



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

A report on

**Ysgol Gymraeg Gilfach Fargod
Commercial Street
Bargoed
Caerphilly
CF81 8JG**

Date of inspection: October 2019

by

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

About Ysgol Gymraeg Gilfach Fargod

The school is situated in the village of Gilfach on the outskirts of the town of Bargoed, in the heart of the Rhymney valley in Caerphilly local authority. Pupil numbers have declined over the last three years. There are now 141 pupils between 3 and 11 years old on roll, including 17 part-time nursery pupils.

Over the last three years, an average of 20% of pupils have been eligible for free school meals, which is higher than the national average of 18%. The school has identified 21% of its pupils as having additional learning needs. This is the same as the national average. Very few pupils come from Welsh-speaking homes.

The school was last inspected in January 2012. Since the summer term 2019, there has been a significant change in the school's leadership, and the acting headteacher began in post on a part-time contract in September 2019.

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, many pupils make adequate progress in their learning. This includes those with special educational needs. Although pupils' achievement and attainment are now beginning to improve, on the whole, only a few achieve to the best of their ability in their literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology (ICT) skills.

The school has a caring ethos, in which pupils and staff respect each other. As a result, pupils behave well and are willing to learn. On the whole, teachers provide tasks and experiences that engage many pupils' interest appropriately. However, teachers do not have high enough expectations to encourage all pupils to achieve as well as they could. The school does not have systematic procedures for tracking and evaluating pupils' progress. This is an important shortcoming and means that teachers do not identify pupils' specific needs in enough detail or measure their progress regularly enough.

The lack of strategic leadership over an extended period means that provision has not had a positive enough effect on pupils' standards. However, following significant support and guidance from officers from the regional consortium over the last six months, the school's leadership and management are beginning to improve. In a short period of time, the acting headteacher has identified the school's current strengths and areas for improvement well, and provides robust leadership in order to move it forward.

Inspection area	Judgement
Standards	Adequate and needs improvement
Wellbeing and attitudes to learning	Adequate and needs improvement
Teaching and learning experiences	Adequate and needs improvement
Care, support and guidance	Unsatisfactory and needs urgent improvement
Leadership and management	Unsatisfactory and needs urgent improvement

Recommendations

- R1 Ensure that leaders, including the governors, operate more effectively in setting a strategic direction for the school and challenging its performance
- R2 Improve self-evaluation and planning for improvement processes
- R3 Establish manageable progress-tracking procedures and ensure that teachers use them efficiently to extend learning
- R4 Ensure that provision for pupils with special educational needs meets their needs
- R5 Improve pupils' standards of literacy
- R6 Ensure that planning and teaching provide appropriate challenge for pupils to achieve to the best of their ability and develop as independent learners

What happens next

In accordance with the Education Act 2005, HMCI is of the opinion that this school is in need of significant improvement. The school will produce an action plan to show how it will address the recommendations. Estyn will monitor the school's progress around 12 months after the publication of this report.

Main findings

Standards: Adequate and needs improvement

During their time at the school, many pupils, including those with special educational needs, make adequate progress in their learning. However, pupils do not achieve to the best of their ability in their literacy, numeracy or information and communication technology (ICT) skills.

On entry to the foundation phase, many pupils' oral skills are lower than expected. Although they understand simple instructions and listen to other people's presentations appropriately, they have difficulty using appropriate language in classroom activities. By the end of the phase, a few more able pupils in Year 2 share their views with their peers and adults when undertaking different activities. In key stage 2, many speak more confidently and build appropriately on their previous experiences. By Year 6, many express an opinion clearly in both languages, listen carefully during discussions and provide relevant comments on the contributions of others. However, many do not use the Welsh language voluntarily in informal situations around the school.

