A report on

Cymmer Primary School
Graigwen Road
Porth
RCT
CF39 9HA

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by

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

About Cymmer Primary School

Cymmer Primary School is in the village of Cymmer, on the outskirts of Porth in the Rhondda Valley. The school opened in September 2016 following the amalgamation of the former infant and junior schools. Currently, foundation phase pupils receive their education on the school site but key stage 2 pupils are temporarily based in the nearby secondary school. In the very near future, key stage 2 will move to the re-furbished building, resulting in a primary school, on one site.

There are currently 263 pupils on roll between the ages of 3 and 11, including 28 part-time pupils in the nursery. The school has 11 classes, including six single-age classes, three mixed-age classes and a part-time nursery class. The school also has a key stage 2 learning resource base class for pupils with additional learning needs.

The three-year average of pupils eligible for free school meals is 34%, which is well above the national average of 18%. The school identifies around 22% of pupils as having additional learning needs. This is similar to the national average of 21%. Very few pupils have a statement of special educational needs. Very few pupils come from an ethnic minority background or are in the care of the local authority. Very few pupils have English as an additional language and no pupils speak Welsh at home.

The current headteacher took up her post in September 2016, having previously been the headteacher at the junior school. This is the school's first inspection as a primary school.

Further information is available from the Welsh Government My Local School website at the link below.
http://mylocalschool.wales.gov.uk/Schools/SchoolSearch?lang=en

Summary

During their time at the school, most pupils progress well and develop effective literacy and information and communication technology (ICT) skills. Pupils feel safe at school and praise the care and support that is available to them from staff. They show care for each other and respect their peers, staff and visitors to the school.

The school provides a broad range of rich learning experiences that improve pupils' skills successfully. Overall, teaching and assessment procedures support most pupils to make good progress from their individual starting points. Teachers and learning support assistants respond sensitively to the needs of all pupils, including those that are most vulnerable. Additionally, they provide effective guidance and support for parents.

The headteacher and governors have a clear vision to move the school forward. The newly formed leadership team focus well on improving provision, for example by promoting professional learning to ensure that the staff's care and support affects pupils' wellbeing purposefully.

Inspection area	Judgement
Standards	**Good**
Wellbeing and attitudes to learning	**Good**
Teaching and learning experiences	**Good**
Care, support and guidance	**Good**
Leadership and management	**Good**

Recommendations

R1 Ensure that pupils apply their numeracy skills purposefully across the curriculum

R2 Improve the level of challenge for more able pupils

R3 Ensure that teaching does not restrict pupils' independent learning skills

R4 Ensure that the newly formed leadership team implements improvement strategies effectively to maximise its impact on provision and pupils' outcomes

What happens next

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

Main findings

Standards: Good

A minority of pupils start school with communication skills that match the expected standards for their age. During their time at school, most pupils make develop and use their literacy and ICT skills well. Many develop appropriate numeracy skills. Pupils with additional learning needs achieve well against their personal targets. However, across the school, the more able pupils do not progress as well as they could.

Most pupils improve and use their speaking and listening skills purposefully as they move through the school. Soon after starting school, the majority of pupils understand that listening attentively to adults and each other is an important part of their education. Many pupils talk with interest and pride about their work. For example, foundation phase pupils explain enthusiastically why they choose different shapes, such as pentagons and hexagons, to create symmetrical patterns. In key stage 2, many pupils communicate effectively, for instance, when they discuss intelligently the influence of William Morris on Victorian design and fashion. A few pupils use sophisticated language, with clear understanding, to explain discrimination, antisemitism and liberation during work about the Second World War. Most pupils make good progress in developing their Welsh oracy skills. By Year 2, many pupils use familiar phrases regularly and respond well to instructions from staff. Many pupils in key stage 2 speak confidently, with expression and good pronunciation, when describing their feelings and their families.

Many pupils develop good reading skills. By the end of the foundation phase, the majority read a range of texts effectively. They use phonic strategies to build and pronounce unfamiliar words successfully. Many pupils discuss the content of their books sensibly and respond sensitively to the feelings of their favourite and least liked characters. Many pupils in key stage 2 read carefully and accurately. They enjoy fiction and factual books, and use internet research purposefully, for example when researching how the Romans built roads during their conquest of the Celts. They practice their advanced reading skills regularly and gather information from different sources, by using books, fact sheets and electronic devices. Many pupils develop appropriate reading skills in Welsh and discuss books and magazines enthusiastically.

