A report on

Aberbargoed Primary School

Heol Ysgol Newydd
Bargoed
CF81 9DD

Date of inspection: June 2022

by

Estyn, Her Majesty's Inspectorate for Education

and Training in Wales

This report is also available in Welsh.

About Aberbargoed Primary School

Name of provider	Aberbargoed Primary School
Local authority	Caerphilly County Borough Council
Language of the provider	English
Type of school	Primary
Religious character	
Number of pupils on roll	252
Pupils of statutory school age	190
Number in nursery classes	41
Percentage of pupils eligible for free school meals over a three-year average (The national percentage of pupils eligible for free school meals over a three-year average in the primary sector is 21.3%)	32.8%
Percentage of pupils identified as having additional learning needs (a) (The national percentage of pupils identified as having an additional learning need in the primary sector is 22.2%)	14.7%
Percentage of pupils who speak Welsh at home	*
Percentage of pupils with English as an additional language	*
Date of headteacher appointment	05/01/2022
Date of previous Estyn inspection (if applicable)	
Start date of inspection	13/06/2022

Data reported is sourced from the latest available Pupil Level Annual School Census. These figures may be slightly different to those observed during the inspection.

Further information is available from the Welsh Government My Local School website: mylocalschool.gov.wales

a. The term 'additional learning needs' is being used to describe those pupils on the SEN/ALN register of the school.

Overview

Aberbargoed Primary School is a highly inclusive school that places a high priority on the well-being of its pupils. Pupils know that all adults in the school care for them and that they can turn to them when they face challenges or have difficulties. As a result of this, the majority of pupils make good progress with their academic and social skills. The valuable, caring ethos that staff have worked so hard to create means that the school was in a strong position to deal with the impact of the pandemic. Effective partnerships with parents and the commitment of staff meant that pupils and their families felt well supported during this time.

Most pupils make good progress from their starting points and there is suitable provision for pupils with additional learning needs. Overall, pupils make purposeful progress in developing their skills in English and mathematics, but they do not always apply these skills well enough in their topic work. Pupils in the foundation phase benefit from effective provision and are given exceptional opportunities for them to collaborate, experiment and learn through experience. Pupils contribute well to a variety of groups and committees and can give examples of how their work has impacted on the school. The headteacher recognises that work needs to be done around identifying suitable opportunities for improving monitoring and evaluation processes and how staff and pupils will benefit from this. Staff roles and responsibilities need to be clarified in order to support improvement. She is aware that standards in teaching from Years 3 to 6 need to be improved and expectations raised.

Governors know the school well and provide good support for the newly appointed headteacher. They have a wide range of knowledge and experience that help them carry out their role.

Recommendations

R1 Address the standards of teaching and low expectations for pupils in Years 3 to 6

R2 Create opportunities to develop pupils' independent skills and further challenge pupils in Years 3 to 6

R3 Ensure that senior leaders robustly monitor and evaluate learning and teaching to identify key areas for improvement

R4 Develop the roles of leaders at every level to secure improvement

What happens next

The school will draw up an action plan to show how it is going to address the recommendations. Estyn will work with the local authority to review the school's progress.

Main evaluation

Learning

Overall, many pupils make effective progress from their individual starting points in all areas of learning. A minority of pupils start nursery with skills below those expected for their age. EFSM pupils make good progress from their starting points.

Despite the impact of the pandemic, pupils in nursery and reception develop their communication skills well. They listen attentively to presentations and introductions and respond sensibly in lessons. For example, they take orders in the class fish and chip shop and discuss confidently how to make a cake in the mud kitchen. Many older pupils' speaking and listening skills are developing well. They express their ideas clearly and accurately, for example when sharing their thoughts on climate change.

In the nursery, many pupils enjoy looking at and talking about the pictures in books. From reception, pupils enjoy listening to stories and retelling them. They begin to recognise and name a range of sounds and use this knowledge to start to read simple texts. By Year 2 they read fluently and re-tell stories confidently. Pupils use their phonics skills successfully when reading unfamiliar words and, as they get older, read accurately with good understanding. They enjoy discussing their favourite characters. By Year 6, most pupils are capable of gathering information from different sources independently to produce interesting reports, for example life in the Antarctic.

Pupils' progress in writing is good. The youngest pupils develop their fine motor skills well and begin to use strategies to spell simple words accurately. Progressively through the school, pupils develop a sound understanding of the features of a variety of styles of writing when describing feelings or expressing an opinion. They punctuate and organise their work accurately which makes it easy to read. Many older pupils write well but the overuse of worksheets and over teacher direction prevents them from expressing themselves independently. They use interesting and mature vocabulary but struggle occasionally with spelling these words correctly. Generally, pupils apply their literacy skills well in other areas of the curriculum.