A majority of pupils in the foundation phase make suitable progress in their Welsh reading skills. They have an appropriate understanding of sounds and apply their phonic knowledge suitably when interpreting unfamiliar words. However, a significant few have difficulty understanding what they are reading and are unsure of familiar vocabulary. Only a few read words correctly and discuss the content of their books intelligently. Very few older pupils in the foundation phase read fluently and with expression. By the end of key stage 2, many pupils develop their reading skills successfully in both languages and show a sound understanding of the text. Many understand how punctuation can vary the text and have an effect on syntax and the meaning of the sentence. More able pupils consider to what extent the text is effective in conveying information and ideas and, where appropriate, amend it in order to improve it.

Pupils' early writing skills are developing appropriately in Welsh. Younger pupils write very simple sentences and extend their vocabulary, for example to describe an animal. By Year 2, many understand that stories have a beginning, a middle and an end, and develop their use of a storyline well, for example when writing about a dinosaur's visit to the zoo. In key stage 2, many write appropriately for different purposes and audiences in both languages, for example when creating a leaflet for visitors based on Caerphilly Castle and research into the features of famous local battles. By the end of Year 6, many pupils write clearly and methodically in creative and factual genres on a variety of topics, such as clear instructions on how to make sushi. The majority use punctuation and paragraphs to structure and organise their written pieces. However, although this is beginning to develop, pupils' ability to write independently and at length is inconsistent. A majority of pupils' handwriting and presentation are not always neat.

In the foundation phase, a majority of pupils use and apply their numeracy skills regularly in various situations. By the end of Year 2, in a limited range of situations, they solve simple number problems suitably. Recently, many apply their number

skills to solve problems in the context of their theme work. For example, pupils follow instructions to help the little dinosaurs cross the swamp by building a bridge. In key stage 2, they have an appropriate understanding of number strategies and, by the end of the key stage, many pupils' mental mathematics skills are developing successfully. By Year 6, many use a wide range of appropriate strategies to solve problems and apply their numeracy skills purposefully in various activities across the curriculum. A good example of this is the way in which pupils research into the capacity of several rugby stadiums and place them in order from largest to smallest.

A majority of pupils' information and communication technology (ICT) skills are developing appropriately. In the foundation phase, most use apps appropriately to support their understanding of literacy and numeracy. Most pupils at the top of the phase control an electronic device well to find the correct path for the camel. Many pupils in key stage 2 conduct research on the internet to find information about different issues, such as the location of Welsh castles and the effects of deforestation on the environment. By the end of the stage, most use spreadsheets purposefully to find and compare suitable hotels in Japan for a visit during the Rugby World Cup. Many Year 6 pupils make effective and creative use of green screen technology to present information effectively about Mount Fuji. However, the skills range of a majority of pupils across the school has not been developed effectively enough to support their work fully across the curriculum.

Wellbeing and attitudes to learning: Adequate and needs improvement

Most pupils behave well in lessons and around the school. They are very friendly and caring towards each other, and treat adults and visitors with respect and courtesy.

Nearly all pupils feel safe at school and are confident that staff respond to any concerns they may have. They know to whom they can talk if they are worried or if they have a problem. A majority are aware of how to stay safe online. For example, they understand the importance of not sharing passwords or personal information with other people.

Nearly all pupils have a good understanding of the importance of eating and drinking healthily and how to keep fit. This is reinforced successfully as many take part in physical education activities within the curriculum and in after-school clubs. All pupils take part in daily fitness activities before the start of the school day, which prepares them for learning.

The school council is active and supports the school's priorities appropriately. One successful activity that has been conducted is the campaign to reduce the use of plastic in lunchboxes to raise their peers' awareness of the damage to the environment. Recently, under the guidance of the healthy schools officer, the school council has held a whole-school session on the importance of hand hygiene in order to reduce the risk of catching illnesses through spreading germs. However, pupils' role in leading their activities and making strategic decisions has not been developed in full. A few pupils shoulder additional responsibilities, such as the Digital Wizards, who have begun to meet to discuss improving the standard of the school's hardware.

