



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

A report on

**Ysgol-Y-Graig Primary School
Cefn Coed
Merthyr Tydfil
CF48 2LR**

Date of inspection: November 2019

by

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

About Ysgol-Y-Graig Primary School

Ysgol-Y-Graig Primary School is in Merthyr Tydfil. There are 193 pupils on roll, aged from 3 to 11, including 24 nursery pupils who attend full-time. There are seven single-aged classes, a nursery class and a pilot nurture class, which caters for pupils aged 7 to 11 at the school.

About 20% of pupils are eligible for free school meals, which is slightly above the national average of 18%. The school identifies around 21% of pupils as having special education needs. This is in line with the national average. Around 12% of pupils come from an ethnic minority background and around 8% have English as an additional language. No pupils speak Welsh at home.

The school's last inspection was in March 2015 and the current headteacher took up his post in January 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

The school has clear procedures to identify what it does well and what it needs to do to improve. The headteacher has high expectations of all staff and promotes a culture of continuous evaluation and improvement well. Since his appointment, he has implemented changes that have had a positive impact on pupils' standards, the quality of teaching and the school environment. Senior leaders contribute well to improvement planning and are beginning to develop their leadership skills effectively.

Pupils generally make suitable progress in developing their literacy and numeracy skills, but progress tends to accelerate as pupils move through key stage 2. However, they do not generally have opportunities to apply their information and communication technology (ICT) skills well enough across the curriculum. Many pupils behave well and have positive attitudes to learning, particularly in key stage 2. The school is an inclusive community and caters well for the needs of pupils in the nurture provision.

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	Good
Leadership and management	Good

Recommendations

- R1 Improve consistency in the quality of teaching across the school
- R2 Develop pupils' independent skills and give them a greater voice in what and how they learn
- R3 Develop the skills of leaders at all levels
- R4 Improve attendance

What happens next

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

Main findings

Standards: Adequate and needs improvement

Most pupils start school with skills at the expected level for their age. By the end of the foundation phase, many make suitable progress in developing their literacy and numeracy skills. Throughout key stage 2, most pupils progress well and, by Year 6, many achieve good standards in literacy and numeracy. A majority of pupils with additional learning needs, including those in the nurture class, make expected progress from their starting points and a few make better than expected progress. However, across the school, more able pupils do not always achieve as well as they could.

In the foundation phase, most pupils develop their speaking skills successfully. For example, they talk about their work clearly and retell familiar stories using puppets well. However, a minority of pupils do not listen carefully enough to adult instructions. As a result, they do not always understand what is required of them to complete their tasks. This has a negative impact on their progress and overall achievement. In key stage 2, many pupils communicate confidently, using appropriate, subject specific language. For example, Year 6 pupils use emotive language skilfully when describing the feelings of evacuees during World War II. In the nurture class, pupils make suitable contributions to group activities, but they do not always listen carefully enough to others.

Many pupils make sound progress in developing their Welsh oracy skills. By Year 2, many greet others confidently, sing familiar songs and describe the weather. Many pupils in key stage 2 use extended sentences appropriately to describe themselves, their friends and family members.

In the foundation phase, many pupils develop appropriate reading skills. By Year 2, many apply their phonic knowledge well to read unfamiliar words and they recall favourite stories enthusiastically. However, very few pay enough attention to punctuation to gain meaning from text. Most Year 6 pupils read aloud competently and discuss books by their favourite authors confidently. Most answer questions about their books well, showing good understanding of content, but very few infer meaning that is not explicit within the text. Most pupils read from familiar Welsh books with good pronunciation and understanding.

By Year 2, most pupils write short sequences of simple sentences that communicate meaning clearly. Many follow forms of writing modelled by adults suitably, such as when writing instructions to make cupcakes. Many apply their phonic knowledge to spell unfamiliar words, but very few use simple punctuation accurately. In key stage 2, older pupils adapt their writing to suit its purpose well. For example, they write play scripts, magazine articles and retell familiar stories from a character's point of view. Many create interesting poems, emulating the work of poets, such as Charlotte Raby and Tony Walsh. They use paragraphs correctly to convey main ideas and are beginning to choose imaginative vocabulary to enrich their writing. Most older pupils write suitably in Welsh, with adult support.

Across the school, pupils generally make appropriate progress in developing their numeracy skills. In Year 1, pupils name and identify common two and three-dimensional shapes correctly and more able pupils read and interpret simple word problems on a computer program and mentally calculate answers quickly. A few pupils do not have a secure understanding of basic number concepts and find it difficult to apply known number facts to new situations. In Year 3, pupils begin to apply their mathematical skills to new situations appropriately. For example, they plan and cost packed lunches for a week making sure that they keep to a given budget. As pupils move through key stage 2, they become more secure and confident in using their numeracy skills and their progress accelerates. By the time pupils reach Year 6, many are confident mathematicians who explain their reasoning using correct mathematical language. For example, they describe the differences between area and perimeter when designing a garden for families to be safe and more self-sufficient during World War II.