Across the school, many pupils use a variety of styles to write for different purposes effectively. In the foundation phase, the majority write independent pieces confidently, such as instructions related for their own board games. In key stage 2, many pupils write extensively with interesting vocabulary to enrich the meaning of passages. They organise their written work effectively in sensible paragraphs. For example, during their research of the lives of famous novelists, where their findings reflect a good understanding of issues discussed in the novels. However, the more able pupils do not write to the best of their abilities. The majority of pupils in key stage 2 write suitably in Welsh with teacher support.

Overall, many pupils across the school have a sound understanding of number concepts. They follow instructions to apply their knowledge successfully during

lessons. A good example is the way in which foundation phase pupils estimate the length of different objects, such as bones using different leaves. Additionally, most pupils use ordinal numbers well during the creation of magical potions.

In key stage 2, many pupils present and analyse data successfully. With teacher support, they create a line graph to present their results on the length of shadows and how long it takes for water to evaporate from different sponges. The majority of pupils across the school choose the appropriate mathematical methods to complete new tasks independently. As a result, a minority apply their numeracy skills across the curriculum effectively to solve problems.

Most pupils in the foundation phase use ICT equipment confidently. For example, they control electronic toys to travel around a maze successfully. Most pupils in key stage 2 demonstrate effective ICT skills. They apply their skills and select appropriate methods to present their work purposefully, such as animating characters living in a Celtic village. They use databases to record the cost of rations to create facts files about the Second World War. In addition, most pupils use secure passwords to access their online tasks successfully.

Wellbeing and attitudes to learning: Good

Nearly all pupils are proud of their school and they feel safe within its inclusive atmosphere. They are happy to discuss any concerns with staff, and most pupils are confident that the staff listen to them attentively and act upon their concerns and suggestions. Most pupils have a sound understanding of how to stay safe at school and when they are online.

Most pupils across the school have positive attitudes towards their learning. They listen attentively to teachers' instructions and concentrate well on their work during lessons. Most pupils are enthusiastic learners, who are motivated when embracing new experiences, such as painting an imaginary alien and explaining how the Romans built a powerful empire. Most are confident to discuss their work with their peers, and do so readily. This successful collaboration is a strong and visible feature in every class. As a result, most pupils demonstrate respect for others' contributions and respond positively to their ideas.

The behaviour of most pupils, inside and outside classes, is consistently good. They are courteous and show respect for their peers, staff and visitors. Many pupils care for each other sensitively and work and play together successfully. They support the school's family ethos, for example by showing empathy for others on the schoolyard and organising play activities. They are mindful of each other's needs and offer willing support to pupils who demonstrate the need for peer advice.

Most pupils have a sound understanding of how to keep healthy by eating a balanced diet, drinking water and keeping fit. As well as regular exercise lessons, they take part in a variety of interesting activities to improve their fitness. These include weekly 'Welly Wednesday' walks for foundation phase pupils in the garden area and regular skills and fitness sessions with a local professional football team.

Most pupils contribute appropriately to their learning by offering constructive ideas to the termly themes, which extends their knowledge and understanding effectively. For example, they learn purposefully through completing 'challenges' and 'missions' in the foundation phase and key stage 2 respectively, on aspects related to the themes.

Many pupils take on additional responsibilities conscientiously. They display a sound understanding of the importance and purpose of their roles. As a result, prefects, members of the school council, the eco-committee and the digital leaders contribute beneficially to school life. For example, the school council members organise fundraising activities, alongside 'Helping Hands', the school's support group, to buy additional resources for their classrooms and the outdoor areas. Additionally, the school council leads anti-bullying presentations for the rest of the pupils. This has a positive impact on behaviour and relationships between pupils.

Most pupils develop a good understanding of the importance of effective citizenship through their awareness of the values promoted by the school, which includes honesty, fairness and respect for others. Older pupils explain the importance of these values maturely.