Most pupils show that they are ready to learn at the beginning of lessons. They undertake activities well and, on the whole, enjoy their learning. Most are aware of the colour system that denotes the difficulty of a task. They concentrate for suitable periods when working independently on carousel activities. At the top of key stage 2, pupils work well together as they persevere when using a green screen to create a video of images of Japan as part of their independent task. However, pupils are over-reliant on instructions and support from adults, and their ability to work independently is limited. Many pupils do not have a clear understanding of their progress or what they need to do to improve. As a result, they do not take enough responsibility for their own learning. Very few pupils contribute to what they would like to learn.

Pupils' attendance rates have been inconsistent over the last three years and have placed the school in the bottom quartile in comparison with similar schools. Attendance has improved recently and pupils understand the importance of attending school regularly. Nearly all pupils arrive at school on time.

Teaching and learning experiences: Adequate and needs improvement

Respect between teachers, assistants and pupils ensures a comfortable learning environment across the school. The care that is given when preparing colourful and appealing displays in the classrooms celebrates pupils' efforts and supports teaching and learning purposefully.

A majority of teachers are good language models and encourage pupils to use the Welsh language regularly and correctly during the day. Although this has not yet become embedded, it raises pupils' awareness of the importance of accuracy and fluency when talking, in addition to the expectation for them to communicate with each other in Welsh regularly.

Teachers provide a wide variety of tasks and experiences which, on the whole, engage many pupils' interest appropriately. Many tasks meet most pupils' needs and enable them to make adequate progress. A majority of teachers share instructions clearly with pupils and question them appropriately to extend and develop their understanding. However, many teachers' expectations are too low and they do not challenge pupils enough to learn independently or achieve to the best of their ability.

Although foundation phase staff have developed an attractive outdoor area for pupils and give good attention to the focus tasks that they present to them, they have not addressed the inconsistencies in terms of the level of challenge or developed their independence in learning sufficiently. Similarly, although the tasks that are presented to pupils in key stage 2 engage many pupils' interest appropriately, teachers have a tendency to over-direct too often. This limits pupils' ability, particularly those who are most able, to achieve to the best of their ability and develop as independent learners.

Recently, the school has worked successfully with staff in a nearby school to revise curricular plans in order to ensure that they meet statutory requirements. They have also begun to prepare to deliver the new curriculum for Wales in due course. The change in the approach to planning has ensured that experiences that are provided for pupils are now broader. They are beginning to give appropriate consideration to

pupils' interests, in addition to opportunities for those at the top of the school to develop their skills and begin to take ownership for their own learning. However, it is too early to measure the effect of these changes on pupils' outcomes.

Planning to develop pupils' oral skills is developing appropriately. For example, they use a specific scheme in which teaching focuses specifically on widening pupils' vocabulary and developing their ability to discuss fairly successfully. Pupils are given interesting opportunities to write across the curriculum in a wide range of forms, but not enough attention is given to developing specific opportunities for them to write at length or develop their reading skills effectively enough. Provision to develop pupils' numeracy skills is appropriate and there is a variety of suitable opportunities for them to apply them across the curriculum. Teachers are beginning to embed the requirements of the digital competence framework in their plans and provide more suitable opportunities to enable pupils to use their ICT skills in various contexts. However, as the school does not have a system to track pupils' progress, teachers are unable to monitor learning in enough detail to ensure continuity and progression in provision within classes or from one year to the next.

Teachers mark pupils' work appropriately and provide comments on their efforts. However, comments are not always specific enough to enable pupils to understand how to improve their work and, on the whole, teachers do not use information from assessment procedures effectively enough to inform learning experiences. Very recently, teachers have begun to provide appropriate opportunities for pupils to evaluate their written work, but it is too early to see the effect of this on their learning.

Provision for the Welsh dimension is appropriate and this makes a valuable contribution to pupils' understanding of their local area and culture. The school enriches the learning experiences that are provided for pupils in the classes well by organising visits to places of interest, such as a local coal mine and historical houses. Teachers also provide opportunities for pupils to go on residential trips to develop their use of the Welsh language and their knowledge of Wales. Pupils' learning experiences are enriched further by inviting visitors, such as the caretaker who is a former miner, to the school to share his experiences with them while they learn about the village's mining history.

