The school has 12 full-time teachers, one part-time teacher and 12 learning support assistants.

English is the predominant language for most pupils. A few pupils receive support for English as an additional language but no pupils use Welsh as a first language. Approximately 7% of pupils are from ethnic minority backgrounds and they speak either Polish, Portuguese, Hindi or Chinese at home.

Base line indications show that attainment on entry to the school is generally below average. Approximately 25% of pupils are identified as having additional learning needs, but no pupil has a statement of special educational need. No pupils were excluded in the last year.

The individual school budget per pupil for Gwaunfarren Primary School in 2010-2011 means that the budget is £3,198 per pupil. The maximum per pupil in primary schools in Merthyr Tydfil is £7,735 and the minimum is £3,000. Gwaunfarren Primary School is 21st out of the 24 primary schools in Merthyr Tydfil in terms of its school budget per pupil.

The last school inspection was in 2005. The current headteacher, appointed in 2004, has been absent on sick leave from May 2011 to date. The assistant headteacher has deputised as the acting headteacher in the meantime, but became ill at the start of the inspection and was also absent on sick leave during the inspection.

Summary

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

Current performance

The overall judgment on current performance is adequate. This is because the school's performance data at the end of key stage 2 is above local authority and national averages and also the results of similar schools and other schools in its family group. Pupils show high standards of behaviour and have good attitudes to learning. Although staff morale is brittle, teachers are more confident this term as they have worked to a common purpose led by the acting headteacher.

However, in key stage 1, declining trends over the last three years, show that, by the end of year 2, the school is performing significantly less well than similar schools, other schools in its family group, local authority and national averages. Also, younger pupils do not write well at length or use their literacy and numeracy skills effectively. Safeguarding and child protection procedures are inadequate.

Prospects for improvement

The overall prospects for improvement of the provider are judged as unsatisfactory, for the following reasons:

- the overall quality of leadership and management is unsatisfactory;
- self-evaluation has been weak since the last inspection;
- there is no effective link between self-evaluation and school improvement planning;
- school improvement planning has not focused sufficiently on improving learning outcomes for pupils;
- the governing body does not challenge the school effectively enough and does not fulfil all its statutory requirements; and
- the school has not properly addressed the recommendations of the last inspection and improvement over the last six years has been very limited.

Recommendations

In order to improve further, Gwaunfarren Primary School needs to:

- R1 raise standards by the end of Year 2 in reading, writing and numeracy;
- R2 improve the quality of leadership and management at all levels and resolve the difficulties and uncertainties surrounding the long-term senior leadership of the school;
- R3 establish a rigorous and widely shared system of self-evaluation and use this to inform planning for improvement;
- R4 improve the quality of all teaching across the school to that of the best;
- R5 develop accurate and useful pupil assessment systems;
- R6 improve safeguarding policy and procedures.

What happens next?

I am of the opinion, and HMCI agrees, that special measures are required in relation to this school because it is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and senior leaders lack the capacity to secure the necessary improvements.

Main findings

Key Question 1: How good are outcomes?

Adequate

Standards: Adequate

Many pupils enter the school with skills below those normally expected for their age. By the end of Year 2, pupils achieve below average standards in English and mathematics and there has been a decline in standards for at least three years from 2009 to 2011. Many pupils make little progress by the end of Year 2, including those with special educational needs. Younger pupils who are more able do not achieve as well as they might. Girls do a little better than boys.

By the end of Year 6, many pupils achieve above average standards in English and mathematics. However, standards achieved in the 2011 key stage 2 assessments have begun to decline when compared with those achieved in 2010. The relative performance of boys and girls has varied over the last four years. More able pupils achieve highly although their performance has declined over the last three years. Those pupils who have English as an additional language, and speak Polish or Portuguese at home, make adequate progress over time in learning English. They have difficulties with verb tenses and figures of speech.