The pupils from nursery to Year 2 have strong number skills, and a good grasp of shape and data. They apply these skills confidently in a variety of contexts across other areas of learning. Overall, many younger pupils have a good grasp of mathematical knowledge and understanding. Higher up the school, pupils develop their knowledge of number well and have an appropriate understanding of how to collect and present data. Although many older pupils have a sound knowledge of mathematical concepts, these skills are not used to a suitable depth or regularly enough in other areas of the curriculum.

Generally, the development of pupils' Welsh language skills is inconsistent. The younger pupils are developing a good range of vocabulary and are quickly becoming bilingual learners, responding naturally to questions in Welsh. Following their return to school after periods of lockdown, most older pupils use very simple greetings and

phrases appropriately. Although their skills are not as advanced as might be expected for their stage of development, Year 6 are beginning to use the past tense.

When opportunities arise, pupils are eager to develop their creative skills, for example, when studying local artists. Regular physical education lessons along with recently introduced skateboarding and dance workshops ensures that pupils develop their physical skills appropriately across the school.

Many pupils in the school have basic digital skills. Although many pupils use the school based digital learning platform to save and recall their work, this is inconsistent across the school. The younger pupils send their work to their teachers confidently and use programmable toys with ease. The progression of older pupils' digital skills does not develop at the same rate and the opportunities to use in a range of contexts is limited.

Well-being and attitudes to learning

Most pupils settle quickly and work purposefully. They collaborate well and show respect and care for the ideas of others when working in pairs and groups. On the whole, pupils' behaviour is appropriate. The school's focus on supporting pupils' health and well-being means that most pupils identify and communicate their feelings clearly to adults and are confident that they will support them. Those pupils who need extra help to manage their emotions benefit well from the purposeful range of support they receive.

As pupils progress through the year groups, they show an increasingly positive attitude to their learning. Pupils in Years 5 and 6 begin to show confidence and resilience through problem solving activities, for example when experimenting with different materials to create an Anderson shelter. However, across the school, pupils feel they are guided by the teacher in most lessons and are given very few opportunities to work independently.

Most pupils understand the importance of eating a healthy snack and how to make healthy choices. Older pupils have created a healthy eating information board, and have utilised this to encourage younger pupils throughout the school to eat healthily. Most pupils are aware of the importance of regular exercise to achieve a healthy life and enjoy a range of equipment at break times to develop their physical skills. Nearly all pupils play co-operatively, take turns and support each other well when playing games and socialising. They understand the importance of staying safe online. Through activities such as fundraising to support people in Ukraine, pupils are beginning to develop as ethically informed citizens.

Pupils in leadership roles value the opportunities they have to take on responsibilities and contribute to decision-making across the school. They are proud of their school and the difference they make to it. Pupils feel that they are listened to and that they influence the work and life of the school positively. For instance, Criw Cymraeg created Welsh displays and use them to encourage all pupils to use the language.

Across the school, pupils discuss the topics they have covered and feel that staff listen to their ideas and use their suggestions. For example, when studying World

War Two they asked whether they could study Ukraine as a country and teachers built this into their planning.

When pupils find their learning interesting and stimulating, they engage well with tasks and make good progress with the development of their knowledge and skills. For example, pupils in Year 2 count accurately to 100 in Welsh in order to find out how many dragon's eggs were left in their classroom.

Owing to the coronavirus pandemic, inspectors will not report pupils' rates of attendance during the academic years 2020-2021 and 2021-2022. Inspectors will, however, consider the school's provision for monitoring and improving attendance as part of inspection area 4 (care, support and guidance).

Teaching and learning experiences

Overall, the school's curriculum is broad and offers pupils a suitable range of opportunities that encourage them to explore and learn. All topics begin with an opportunity for pupils to influence what they want to learn with questions such as, 'why is the dragon on the flag?' As part of their work on World War Two, older pupils chose to learn about Ukraine and the impact of the modern-day war on the country and its people. In addition, the curriculum includes themes such as 'Everyone Matters', that focus on topics such as Black History and the work conditions for children in Ghana. This supports pupils to develop a better understanding of the diverse nature of Wales and the wider world.

Provision to develop pupils' speaking, listening and reading skills is generally successful across the school. There are suitable arrangements to develop pupils' writing skills and a number of opportunities for pupils to apply these skills in their work across the curriculum. Provision to develop pupils' mathematics is purposeful, but there are too few opportunities for pupils to apply their numeracy skills in other subjects at the level of which they are capable. A very few members of staff model the Welsh language extremely well and regularly use incidental Welsh throughout the day. However, the recently introduced initiatives do not support pupils to make enough progress in developing their Welsh language skills.