Care, support and guidance: Unsatisfactory and needs urgent improvement

Staff create a caring and supportive ethos in an environment that is safe for pupils. As a result, most feel confident in sharing their feelings and any concerns they may have with staff and their peers. There is a purposeful and effective focus on supporting pupils and promoting the wellbeing of those with emotional, physical and social needs. A good example of this is the way in which the school uses an external wellbeing specialist to provide a range of intervention groups for pupils who have difficulty controlling their emotions. The school's arrangements for safeguarding pupils meet requirements and are not a cause for concern.

Staff work appropriately with a wide range of specialist services, including a special educational needs advisory teacher, a behaviour officer and the educational psychologist to provide beneficial advice and support for individuals. However, pupils' individual education plans do not always describe clearly enough what is needed to meet their specific needs. As a result, the school is unable to evaluate

pupils' progress towards achieving the actions in these plans rigorously, and teachers do not know to what extent interventions and additional support work successfully. This is an important weakness in provision.

Within a short time, the acting headteacher has established a good working relationship with parents and shares useful information with them through social media and electronic newsletters. This ensures parents' involvement in their children's education. The school includes parents whose children have special educational needs in discussions and given them regular information about their achievement. It provides them with suitable information about how they can support their child at home; for example, staff refer vulnerable families to the local authority's family intervention team for advice and guidance. This has a positive effect on these pupils' behaviour and wellbeing.

One of the school's main weaknesses is the fact that it does not have systematic procedures for tracking and evaluating pupils' progress. This is an important weakness and means that teachers do not identify pupils' specific needs in enough detail or measure their progress regularly enough. There are also no specific opportunities for staff to discuss pupils' progress jointly or reflect on the effectiveness of provision. As a result, the school does not have a sound understanding of the performance of specific groups of pupils to enable it to understand to what extent new initiatives lead to improvements in outcomes. Although teachers have begun to identify more able pupils across the school, they do not offer additional provision to ensure that they achieve to the best of their ability.

The school has begun to organise groups of pupils to develop their leadership skills. For example, teachers are planning jointly with the digital leaders to improve the standard of the school's ICT hardware. However, leaders do not provide enough opportunities for pupils to have an independent influence on decisions about the school, particularly in relation to what they would like to learn.

The school has appropriate arrangements to promote eating and drinking healthily. It also provides a range of opportunities for pupils to consider their health and wellbeing through regular physical activities, which include 'a mile a day'. An appropriate range of extra-curricular activities provides appropriate opportunities for pupils to take part in sports, including rugby and netball.

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural attitudes are promoted effectively by providing opportunities for them to study the world's beliefs and through regular periods of collective worship. For example, a whole-school assembly is held during the harvest festival and supplies are collected for the local food bank. The school works appropriately to develop pupils' sense of community; for example, Year 5 and 6 pupils work with the local church to run a cafe for the elderly.

Leadership and management: Unsatisfactory and needs urgent improvement

On the whole, leaders have responded too slowly to ensure that provision has a positive enough effect on pupils' standards. The lack of strategic leadership over an extended period means that the school has not addressed important issues, such as establishing purposeful progress-tracking processes. However, following significant support and guidance from the consortium over the last six months, the school's

leadership and management are beginning to improve. In a short time, the acting headteacher has come to know the school well and provides robust leadership while moving the school forward. She has a sound understanding of the school's main strengths and areas for improvement. She works enthusiastically with governors and staff in order to implement a robust vision that is based on improving provision and raising standards.

