



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

**A report on**

**St Mary's Aided Primary School  
Ael y Bryn  
Brymbo  
LL11 5DA**

**Date of inspection: October 2018**

**by**

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

## About St Mary's Aided Primary School

St. Mary's Aided Primary School is in the village of Brymbo, on the outskirts of Wrexham, in Wrexham local authority. There are currently 134 pupils on roll between the ages of 3 and 11, including 16 part-time pupils in the nursery. The school has one single-age class, four mixed-age classes and a resource provision unit for pupils with moderate learning difficulties.

The three-year rolling average of pupils eligible for free school meals is around 18%, which is in line with the national average. The school identifies around 17% of pupils as having additional learning needs. This is below the national average of 21%. A very few pupils have a statement of special educational needs. Around 8% of pupils have English as an additional language and no pupils speak Welsh at home.

The school was last inspected in March 2012. The current headteacher took up his post in September 2015. There have been a number of staffing changes. The deputy head was appointed in September 2017. The acting foundation phase lead started this role in September 2018 and three out of the five teachers also started in September 2018.

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

Leaders and staff at St Mary's Aided Primary School work diligently to create a friendly, caring environment, where pupils feel happy and safe, and enjoy their learning. As a result, most pupils make suitable progress. Nearly all pupils behave well in lessons and around the school. As they move through the school, many pupils become capable mathematicians who enjoy solving problems. They develop effective speaking and listening skills, and make strong progress with their reading and spelling. Throughout the school many pupils use a narrow range of information and communication technology (ICT) skills with confidence. However, in general pupils' Welsh oracy skills are not at the expected level.

The school's curriculum is often engaging and exciting, and its learning environment is attractive and well organised. However, planning for the application of pupils' numeracy skills is inconsistent. Teachers provide pupils with valuable opportunities to develop their independent learning skills and to direct their learning. However, at present, this is too variable across the school.

The school is developing a sound track record of making improvements. The process of self-evaluation and planning for improvement is at an early stage of development. Leaders make sound use of the assessment of pupils' work and tracking data to identify areas where standards need to improve. However, monitoring activities do not always identify clearly enough important areas to help raise pupils' standards.

<b>Inspection area</b>	<b>Judgement</b>
<b>Standards</b>	<b>Adequate and needs improvement</b>
<b>Wellbeing and attitudes to learning</b>	<b>Adequate and needs improvement</b>
<b>Teaching and learning experiences</b>	<b>Adequate and needs improvement</b>
<b>Care, support and guidance</b>	<b>Adequate and needs improvement</b>
<b>Leadership and management</b>	<b>Adequate and needs improvement</b>

## **Recommendations**

- R1 Improve monitoring and school improvement processes to ensure they focus robustly on raising standards
- R2 Involve all staff, parents, pupils and governors in contributing ideas to bring about school improvement
- R3 Raise pupils standards in ICT and Welsh oracy
- R4 Improve pupils' independent learning skills in key stage 2
- R5. Ensure teachers' planning enables pupils to develop their numeracy skills systematically across the curriculum

## **What happens next**

The school will draw up an action plan, which shows how it is going to address the recommendations. Estyn will review the school's progress.

## Main findings

### Standards: Adequate and needs improvement

Many pupils enter the school with literacy and numeracy skills around those expected for their age, and by the end of key stage 2, most make suitable progress. Most pupils identified as having additional learning needs, and those in the resource provision unit, make worthwhile progress towards their personal goals. The progress of pupils that are more able varies.

In the foundation phase, most pupils listen to adults and each other well. They talk to visitors about their learning confidently. Many younger pupils develop a solid understanding of letters and sounds. They enjoy looking through books in the 'book nook', handling them like a reader. Most older foundation phase pupils have a clear understanding of which strategies to use to help them read unfamiliar words. As a result, they read with increasing fluency and confidence. Many pupils in nursery and reception enjoy experimenting with mark making and eagerly produce pieces of emergent writing. By the end of Year 2, many pupils organise their ideas well, and present interesting and engaging pieces of extended writing, for example when composing rhyming poems, using phrases such as 'the crunchy carrot went to the shop and the fluffy rabbit followed with a hop'.

