



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

A report on

**Rhydyfro Primary School
Waun Penlan
Pontardawe
SA8 3BB**

Date of inspection: October 2018

by

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

About Rhydyfro Primary School

Rhydyfro Primary School is in the village of Rhydyfro, near Pontardawe, in Neath Port Talbot local authority. There are currently 144 pupils on roll aged 3 to 11, including 17 who attend the nursery part-time. There are six classes including the nursery.

The average proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals over the last three years is 36.6%. This is well above the national average of 18%. The school identifies 28% of pupils as having additional learning needs. This is above the national average of 21%. Nearly all pupils come from a white ethnic background and speak English as a first language. Very few pupils come from Welsh speaking homes.

The headteacher took up his post in September 2017 and the deputy headteacher assumed her role in September 2016. In key stage 2, a senior leader is currently on a year's in-service course and two other teachers are new to the school. The last inspection was in July 2012.

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

The school creates a happy and safe environment in which all pupils can thrive. Following a period of instability, the school has made notable improvements in many aspects of its work. As a result, the overall quality of its provision for pupils' learning and wellbeing is effective.

Most pupils enjoy the interesting learning experiences teachers provide for them. Consequently, many make good progress from their starting points as they move through the school, including pupils with additional learning needs.

The headteacher, ably supported by the deputy headteacher, provides strong leadership. He communicates a clear vision for the future direction of the school to all members of staff, parents and governors. There is now a strong team ethos, and morale is high, as members of staff and governors work together effectively to meet identified priorities for improvement.

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 Provide a consistently effective level of challenge in lessons to meet the needs of all pupils
- R2 Improve the quality of pupils' handwriting and presentation of their work
- R3 Strengthen pupils' use of their higher order reading skills as they move through the school
- R4 Increase opportunities for pupils to apply their information and communication technology skills confidently

What happens next

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

Main findings

Standards: Good

Most pupils enter school with skills that are at, or below, those expected for their age. Many make good progress and achieve expected levels, or better, by the end of key stage 2. Most pupils with additional learning needs make good progress from their starting points, but pupils of higher ability do not always achieve as well as they could.

Throughout the school, most pupils listen attentively to adults and become increasingly considerate when listening to other pupils' views. Initially, many pupils in the nursery lack confidence in speaking, but most make good progress in their conversational skills. By the end of the foundation phase, many pupils initiate conversations and talk confidently about their experiences.

In key stage 2, most pupils use their speaking and listening skills well to support their learning. For example, pupils in upper key stage 2 devise questions to ask a pupil acting in role as a soldier in the first world war. They then incorporate these questions effectively in letters they write to him whilst serving at the 'front'.

Pupils generally have a positive attitude to learning Welsh. In formal Welsh lessons, most pupils respond well to instructions and questions, showing a developing understanding of the content. However, many pupils are less confident in participating in informal conversations in Welsh.

In the foundation phase, most pupils read for a wide range of purposes, including in their role play activities, and make good progress in their reading skills. Many pupils enjoy listening to stories and have a good recall of their favourite tales. Most pupils use their knowledge of letters and sounds in both English and Welsh to read unfamiliar words effectively.

In key stage 2, the majority of pupils enjoy reading and use appropriate strategies when they get stuck on a word. Many pupils know the difference between fiction and non-fiction and the purpose of contents and index pages. However, they do not consistently adapt their reading strategies efficiently to suit their purpose, such as skimming and scanning to locate specific information. Many pupils enjoy reading Welsh texts at an appropriate level, but a few pupils struggle to understand texts read as a whole class.

Pupils in the foundation phase write for a good range of purposes such as recounts, rhyming potions and posters. The majority write at increasing length and begin to structure their writing effectively with connectives such as 'first' and 'next'. Most pupils' spelling is developing well. A few pupils write neatly, but a minority do not write clearly and legibly.