By the end of the Foundation Phase pupils' literacy skills are variable with about a half who can read adequately. Their writing skills are also mixed and few have completed any extended writing. Pupils' writing in key stage 2 is fluent and uses good vocabulary. These older pupils are articulate in discussions.

Pupils have adequate numeracy skills in the Foundation Phase. They can count up consecutively in twos and fives but do not know their multiplication tables. Older pupils in Year 5 and Year 6 have good skills in numeracy and work well with problems that deal with mixed fractions.

The majority of pupils make adequate progress in learning Welsh, with verbal skills stronger than reading and writing. Many use Welsh greetings enthusiastically and engage in simple dialogues well.

Wellbeing: Adequate

Most pupils are enthusiastic and well-motivated learners. They work hard in lessons, are attentive and adopt a positive approach to learning activities. Pupils' behaviour is very good. As they grow older, they take on greater responsibility and show increasingly mature attitudes. They are courteous and friendly and show respect, care and concern for others.

Many pupils work well at solving problems and work well in groups or teams. However, they are not regularly involved in planning their own learning and do not work independently to a sufficient degree. In a few key stage 2 classes, pupils' views are used to modify planning for the week to some degree.

Nearly all pupils feel safe within the school and well protected from physical and verbal abuse. They are also aware of how to develop a healthy lifestyle through physical exercise and a nutritious, well balanced diet. Many participate in the wide range of physical activities available in after-school clubs. They recognise the harmful effects of particular substances on the body.

Attendance is in line with that of similar schools and nearly all pupils arrive promptly in the mornings. However, a few are regularly late.

Many pupils are regularly involved with community activities. These include choral singing at local festivals and old peoples' homes as well as fund raising for local and national charities. The school council and eco council represent the views of pupils well. They engage actively in trying to improve the quality of school life.

Key Question 2: How good is provision?	Adequate
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Learning experiences: Adequate

The provision for pupils' learning needs is inconsistent. Planning in key stage 2 covers National Curriculum requirements and learning experiences are adequate overall. In a few key stage 2 classes, planning successfully meets the needs of the full range of pupils. Pupils with English as an additional language are adequately catered for.

The Foundation Phase curriculum does not fully meet the needs of pupils because of the way it is organised. There is not enough emphasis on developing the basic skills of reading, writing and oracy. Planning does not build on pupils' existing knowledge and does not provide enough opportunities for pupils to make individual choices or learn independently.

Although the school has invested in a new curriculum initiative, this planning is wholly underused and represents an unsatisfactory deployment of resources. The school does not have a comprehensive or shared approach to developing pupils' communication, numeracy and information and communication technology skills. Oracy is given a high profile in around half of classes in key stage 2. Extended writing opportunities across the curriculum are often missed, especially in the Foundation Phase. Overuse of worksheets in many classes limits pupils' ability to write independently or at length. Appropriate time is allocated for Welsh and provision is adequate.

Education for sustainable development is well developed and the school acts sustainably. A minority of pupils show a keen awareness of the principles involved. Their understanding of global citizenship is, however, more limited.

Teaching: Adequate

The range and quality of teaching approaches varies too much throughout the school. In a large minority of lessons, the teaching is adequate at best and pupils are not challenged enough. In too many lessons, teaching does not provide pupils with enough opportunities to learn independently. About half the staff have good subject

knowledge and set clear learning objectives in lessons. They share with pupils not just what they are to learn but why it is going to be useful to them. In lessons where teaching is good, it is characterised by effective planning and organisation, creative thinking and fast-paced lesson development.

Many teachers are good role models for learners and manage pupils' behaviour effectively. Most teaching assistants are an asset to teaching and learning.

Marking does not consistently enable pupils to know how well they are doing. There is little evidence of self-assessment or peer assessment. The school does not analyse assessment findings effectively to raise standards and does not monitor pupils' progress systematically. Inspection evidence raised concerns about the accuracy of assessments. Parents and carers are informed of progress through regular reports, which are satisfactory.