As they progress through key stage 2, many pupils talk confidently when explaining and sharing their ideas on how to solve mathematical problems. Many pupils use their reading skills effectively to extract key information about inventions. Pupils in Year 5 and Year 6 read, recall and discuss their reading texts enthusiastically, when writing book reviews. Many key stage 2 pupils understand how to structure their writing for different purposes, such as producing short reports or recounts. However, they do not always present or punctuate their work well enough when writing independently at length.

Throughout the school, many pupils make suitable progress in developing their Welsh language skills. In the foundation phase, many pupils respond to instructions given by adults quickly. They use a few simple words and phrases competently to describe how they feel and to discuss the weather. By Year 6, many pupils sustain a basic conversation about their hobbies. Many read simple texts with growing understanding and generally accurate pronunciation. Many are beginning to write short sentences, following taught language patterns. However, in general pupils' Welsh oracy skills across the school are not at the expected level.

Many pupils develop a solid knowledge of mathematical concepts and are confident mathematicians by the time they reach Year 6. In the foundation phase, most pupils make good progress in developing their mathematical and numeracy skills. Many younger pupils demonstrate their understanding of repeating patterns and early number recognition well, as part of their role-play activities. Many Year 2 pupils understand the concept of making amounts of money using different combinations of coins, when 'buying' decorations to make crowns for the royal banquet. More able pupils work at a high level when ordering numbers to 100 from the lowest to the highest, accurately.

Towards the end of key stage 2, many older pupils use and apply mental or written mathematical strategies successfully. They answer questions quickly when working out the area and perimeter of shapes. Most use their number skills well when trying different methods to solve problems. They check their answers carefully, giving clear explanations for their reasoning. However, in general, pupil's application of their numeracy skills is inconsistent across the school.

Throughout the school many pupils use a narrow range of ICT skills with confidence. They access games and applications through a computer tablet independently, to support the development of their mathematical skills. Nearly all are aware of the importance of internet safety and the need to keep passwords safe. Many nursery pupils experiment with a small programmable toy confidently, programming it to change direction with growing independence. Older foundation phase pupils film each other when acting out part of their favourite story, 'The Paper Bag Princess'. They competently press the correct buttons to record, play and pause. Most key stage 2 pupils use their word processing skills well to research and present information about an invention, as part of their topic work. However, they have a limited knowledge and understanding of how to input data onto electronic spreadsheets and databases for a range of purposes.

### **Wellbeing and attitudes to learning: Adequate and needs improvement**

Most pupils feel safe and secure in school and know who to talk to if they are worried or upset. They feel confident that their concerns are listened to.

Nearly all pupils behave well in lessons and as they move around the school. This ensures a calm working ethos. Pupils are polite, well-mannered and respectful of the feelings of others, and resolve minor disputes maturely. Pupils in the resource provision unit show confidence when engaging in school activities, such as physical education lessons and assemblies. This develops their social skills effectively.

Pupils show a good awareness of fairness, equality, trust and truthfulness. As a result, nearly all are kind and considerate. During assemblies, pupils reflect well on what they are thankful for, and are keen to help others less fortunate than themselves, for example in providing food for the homeless in Wrexham.

Nearly all pupils in the foundation phase are confident when approaching new challenges and work independently to solve problems. They sustain concentration and work purposefully. They enjoy using sand timers when completing tasks. These encourage them to persevere and to not give up at the first mistake. Most foundation phase pupils make a valuable contribution to directing their learning.

In key stage 2, most pupils engage well with their learning and persevere appropriately, for example when trying to work out how to measure the perimeter of a hoop. However, many pupils do not make sufficient progress in developing their independent learning skills, limiting the progress they make.

Many pupils are keen to contribute to the life of the school. However, their role in decision making is underdeveloped. Across the school, nearly all pupils work effectively with their 'talk partners' when discussing their work. They listen attentively to the views of others and accept opinions which are different to their own.