Most pupils are punctual at the start of the school day. Many pupils respond positively to the school's focus on improving attendance and they understand the importance of attending school regularly. However, over the last two years, since the opening of the primary school, attendance levels have remained lower than those in similar schools.

Teaching and learning experiences: Good

Teachers use a variety of styles and approaches effectively to engage pupils in learning. For example, they plan opportunities for pupils to work in small groups and in pairs. This contributes successfully to pupils' good collaboration skills. Teachers and learning support assistants plan well for the effective use of all available teaching areas to provide a variety of rich learning experiences for pupils. These include the 'challenge' areas in the foundation phase and the 'missions' in key stage 2. These successfully engage pupils and foster their concentration skills purposefully. However, in a few classes, over direction by adults does not allow pupils to develop their independent learning skills fully.

Most teaching sessions proceed at a brisk pace and maintain the interests of nearly all pupils successfully. However, in a few lessons, teachers' introductions are too lengthy, limiting the time for pupils to engage actively with tasks.

Staff have very good working relationships with pupils and employ effective behaviour management strategies. As a result, most pupils are well behaved and ready to learn at the beginning of each teaching session. Most teachers have high expectations and many use a variety of questioning methods skilfully to challenge pupils' thinking. Teachers plan the next steps in learning for most pupils successfully. However, the work does not always challenge the more able pupils well enough.

All teachers share well-planned learning objectives with pupils clearly. Most provide valuable oral and written feedback to pupils. This helps them identify what they need to do in order to improve. Teachers provide good opportunities for pupils to assess their own work and the work of their peers.

The thematic approach to planning stimulates nearly all pupils and fosters positive attitudes to learning. Pupils have appropriate opportunities to make choices about what they would like to learn, through class discussion at the beginning of a new topic.

Teachers ensure good opportunities for pupils to apply their literacy skills across the curriculum. For example, in the foundation phase pupils write recipes for magic potions in their topic work and pupils in key stage 2, write diaries describing the life of a Victorian schoolchild.

Planning to develop pupils' ICT skills across the curriculum is effective. In the foundation phase, pupils programme an electronic toy to follow a path to find a witch in a forest. Pupils in key stage 2 use a variety of search engines to complete history project work successfully. However, planning for pupils to develop their numeracy skills across all subject areas is less well developed.

Planning for pupils to use their Welsh language skills is effective and supports pupils to learn and use the language to a suitable standard. Most staff model the language well during lessons. Teachers plan good opportunities for pupils to celebrate the culture and heritage of Wales. For example, younger pupils learn traditional folk dances and visit local places of interest such as Llancaiach Fawr. Older pupils enjoy residential courses in the Urdd centre in Llangrannog and learn traditional tales such as Guto Nyth Brân.

Care, support and guidance: Good

The school is a caring community, where staff and pupils show a high level of respect for each other. Teachers and learning support assistants know the pupils well and respond sensitively and effectively to their emotional and social needs. The supportive ethos and the high-quality provision at the school enable, most pupils to develop positive attitudes to learning and good co-operation and social skills.

The school has a comprehensive system to gather information about pupils' achievements as they move through the school. Staff use the tracking system to monitor the progress of pupils in their class regularly. They use this information to plan for the next steps in pupils' learning suitably.

The school's provision to support pupils with weaker literacy skills is good. Staff develop detailed individual plans to meet pupils' additional needs effectively. They plan measurable targets for improvement and track pupil progress rigorously. The school provides a wide range of purposeful intervention programmes to improve pupils' speech and language, spelling and reading skills. Well-trained staff deliver the literacy programmes effectively. As a result, nearly all targeted pupils make good progress from their individual starting points. Intervention sessions that focus on pupils' wellbeing are effective and they enable pupils to participate in lessons successfully, enriching their self-esteem and co-operation skills.

The school provides personalised learning programmes for pupils attending the learning resource base from other schools in the local authority. These have a positive impact on their individual progress and achievements. Positive relationships between the staff of the learning resource base and teachers of the host schools support pupils' integration into mainstream settings positively. New strategies to improve parental involvement in their children's learning are developing well.