Care, support and guidance: Unsatisfactory

The school promotes spiritual, moral, social and cultural development adequately as it does pupils' health and wellbeing. There are good procedures for promoting attendance, ensuring good behaviour and addressing any harassment.

The school provides individual support for pupils who use English as an additional language as well as for those who have special educational needs. This support is provided by a language support teacher and teaching assistants. However, their work is not monitored or evaluated sufficiently to ensure that pupils make good progress.

Liaison with specialist agencies, such as the police community liaison service, is good. There is a policy for personal and social education, but this has not been ratified or dated by the governing body and has little impact on pupils' levels of wellbeing.

The school does not have an appropriate policy for safeguarding. Procedures for dealing with safeguarding issues are not fully developed. Health and safety issues which require urgent attention were raised with the governing body during the inspection.

Learning environment: Adequate

The school takes account of the diversity of pupils' backgrounds. Most pupils show tolerant attitudes to others and reports of bullying are few. The school's policies on and action planning for equality of opportunity are out of date and do not meet statutory requirements.

The school buildings are well maintained although some areas are still being refurbished. The accommodation adequately meets the needs of pupils. The wall displays enhance the learning environment as do some parts of the school grounds. The nature reserve is an imaginative use of the natural environment. The provision for information and communications technology is good. Resources in a few classes such as the Nursery, Year 3 and Year 5 are good. However, the layout and

arrangement of furniture in classrooms such as Year 2 is inadequate with too few tables for pupils to write on and role play areas that are underdeveloped. Some classes in key stage 2 have very good library corners that promote literacy well.

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

The overall quality of leadership and management is unsatisfactory. Leaders and managers do not communicate priorities for improvement sufficiently well and staff have lacked clear direction since the last inspection. They have been excluded from involvement in setting and promoting the school's strategic vision. Meetings for teaching and support staff are infrequent and do not allow the development of whole-school policies and procedures. As a result there are wide variations in practice and inconsistencies across the school. Staff who have attended in-service training do not have opportunities to share what they have learned with colleagues, although they want to. Staff morale is brittle although they are more confident this term as they have worked to a common purpose led by the acting headteacher. Performance management arrangements for teachers are unsatisfactory and do not meet statutory requirements.

Governors are not provided with sufficient reliable information to enable them to carry out their role as critical friends. They do not challenge the school to bring about improvement. Statutory duties such as oversight of the school's budget and spending are not adequately addressed. As a result, the school's budget has moved from a relatively healthy situation to one of significant deficit.

National priorities such as the school effectiveness framework have received scant attention.

Improving quality: Unsatisfactory

The school's recent self-evaluation focuses clearly on pupils' attainment and takes account of the views of staff, governors and pupils. The document is honest and is an early sign of the school's new and growing knowledge of its strengths and shortcomings. It replaces previous self-evaluation documents, which, since the last inspection, have been inaccurate, unshared, unrealistic and ineffective. Progress towards targets from the improvement planning cycle in previous years has not been evaluated.

Procedures for leading, managing or monitoring the quality of teaching and learning have been insufficiently rigorous. Consequently, annual reviews were based on unreliable evidence which was not shared with or derived from the school's staff.

The link between self-evaluation and the school development plan has been absent until very recently. Priorities for improvement have rarely been focussed on improving pupils' outcomes. The most recent targets for improvement, this term, are often appropriately quantified and include realistic time scales. However, the revised self-evaluation and improvement arrangements are so recent that it is not yet possible to judge their effectiveness.

The school's involvement in networks of professional practice is a recent development. At present, it has not been fully effective in promoting best practice amongst staff.

Progress since the last inspection has been unsatisfactory. The school has not satisfactorily addressed the recommendations made in the last inspection report. Standards in English, Welsh and mathematics have not risen enough. Standards in writing as a key skill are not good enough still with too little extended writing across the school. Teaching still has weaknesses which include a lack of challenge or enough independent learning opportunities. Subject leadership has had shortcomings for six years and there is little evidence of a long-term critical evaluation of progress towards targets set over time. Senior leadership has declined in quality over time and although there has been a recent improvement, it has not yet had enough time to affect school improvement.