Nearly all pupils make healthy food choices at snack time, and many select salads to accompany their school lunch. The school council helps to promote and monitor this successfully. Foundation phase pupils understand how a tooth brushing initiative helps to keep their teeth healthy.

### **Teaching and learning experiences: Adequate and needs improvement**

In many cases teachers plan stimulating and exciting activities that develop pupils' skills, knowledge and understanding effectively. These include a range of beneficial trips and events, to support and enrich pupils' learning experiences. For example, foundation phase pupils held a royal banquet, following their work on castles. Teachers in the resource provision unit use dance and song creatively, to help consolidate pupils' understanding of counting in 2s, 3s, 5s and 10s.

Teachers take appropriate account of pupils' interests at the start of topics. Many provide regular opportunities for pupils to make choices about what and how they learn, which motivates them successfully. Teachers in the foundation phase provide exciting 'challenges' linked to current themes. They take good account of pupils' suggestions and changing interests, when planning engaging indoor and outside learning activities. For example, pupils were challenged to construct a small catapult linked to their topic on castles, independently. Many then chose to measure how far a small foam ball travelled when fired from it, using centimetres. This fosters the development of pupils' thinking skills effectively, and helps them to practise their numeracy skills in a fun and active way. In key stage 2, most pupils write down ideas about what they would like to find out about at the start of a topic, and teachers adapt their planning accordingly. However, the level of independent choice in how pupils tackle and present this work varies.

Teachers and other adults have high expectations of pupil behaviour, and use positive praise well to encourage pupils to persevere. In most classes, teachers question pupils skilfully to check on their progress, and, in the best examples, to challenge them to produce work of high quality. However, this approach is inconsistent, and learning does not always meet the needs of pupils at the correct level. As a result, pupils do not always fully understand what they need to do, and their rate of progress slows.

Teachers are beginning to respond well to recent initiatives to improve aspects of teaching and learning. This is particularly evident in the planning for the development of pupils' literacy skills across the curriculum. This is raising pupils' reading, oracy and spelling skills effectively. The school incorporates the literacy and numeracy framework suitably into its plans and is beginning to consider the digital competency framework appropriately. However, overall, there are insufficient opportunities to develop pupils' ICT and numeracy skills systematically, in a broader range of tasks, across the curriculum.

Through regular Welsh sessions and activities, teachers promote pupils' use of the Welsh language suitably. However, they do not plan for the progressive development of pupils' Welsh language skills well enough.

There are worthwhile opportunities for pupils to learn about Welsh history and culture. In key stage 2, pupils work closely with the Brymbo Heritage Group as part of the Remembrance Day service to mark the centenary of the First World War.

Pupils are making soldiers' helmets to represent the men from Brymbo who lost their lives. This develops their sense of empathy and an understanding of local history meaningfully, as they look into the lives of these men, and put faces to the names on the cenotaph.

Teachers provide useful feedback to pupils about what they do well and how they could improve their work. All teachers provide regular opportunities for pupils to assess the quality of their own, and the work of others. This is beginning to support pupils' understanding of where they need to improve their work. It is supporting older pupils well, in being able to discuss their next steps in learning, more clearly.

### **Care, support and guidance: Adequate and needs improvement**

The school has an inclusive and welcoming ethos. It provides strong support for pupils with additional learning needs and those who access the resource provision unit. There is an extensive range of well-planned intervention programmes that develop the literacy and numeracy skills of these pupils successfully.

The school caters for the needs of vulnerable pupils well through high quality interventions. These support their social and emotional skills effectively. The use of art therapy allows these pupils to express, explore and manage their emotions in a more mature way.

Leaders use tracking information well to identify groups of learners at risk of underperforming and to challenge pupils that are more able appropriately. They hold regular meetings with teachers to evaluate individual pupils' progress, and to set future targets. However, individual pupil targets are not always specific enough to enable pupils to make beneficial progress.

The school has appropriate arrangements to promote healthy eating, drinking and lifestyles. There is a worthwhile range of extra-curricular activities, such as tennis, football and netball. These are well attended and have a positive impact on pupils' personal development and wellbeing. Older pupils benefit from visiting an outdoor activity centre. This helps them to develop their resilience and confidence to tackle new experiences.