The school promotes pupils' spiritual and moral development effectively during personal and social lessons and class assemblies. Visits to perform in the local

church and a retirement home promote pupils' cultural and social skills appropriately. Close links with a school in Uganda, which includes sponsoring a child's education and providing them with electronic resources, develops pupils' understanding of different cultures successfully.

Staff promote pupils' understanding of the importance of values such as tolerance and the entitlement to be free of harassment and discrimination successfully. A good example is the quality of the discussion by older pupils when exploring the human rights of the Jewish community during their studies of the Second World War.

The school has appropriate arrangements to promote healthy eating and drinking and staff encourage pupils to participate in regular sporting activities effectively. As a result, most pupils understand the importance of choosing a healthy lifestyle. Staff encourage pupils to voice their opinions and respond well to their suggestions. Notable examples include the colour choice for the new school uniform and the introduction of rewards for good attendance.

The school provides a good range of opportunities for pupils to learn the importance of staying safe, for example by highlighting the dangers of substance misuse and teaching them internet safety rules. The school's arrangements for safeguarding pupils meet requirements and give no cause for concern.

Leadership and management: Good

The headteacher places pupils' wellbeing at the heart of the school's vision and philosophy. All staff ensure there is a caring and inclusive environment. This has a positive impact on pupils' progress, their attitudes to learning and behaviour.

New arrangements to distribute leadership roles and to hold leaders to account for the quality and impact of their work are developing appropriately. They draw effectively on staff skills to ensure a clear focus on improving the quality of teaching and a shared understanding of professional values. As a result, all staff focus well on ensuring that most pupils make good progress from their individual starting points.

The school's processes to evaluate its effectiveness are sound and based on a wide range of first-hand evidence. The systems to improve quality include listening to learners, lesson observations, the views of parents and a thorough analysis of assessment data. As a result, leaders have a clear picture of the school's strengths and areas for development. They use this information appropriately to identify a manageable number of suitable priorities, set against realistic timescales, which includes a focus on raising pupils' self-esteem. The leadership team measures the impact of its strategies on school improvement. However, leaders do not yet evaluate the impact of improvement work on pupils' outcomes rigorously enough and this process is at an early stage of development.

Senior leaders take good account of national and local priorities and they match these purposefully to the long-term needs of the pupils. For example, teachers plan a range of interesting tasks and activities to develop pupils' ICT skills successfully. Additionally, all staff promote effective literacy practices and as a result, most pupils develop good speaking, listening and reading skills as they move through the school.

The performance management procedures are effective. Leaders ensure that all staff have access to relevant learning opportunities to support their professional development and link closely with school improvement priorities. A positive feature of this process is that the staff develop skills that they use effectively to improve pupils' outcomes. A notable example of success is the Welsh sabbatical training for support staff, which impacts positively on pupils' Welsh language skills across the whole school.

The school is developing well as a professional learning organisation. It works effectively to share good practice with other schools locally and in other areas of Wales. This supports the school's capacity for continuous improvement and provides teachers with worthwhile opportunities to measure and share their effectiveness with other professionals. As a result, teachers combine their expertise, through visiting each other's schools. A positive example of this is the partnership work with another school, to improve pupils' attitudes to learning.

The school uses the pupil development grant purposefully to improve the wellbeing and achievement of pupils eligible for free school meals through effective intervention programmes.

The governing body is supportive and knows the school and the community it serves well. Governors are knowledgeable about the overall performance of pupils. They contribute appropriately to the school's self-evaluation processes. For example, they meet with teachers with responsibilities regularly to evaluate the impact of provision on pupils' outcomes. Staff and pupils provide detailed reports to the governing body to explain the difference that initiatives make to the work and life of the school. This knowledge enables governors to challenge leaders effectively to improve the school further. Governors monitor expenditure prudently and ensure that spending decisions match the school's priorities for improvement.

Copies of the report

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

Estyn evaluates a provider's effectiveness using a four-point judgement scale:

Excellent	Very strong, sustained performance and practice
Good	Strong features, although minor aspects may require improvement
Adequate and needs improvement	Strengths outweigh weaknesses, but important aspects require improvement
Unsatisfactory and needs urgent improvement	Important weaknesses outweigh strengths

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