During key stage 2, the range and length of most pupils' writing increases. For instance, in upper key stage 2, pupils write play scripts, letters and theatre reviews related to the first world war. When writing a soliloquy, the best pieces of writing capture the mood of the moment well. For example, a pupil in Year 6 wrote about a

mother's anxiety as a telegram, 'was pushed through the letter box and it felt like forever as it fell on the floor.' Pupils' spelling is generally appropriate for their age. However, pupils' handwriting is often immature and the standard of presentation of their work varies considerably. By the end of key stage 2, most pupils write effective factual and personal information in Welsh.

In both key stages, most pupils develop their numeracy skills well and apply them effectively in real-life contexts. For instance, in the foundation phase, they calculate the number of pupils having school dinner or packed lunch and the difference between them. In upper key stage 2, pupils compare the price of everyday items in 2018 with those in 1913 by converting pounds, shillings and pence to current decimal values. During key stage 2, most pupils develop a sound understanding of place value and the relationships between numbers. Many tackle problem-solving exercises with growing confidence.

Throughout the school, pupils' information and communication technology (ICT) skills are at an early stage of development because they have only recently had access to a good range of ICT equipment. Nevertheless, by Year 2, most pupils write confidently using a tablet computer and input pictures to enhance their work. In key stage 2, most pupils use audio and video effectively to make their work more interesting.

Wellbeing and attitudes to learning: Good

Nearly all pupils settle quickly and happily to class routines and expectations when they first start school. Most pupils become increasingly independent as they move through the foundation phase. For example, they make sensible choices as they move from one activity to another.

Nearly all pupils feel safe and secure in school and know who to talk to if they are worried or upset. They are confident that adults will listen to their concerns and deal with any problems promptly. Most pupils have a positive attitude to learning, focus well on their tasks and are eager to do well.

Most pupils behave well in lessons and when moving around the school. They are sensitive to the needs of others and treat visitors with respect. Nearly all pupils play harmoniously and energetically at break times and lunchtimes. They share the playground spaces fairly so that they can play ball games and use other play equipment safely. School prefects support these activities well, identifying any pupil who appears to need a friend. Other pupils with responsibilities help make play times fun. For example, members of the 'Cryw Cymraeg' have recently introduced Welsh games, such as 'Mae pont Rhydyfro', based on the rhyme about London Bridge.

Most pupils understand how to make healthy choices relating to diet, physical activity and emotional wellbeing. For example, pupils in the foundation phase enjoy activities and games that help them understand the effect of eating different amounts of food on their hearts. Throughout the school, pupils talk knowledgeably about sensible food choices and know what constitutes a healthy lunch box. Many pupils appreciate having fruit snacks at break times, some of which they purchase from the school fruit tuck shop.

Pupils from Years 2 to 6 elect representatives to various groups and committees appropriately. The representatives collect the views of all pupils about life in school and make effective plans to improve aspects of its provision. For example, they agree how to spend a grant from a local supermarket to improve playground facilities. They then report back to their class mates on the outcomes from their meetings. This process gives pupils a valuable insight into one way of being an active citizen.

The work of the eco council promotes pupils' understanding of the need to care for their environment very well. For example, pupils in the foundation phase write about their excitement when they watched Tim Peake circle the earth. They write with a sense of awe and wonder when describing what the earth looks like from space.

Most pupils develop a sound understanding of the articles contained in the United Nations Rights of the Child. They use their knowledge of the articles sensibly to justify their actions and opinions. For example, an older pupil used the current article, the right to an education, spontaneously to remonstrate with his partners that if they did not focus on the task in hand, they would not be able to complete their work successfully.

Nearly all pupils understand the importance of attending school regularly and respond positively to the school's efforts to encourage good attendance. As a result, there has been a marked improvement in pupils' attendance rates over the last year.

Teaching and learning experiences: Good

The school's approach to the long, medium and short-term planning of pupils' learning experiences is comprehensive. The planned two-year rolling programme includes exciting topics, such as the work of the emergency services in the foundation phase and super heroes in key stage 2. Recent changes to the curriculum have greatly improved pupils' interest in their topics. For example, pupils in lower key stage 2, who are studying the Celts, recount enthusiastically Boudicca's battle with the Romans and her subsequent poisoning.

Pupils are beginning to contribute their own ideas about topics they would like to research through 'question trees' that have been established in many classes. This strengthens further pupils' commitment to their learning.