Partnership working: Adequate

The school has effective links with a range of partners, including the main receiving secondary schools and their other feeder primary schools. Most parents generally think well of the school and are supportive of its work although the parent teacher association has been inactive of late.

There is effective joint planning as part of transition arrangements. Links with the community have helped to raise pupils' awareness of local issues such as Merthyr Tidy Towns, which has helped improve the school grounds. The Family Learning facility offered by the school, and the visits to industry organised by the Education Business partnership have been beneficial to pupils and parents and are appreciated by those few who participate. Links with support agencies such as for educational psychology and speech and language therapy have some beneficial impact on pupils' wellbeing.

Resource management: Unsatisfactory

Overall, resource management is unsatisfactory. The school makes adequate use of some of its learning resources to support pupils' learning but budgetary management is underdeveloped. In a few cases, teachers are not deployed to positions where their qualifications and experience are most effective. All teachers have sufficient non-contact time for planning and assessment. However, there is little evidence that this contributes to raising standards. Support staff are well-briefed by teachers on their roles and help pupils make progress.

Spending is not linked enough to the school's priorities for improvement. Significant expenditure has been made on curricular resources to little effect. The school is projected to have a substantial deficit by the end of the current financial year due to weak financial management. Because of the unsatisfactory quality of leadership, the inconsistencies in teaching, the shortcomings in safeguarding and the low outcomes for pupils by the end of key stage 1, the school gives unsatisfactory value for money.

Appendix 1

Commentary on performance data

At the end of key stage 1, pupils' performance has been below average and declining for the last three years. Standards in 2011 were in the lowest 25% of those for similar schools for English, mathematics, science and the core subject indicator (the expected level 2 in English, mathematics and science in combination for pupils of seven years of age). Girls achieved better than boys, especially in English. When compared to the results of other schools in its family (a group of schools across Wales that face similar challenges), pupils' performance was below average in English, mathematics and the core subject indicator. The proportion of more able pupils achieving the higher level 3 was nil and thus well below those of other schools in the family.

At the end of key stage 2, pupils' performance in attaining level 4 (the expected level for pupils of 11 years of age) or higher has been above the all-Wales average and the averages for the local authority and its family of schools in English, mathematics, science and the core subject indicator. Standards in 2011 were in the higher 25% of those for similar schools for English, mathematics and the core subject indicator. Results for science were in the lower 50% of similar schools. Girls achieved marginally more highly than boys. The proportion of more able pupils, who attained level 5 is above average and has recovered a little from those achieved in 2010 but this shows a decline from results attained in 2009.

Appendix 2

Stakeholder satisfaction report

Responses to parent questionnaires

There were 70 completed responses to the questionnaire, which is a good level when compared nationally. Overall, parents expressed positive views about the school. In particular, almost all are pleased with the school and say their children like being there. They feel that their children are making good progress and are safe at school. Most parents find staff approachable if they have any questions or concerns. Almost all feel that they are kept well-informed about their children's progress. A few parents were unsure of the school's arrangements for dealing with complaints and found its leaders difficult to approach.

Responses to pupils' questionnaires

There were 94 responses from pupils in key stage 2 to the questionnaire. Almost all feel safe in school and believe that the school deals well with any bullying. Nearly all think that they are well-supported in school, especially having someone to talk to if they are worried or upset. Almost all feel that they are doing well at school, believe that there are enough resources to enable them to learn well and that homework is of value to them. There is widespread agreement that the school helps pupils' to live healthy lifestyles. A large minority of pupils feel that other pupils do not always behave well in class or in the play and lunch intervals.

Appendix 3

The inspection team

Robert Isaac	Reporting Inspector
Nicola Williams	Team Inspector
Edward Tipper	Lay Inspector
Nicola Jayne Williams	Peer Inspector

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