The school has close links with the community and visits from the police, school nurse and local fire service, strengthen pupils understanding of keeping healthy and safe. The school attends regular services at the local church to celebrate events such as key Harvest time. This encourages pupils to reflect on their own beliefs and values successfully. Pupils from the resource provision unit attend weekly horse riding sessions, which enriches their learning experiences, and develops their confidence well.

The school uses newsletters and their website to keep parents suitably informed about day-to-day activities. However, they do not communicate with them well enough on wider issues, for example with regards to what their child is learning about and how best they could support them at home. The school facilitates regular parent and teacher consultations, and sends home an end of year report. However, these vary in quality, and, as a result, parents are not always clear about what level their child is working at, or the next steps needed to move their learning on.

The school's arrangements for safeguarding meet requirements and give no cause for concern.



## **Leadership and management: Adequate and needs improvement**

The headteacher has a clear vision for the school with a strong focus on raising standards and meeting pupils' social and emotional needs. He is well supported by the relatively new senior leadership team. Together they are beginning to have a positive impact on the work of the school. In particular in developing consistency of expectation in regards to what pupils can achieve, and effective classroom practices, to support pupils' independent learning. However, these are at an early stage of development and, as such, have yet to fully impact on standards.

Teachers work closely together as an effective team and make a valuable contribution in supporting whole school initiatives. These include improving long term planning to focus more clearly on developing pupils' literacy skills. Foundation phase staff benefit from visits to other schools and from external advice. The impact is clearly evident in the consistency of approach to delivering high quality foundation phase teaching and learning. Leaders ensure teaching assistants are deployed well in the foundation phase. However, this is less effective in key stage 2 where there is a greater variation in how the resource is allocated to support pupils' learning.

There are good systems in place to ensure staff are kept fully informed about school developments. Weekly staff meetings focus on school priorities for bringing about improvement, suitably. Teachers provide strong support for teaching assistants and ensure they are clear about their roles and responsibilities. All teaching staff contribute to the regular monitoring of provision, and progress towards addressing school priorities. For example, the scrutiny of pupils' work is effective in ensuring marking and feedback has a positive impact on pupils' understanding of how they can improve their work, thus raising standards.

The process of self-evaluation in planning for improvement, is at an early stage of development. Leaders make sound use of the assessment of pupils' work and tracking data, to identify areas where standards need to improve. They consult teachers and governors as part of the self-review process suitably. However, leaders do not fully involve all staff, parents, pupils and governors well enough in identifying what needs improvement. As a result, the process lacks rigour, and monitoring activities do not always identify important areas to help raise pupils' standards, clearly enough, for example in identifying improvements needed to the standard of pupils' ICT and Welsh language skills, and the inconsistency in provision to support the application of pupils' numeracy skills.

The governing body is well organised and provides a suitable level of support and challenge to the school. Governors make a valuable contribution to monitoring provision and pupils' attitudes to learning. However, the effectiveness of the governing body is limited due to the large number of governor vacancies.

The school is developing a sound track record of making improvements in some areas, with standards having risen in pupils' understanding of mathematical concepts. The school's work on national priorities is supported effectively through close working with other schools. The positive impact of this training and collaboration is evident in the development of leadership skills, and in developing a greater consistency in teaching approaches, through observations of each other. The school makes highly effective use of links with other schools in the local area and beyond to extend training opportunities. This ensures a more accurate assessment of pupils' work and encourages the sharing of good practice.

Leaders make effective use of staff expertise and experience. The expertise of teaching assistants is used well in the support provided for pupils with specific additional learning needs. The use of resources is enhanced by the sharing of the cost of a sport's coach with another school. The headteacher and governors ensure that they manage the school's finances robustly and maintain a suitable contingency fund each year.

## Copies of the report

Copies of this report are available from the school and from the Estyn website ([www.estyn.gov.wales](http://www.estyn.gov.wales))

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

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