The team of teachers and support staff work well together at the school, but the lack of leadership over an extended period has meant that they have not had a robust enough influence on improving standards. However, one of the acting headteacher's main aims is to develop the school's staff to become leading and knowledgeable practitioners. She has begun to improve the school's performance management methods and places staff's professional development at the heart of the work to improve the school. Although these activities are new, the headteacher has established a more purposeful procedure than existed previously and staff are confident that there will be better opportunities for them to develop professionally.

Governors are supportive of the school and hold regular meetings to discuss relevant issues. Many have conducted learning walks in order to increase their knowledge of what is happening within the school. However, on the whole, the governing body's knowledge of standards and teaching is limited. Although they have begun to reflect on the areas that are in need of improvement, governors do not challenge the school's performance sufficiently. Therefore, their ability to hold the school to account for the quality of provision and pupils' standards is limited. They have not taken enough responsibility for ensuring that important issues are improved, for example in terms of strengthening the quality of the school's leadership and setting an appropriate strategic direction over time.

Although the school's improvement plans have focused on useful priorities over the last two years, they are not based on sufficiently diagnostic evidence of the quality of provision and pupils' standards. Sufficiently robust self-evaluation processes have not been used over time. As a result, leaders have a superficial awareness of the main strengths and areas for improvement, and they do not identify the most important issues that the school needs to prioritise. The effect of this is that the school does not have a good enough record of making necessary improvements; for example, the recommendations from this inspection include aspects that are similar to the recommendation from the previous Estyn inspection. Very recently, the acting headteacher has begun to introduce a culture of self-evaluation based on analysis of first-hand evidence, such as scrutinising books, lesson observations and learning walks. She is forging more obvious links between self-evaluation processes and the school improvement plan. Although these actions are recent, robust improvement arrangements are already in place, for example to strengthen provision for mathematics and numeracy, literacy and the digital competence framework. However, it is too early for them to have enough of an influence on pupils' standards and the quality of provision.

Leaders keep appropriate oversight of the financial situation, and expenditure links clearly with the school's targets and plans. The school has a range of good quality resources, and classrooms provide an attractive learning environment. The school makes appropriate use of the pupil development grant in order to improve the skills of pupils who are eligible for free school meals and increase their attendance.

Evidence base of the report

Before an inspection, inspectors:

- analyse the outcomes from the parent and pupil questionnaires and consider the views of teachers and the governing body through their questionnaire responses

During an inspection, inspectors normally:

- hold a meeting with parents to hear their views on the school and its effectiveness
- meet the headteacher, governors, senior and middle leaders (where appropriate) and individual teachers to evaluate the impact of the school's work
- meet pupils to discuss their work, to listen to them read and to gain their views about various aspects of their school
- meet groups of pupils in leadership roles, such as representatives from the school council and eco-committee
- visit a broad sample of classes, including learning support groups and undertake a variety of learning walks to observe pupils learning and to see staff teaching in a range of settings, including classrooms, support groups and in outdoor areas
- where appropriate, visit the specialist resource base within the school to see pupils' learning
- observe and speak to pupils at lunch and break times and at a sample of after-school clubs, where appropriate
- attend assemblies and daily acts of collective worship
- look closely at the school's self-evaluation processes
- consider the school's improvement plan and look at evidence to show how well the school has taken forward planned improvements
- scrutinise a range of school documents, including information on pupil assessment and progress, records of meetings of staff and the governing body, information on pupils' wellbeing, including the safeguarding of pupils, and records of staff training and professional development

After the on-site inspection and before the publication of the report, Estyn:

- review the findings of the inspection alongside the supporting evidence from the inspection team in order to validate, moderate and ensure the quality of the inspection

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:

Publication Section

Estyn

Anchor Court, Keen Road

Cardiff

CF24 5JW or by email to publications@estyn.gov.wales

This and other Estyn publications are available on our website: www.estyn.gov.wales

This document has been translated by Trosol (Welsh to English).

© Crown Copyright 2019: This report may be re used free of charge in any format or medium provided that it is re used accurately and not used in a misleading context. The material must be acknowledged as Crown copyright and the title of the report specified.

Publication date: 19/12/2019