In the foundation phase, there is a good balance between adult-led activities and those which pupils carry out independently. Imaginative role play areas, such as a doctor's surgery in the nursery and the Pudding Lane bakery in Years 1 and 2, help pupils extend their understanding of the human body or the causes and consequences of the great fire of London.

Teachers' planning includes many worthwhile opportunities for pupils to use their literacy skills in real-life contexts and build their skills as they move through the school. The provision for pupils to apply their numeracy skills for a real purpose in their work in all areas of learning is developing well. However, opportunities for pupils to develop secure competence in using their ICT skills are at an earlier stage of development. This is because of pupils' relatively recent access to a good range of equipment that enables them to develop their skills effectively.

Educational visits related to current topics reinforce pupils' understanding well. For example, pupils in upper key stage 2 visited the theatre to see a play set in the first world war. Their deepened appreciation of soldiers' experiences as a result of this visit is evident in the letters they write to a brother serving at the front. Such visits also aid pupils' long-term recall of their learning. For instance, pupils in Year 3 last year visited the Victorian school room at St. Fagan's museum of Welsh life. This trip helped pupils now in Year 4 to recall vividly many details about the life of a Victorian school child.

The school promotes pupils' Welsh language skills well. Pupils in the 'Cryw Cymraeg' and 'Helpwr Heddiw', today's helpers, have prominent and effective roles in modelling simple language patterns in all classes. The school develops pupils' awareness of Welsh history and culture successfully through visits to places such as Llancaiach Fawr, in connection with their Tudors topic, and through its introduction of Welsh songs and legends such as Cantre'r Gwaelod.

There are strong working relationships between all teachers and pupils. Lessons have clear learning objectives and teachers ensure that pupils understand the criteria for the successful completion of their tasks. For example, teachers in the foundation phase present short video clips at the start of a lesson illustrating 'three steps to success,' which help pupils understand what they expect of them.

Teachers use stimulating resources and a good range of different approaches in their lessons, which engage most pupils productively in their learning. However, the level of challenge offered to pupils does not meet all their needs consistently well. Tasks are sometimes too easy for a few pupils and too hard for a few others so that they do not always complete their work. The over-use of worksheets in a majority of classes constrains pupils' capacity to present their work creatively and independently.

Teaching assistants use their skills well to support pupils' learning. They communicate useful information to teachers about how well pupils manage tasks in the activities they lead. This is particularly evident in the foundation phase, where assistants' notes from their observations inform teachers' planning of future learning experiences usefully.

Teachers give helpful oral and written feedback to pupils about their work to help them improve next time. During Directed Improvement and Reflection Time (DIRT), pupils engage productively in assessing and correcting their own work using a 'blue for better' pen. At present, however, teachers do not give pupils longer term targets to work towards and there are few opportunities for pupils to assess one another's work.

Care, support and guidance: Good

The school creates a happy and safe environment in which pupils can thrive. Close links with the 'Flying Start' group based in the nursery classroom help ensure a smooth transition into school life for the youngest pupils. The school's arrangements for safeguarding pupils meet requirements and give no cause for concern. Staff ensure that pupils know how to keep safe when using the internet. For example, 'Buddy the Dog' helps pupils in the foundation phase understand what is safe, or unsafe, when using tablet computers.

As a result of its effective joint working with the local authority, the school has established a comprehensive new system for tracking and recording pupils' progress as they move through the school. This ensures that staff can access the information they need to support pupils' learning outcomes. Teachers are beginning to use this information effectively to maximise pupils' progress.

Provision for pupils who need extra help with their learning is strong. All identified pupils have relevant individual learning plans which staff, pupils and parents review regularly. These plans meet the needs of individual pupils well. However, they are generally written for adults and pupils do not always easily understand the language used in them.

Suitably trained members of staff deliver a wide range of useful intervention programmes to improve pupils' literacy and numeracy skills and support their social and emotional needs. For example, pupils access very effective small group activities that help them develop their skills in communicating with one another. This raises pupils' self-esteem and leads to improved levels of confidence and engagement in school life.