In the foundation phase, pupils use a suitable range of ICT equipment to support their learning during adult-led activities. For example, in the nursery class, nearly all pupils use a digital camera in the outdoor environment to find and match given objects. However, they do not develop their ICT skills well enough during independent activities. Many key stage 2 pupils use ICT competently to present their work, using text, pictures, and simple graphs. For example, pupils in Year 5 create an interesting presentation about heroes and villains. Older pupils are beginning to interrogate and create simple databases and spreadsheets. However, pupils do not generally apply their ICT skills well enough outside of designated lessons.

Wellbeing and attitudes to learning: Adequate and needs improvement

Most pupils feel happy and safe at school and know what to do if they have any worries or concerns. Most pupils understand the importance of a healthy diet and taking regular exercise. They participate enthusiastically in physical education lessons and take advantage of opportunities to attend after school clubs and activities. However, a minority of pupils do not apply their knowledge of healthy eating in their everyday lives. Most pupils understand the importance of keeping safe online. In key stage 2, most pupils demonstrate respect for each other in classrooms and around the school. However, a minority of pupils in the foundation phase do not always behave appropriately or listen to adults or each other respectfully.

Most pupils in key stage 2 have positive attitudes to learning. They settle quickly and show good levels of engagement and enthusiasm. For example, Year 4 pupils work hard to improve their Welsh language skills during role-play conversations. Most listen to their teachers and friends, collaborate purposefully and support one another well. They are beginning to develop skills of resilience when tackling more challenging tasks. In the foundation phase, many pupils talk enthusiastically about their tasks and work purposefully in small groups with an adult. However, a few pupils find it difficult to stay on task or concentrate for any length of time during more independent activities. As a result, they do not always make enough progress and at times they disturb the learning of others. In the nurture class, pupils generally have positive attitudes to learning and are beginning to develop resilience and confidence when faced with new situations.

Many pupils are keen to contribute to the life of the school and want to take on roles and responsibilities, such as becoming play leaders, members of Criw Cymraeg or digital leaders. The school council organises fund raising activities to support charities and the eco committee has planted trees in a local woodland. However, overall, pupils do not have a strong enough voice in decision-making in the school. They are beginning to contribute ideas to what and how they learn, but this is at an early stage of development.

Over the past four years, pupils' attendance has not compared well with that of pupils in similar schools. A few pupils are persistently late.

Teaching and learning experiences: Adequate and needs improvement

The curriculum provides a purposeful range of learning experiences that engage most pupils well and builds suitably on their prior learning. There are good opportunities for pupils to be involved in creative activities, such as working with a variety of theatre groups and learning to play a range of musical instruments including the drums and flute. In the nurture class, pupils have off site visits to take part in rock climbing activities, which promotes team building and develops their physical skills effectively. They have useful time for reflection through mindfulness sessions to help them to cope with stressful situations. Teachers long-term and medium-term planning provides an appropriate overview of the skills for pupils to develop each term. The school provides a range of interesting experiences linked to real-life situations to stimulate the pupils. For example, a group of key stage 2 pupils planned and budgeted for a visit to Cardiff to purchase books for the school library.

Teachers plan systematically for pupils to develop their reading, writing, oracy and numeracy skills. Most teachers plan effectively for pupils to write in a range of genres across the curriculum. However, opportunities for pupils to write at length are less well developed. Across the school, teachers do not consistently ensure that pupils have enough opportunities to apply their skills in a wide enough range of meaningful contexts in ICT. Opportunities for pupils to apply their numeracy skills across the curriculum are developing appropriately.

The school provides pupils with good learning opportunities to understand and celebrate the culture and language of Wales. The Welsh language is highly visible in displays across the school. Weekly assemblies provide opportunities for pupils to learn new phrases that they can use during break times and to learn Welsh songs. The school celebrates St David's Day with an eisteddfod, which includes a poetry writing competition and Welsh folk dancing. There are good opportunities to study the history of Wales and to hear its legends and stories.

In the foundation phase, teachers provide pupils with appropriate experiences in focused tasks and through independent activities that they guide them to complete. These activities stimulate pupils' oracy skills appropriately, for example when they take on the role of shopkeeper in the grocery shop. However, across the foundation phase, activities are generally overly adult-directed and pupils do not always make enough choices about how and what they want to learn or develop their independent learning skills well enough. Recently, teachers have made significant improvements to the outdoor areas and now use these regularly to support pupils' learning more effectively.

There is a lack of consistency in the quality of teaching across the school. In a majority of classes, teaching is effective and learning generally moves at a suitable pace. In these classes, teachers use a variety of approaches to engage pupils suitably in lessons. Adults, in these classes, also have positive and supportive working relationships with pupils and manage their behaviour well. Teachers and support staff collaborate well to plan suitable activities for pupils to take their learning forward. Where teaching is less effective, pupils are not encouraged to develop their independent learning skills well enough and adults direct them to prescribed tasks rather than providing opportunities for them to experiment for themselves or to follow areas of learning that capture their interest. In general, staff do not involve pupils well enough in making decisions about what and how they learn. In a few classes, adults do not manage pupils' behaviour effectively and this means that pupils waste time in moving between activities and are slow to settle to new tasks.