The school promotes its core values, such as tolerance and respect, effectively. For example, it teaches pupils about the diverse nature of their world and has recently introduced pupils to the articles of the United Nations Rights of a Child. Although this initiative is in the early stages of development, many pupils are beginning to use the articles to support their discussions of relevant issues. For example, pupils in the foundation phase explore the Chinese new year, which helps them appreciate the cultural traditions that exist in different parts of the world. Older pupils explore the way in which religion influences cultural customs, such as why Sikhs wear turbans.

The school's new communication procedures with parents are very efficient. For example, parents receive timely and pertinent information about forthcoming events and topics through a new phone application. The school has recently established the 'HWB' ICT learning platform which pupils can access at home as well as in school. This gives parents valuable help in supporting their child's learning. The school's new 'open-door' policy has increased parents' opportunities to share any concerns they may have about their child and to work with staff to resolve them.

The school has effective arrangements for promoting healthy eating and drinking. It offers regular opportunities for physical exercise in lessons and in a broad range of after school activities. These help pupils stay fit and healthy. For example, pupils in upper key stage 2 record the effects of exercise on their hearts, which helps them understand the importance of exercise to their health and physical wellbeing. Pupils in key stage 2 enjoy opportunities to participate in local sports festivals and competitions, such as the Rotary club's football festival. The school provides a good range of enjoyable extra-curricular clubs, such as 'animaltastics' and construction that enrich pupils' learning and wellbeing effectively.

A strong emphasis on the value of attending school regularly, supported by a rigorous tracking system and rewards that pupils appreciate, has had a notable effect on pupils' attendance rates.

Leadership and management: Good

The headteacher took up his post following a period of instability in the life of the school. His early meetings with staff, parents and governors to ascertain their views of the school enabled him to develop a very clear vision for its future direction. He shares his vision successfully, so that there is now a clear team ethos throughout the school and staff morale is high.

The headteacher is a strong role model and has high expectations of both staff and pupils. The deputy headteacher provides highly effective support for him, particularly in areas such as curriculum development, the provision for pupils with additional learning needs and the tracking of pupils' progress as they move through the school.

All members of staff have clear job descriptions and understand their roles and responsibilities well. The school is building the leadership capacity of teachers through a purposeful programme of professional development. Senior leadership team meetings and staff meetings enable all staff, including teaching assistants, to contribute purposefully to the strategic direction of the school.

Governors contribute a valuable range of relevant skills and expertise to the school. They support school leaders well in their drive to improve in areas such as the resourcing of ICT and the quality of teaching and learning. The school responds well to local and national priorities. For example, it is preparing purposefully for the new curriculum for Wales and the implementation of the digital competence framework.

Arrangements for monitoring and evaluating the school's performance are robust. The headteacher and senior leadership team have an accurate understanding of the school's strengths and areas for improvement, such as the development of pupils' ICT skills. The school improvement plan links closely with the findings of the self-evaluation report. It has a manageable number of priorities, such as reading and numeracy skills, and is an effective tool for bringing about improvements.

Governors receive useful information about aspects of leadership, provision and pupils' standards through regular reports from the headteacher. However, they are at an early stage in taking an active role in the self-evaluation process. Links between governors and teachers in particular classes, or with responsibility for specific areas of learning, are developing well. Governors take an active interest in the school and have begun to visit more purposefully to strengthen their understanding of its performance. For example, they take 'learning walks' with teachers, talk to staff and pupils and join teachers in evaluating the work in pupils' books.

Governors and leaders have a strong understanding of the school's finances. They monitor the budget diligently and direct spending efficiently to help meet the school's priorities for improvement. Teachers generally use available resources effectively, and often imaginatively, to support teaching and learning. However, texts used for pupils' reading in English and Welsh do not match their needs consistently well. The school has a very attractive 'forest school' area which it is not yet exploiting fully to extend pupils' learning experiences.

Leaders use additional funding, such as the pupil development grant, successfully. For example, the school spends some of this grant well on pastoral care to support the emotional wellbeing of vulnerable pupils. The school trains and deploys staff effectively to deliver intervention programmes for pupils needing additional support with their learning. As a result, most pupils in these groups make good progress in their learning.

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.

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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