Teachers have improved the accuracy of their assessments, but they do not always use this information well enough to set tasks that challenge all pupils at a suitable level. There has been a recent focus on providing effective feedback to support pupils to improve their work. This is beginning to be more effective and pupils now have an appropriate understanding of what they need to do to respond to teachers' marking. However, teachers do not always provide timely feedback to alert pupils to areas that they need to improve during lessons.

Care, support and guidance: Good

The school is a safe and caring environment, where most adults encourage pupils to show respect and tolerance towards others. In the nurture class, staff work particularly effectively to improve the self-esteem and confidence of their pupils.

The school has appropriate arrangements to promote healthy eating and drinking. For example, the school provides opportunities for pupils to purchase fruit at break times and encourages them to drink water throughout the day. A range of extra-curricular clubs, such as rugby, football and cricket, promote pupils' physical health successfully. Staff and the local community police officer help pupils to understand how to keep safe on line. The school's arrangements for safeguarding pupils meet requirements and give no cause for concern.

The school is an inclusive community, where all pupils are encouraged to participate by taking on responsibilities. For example, the Criw Cymraeg organise playground games for the younger pupils and the digital leaders provide support for other pupils during ICT lessons. However, the opportunities for pupils to influence the curriculum and to make decisions about how and what they learn are at an early stage of development.

The school promotes pupils' social, moral and spiritual development effectively during acts of collective worship and during lessons. Teachers promote pupils' cultural development well through a range of interesting curriculum activities. Notable examples include visits to Llancaiach Fawr, the study of Japanese art forms and visits from Welsh authors such as Helen Lipscombe. The school has strong links with the local community, which enrich pupils' experiences successfully. For example, visits to the local teashop develop pupils' mathematical skills well and teachers enhance history lessons by providing opportunities to interview local people

who lived through the Second World War. The school uses a range of appropriate methods to communicate with parents, including social media and a comprehensive website. Foundation phase staff organise useful workshops that enable parents to support their children's learning at home successfully.

The school helps pupils to understand their role as citizens who care for the environment successfully. An example is the school's link with scientists in the Antarctic to learn about the current dangers of climate change. The school encourages pupils to use their imagination and to engage with creative arts effectively. For example, the curriculum provides opportunities for pupils to emulate artists' work, such as Banksy and Jackson Pollock and older pupils participate in the Shakespeare festival by performing in a local theatre. The school provides pupils with a good range of opportunities to participate in educational visits, which enrich their learning successfully. For example, pupils visit the House of Commons in London and attend a residential outdoor pursuits activity centre.

The school has revised its systems for tracking pupil progress. As a result, the systems ensure accuracy of teacher assessment and provide staff with a wide range of information about pupils' achievements. Overall, teachers make appropriate use of the information to identify those pupils who are not on track to achieve their targets and who may require additional support. Arrangements to support pupils with additional learning needs in the mainstream classes are suitable and are good in the nurture class. All pupils with additional learning needs have individual educational plans that include measurable targets. Parents and pupils are involved in agreeing the actions to support these pupils. The school works well with a wide range of external specialists who provide beneficial support for individual pupils.

The school has introduced a suitable range of strategies to promote good attendance and punctuality. However, these approaches have not had enough impact on improving overall attendance rates.

Leadership and management: Good

The headteacher provides strong leadership and has a clear vision for the school that he communicates well to staff, parents and pupils. In the short time that he has been at the school, he has brought about significant improvements to pupils' standards and the learning environment and has identified where further improvements are required. Initially, improvement plans were driven by the headteacher, but more recently he has begun to restructure the senior leadership team and to share responsibilities for leadership with them. Senior leaders are now taking responsibility for implementing and monitoring the school's priorities, but it is too early to assess the impact of their actions.

The headteacher has high expectations of all staff. He has encouraged them to take on responsibilities and to engage in improving standards and teaching. For example, members of staff have taken responsibility for developing the Welsh and ICT skills of pupils and staff in key stage 2. There are suitable arrangements to manage the performance of staff and these link well to the school's priorities. For example, the headteacher has strengthened internal moderation processes to ensure that all staff have a secure understanding of expected standards of attainment and assess pupils' work accurately. The school has made good progress in raising standards of pupils' work recently and improving aspects of teaching, particularly in key stage 2.

There is an effective cycle of monitoring and evaluation to identify the school's strengths and areas that it needs to develop. The headteacher is increasing the amount of responsibility he shares with and expects of staff and, by doing so, is improving their self-evaluation skills. For example, he has provided training for coordinators to help them to be more accurate and rigorous in their monitoring and evaluation of curriculum areas.

There are effective arrangements to manage the school's finances and resources. Leaders use grant funding well to make progress against national priorities, for example to support pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds and to engage more effectively with their families.

Governors have a good understanding of the school's strengths and area for development. Since the appointment of the headteacher, they have developed a much more hands on approach to school governance. They receive detailed and accurate information to help them to provide a suitable level of support and challenge to the school.

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:

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