All staff in the younger classes build positive working relationships with pupils, creating welcoming, purposeful, and vibrant learning environments. This contributes to a calm working atmosphere where the younger pupils develop confidence and thrive in their learning. Staff manage pupils' behaviour well and most pupils are engaged and remain on task during lessons. The younger pupils have numerous opportunities to learn through active play or to direct their own learning in a spacious indoor and outdoor learning area. Staff plan activities that build on pupils' prior learning and support them to develop their skills well. For example, whilst undertaking an enquiry-based investigation, a volcanologist visited the school to share his experiences. Teachers deploy support staff thoughtfully to assist the development of pupils' skills and wellbeing.

Overall, when questioned, many pupils in Years 3 to 6 enjoy their learning and find most lessons interesting. However, although most teachers strive to create a warm and friendly atmosphere for the pupils, the planning and delivery of lessons does not always support this. Lessons do not move at a suitable pace and insufficient

challenge impacts on the engagement of most pupils. As a result of these low expectations, a minority of pupils become disruptive and this impacts on the progress pupils make during the lesson. In Years 3 to 6, teachers control lessons closely, which has a negative effect on pupils' ability to work independently.

Staff have begun to adapt their planning to prepare for the introduction of the Curriculum for Wales. Teachers and leaders use a variety of standardised tests to track progress appropriately. This helps to inform next steps for teaching and learning. Assessment for learning strategies are beginning to be used by both the teachers and the pupils appropriately. There are regular opportunities for pupils to reflect on their work. However, the effectiveness of this self-reflection on improving the individuals work is limited.

Over time, the school offer numerous activities to develop pupils personal and social education skills well. Through visits and presentations by experts at the school, older pupils have a clear understanding of issues relating to substance mis-use and the impact of anti social behaviour.

Care, support and guidance

The quality of care, support and guidance for pupils is a strength of the school. It knows its pupils, their backgrounds and the local community well and works effectively to support pupils' emotional well-being. This caring, nurturing ethos encourages pupils to engage well with the school. For example, the school's support for young carers is highly effective. The school has a trained member of staff and have developed systems that allow it to identify and support pupils who have responsibilities for looking after relatives at home. This work has a positive impact on these pupils' sense of wellbeing.

Many staff work hard to promote good behaviour and use positive reinforcement effectively. However, expectations of behaviour are not always clear in the older classes and the reward system is not applied consistently enough to ensure this.

The school's ethos ensures that there are regular opportunities for pupils to explore their spiritual beliefs and find out about the characteristics of other religions and cultures. For instance, pupils in Year 5 study famous singers from other cultures and explore how their cultures and beliefs differs. The curriculum provides opportunities for pupils to understand important values such as justice, fairness and honesty, for example during a whole school assembly about evacuees.

Leaders give pupil voice groups effective opportunities to share their opinions. For example, the Library Crew recently created a reading display and use it to encourage pupils to have a love of reading. The school is aware of the new statutory requirements for additional learning needs and is preparing positively for the transition effectively. They offer purposeful opportunities for parents to become involved in decision-making concerning these pupils.

The school monitors pupils' attendance closely. It works well with external partners such as the Educational Welfare Officer, to engage with pupils and their families to support good rates of attendance. The school has recently reintroduced educational visits, which support pupils' understanding of their culture and heritage successfully.

There is a strong culture of safeguarding throughout the school and it has developed good systems to ensure the safety of pupils. Its safeguarding arrangements meet requirements and give no cause for concern.

The school has appropriate systems to support pupils with additional learning needs. It has adequate processes to identify pupils in need of support, plan interventions and evaluate the impact of this work. The electronic record keeping systems ensure information is shared internally and with outside agencies. The school communicates effectively with parents to ensure that they are kept up to date and receive relevant information in a timely way. It operates a wide range of intervention programmes to address gaps in pupils' literacy, numeracy and social and emotional skills. The school has recently increased its provision to support pupils' mental health and well-being. For example, since the pandemic, more staff have trained to support pupils with their emotional well-being and routinely provide children with opportunities to talk to staff when needed. Knowledgeable, thoughtful teaching assistants deliver a valuable range of educational, emotional and social interventions to support pupils with specific needs.

Leadership and management

The newly appointed headteacher is instrumental in creating and sustaining a welcoming and inclusive community with pupil well-being at its heart. She is beginning to manage change effectively as she steers the school sensitively through alterations in leadership and responds to the disruption caused by the pandemic. Along with the staff, she works hard to support pupils and make them feel safe in the school environment.

Among leaders and staff there is an awareness and commitment to address national priorities in education. Leaders are beginning to encourage staff to innovate and trial new approaches to teaching and learning in preparation for the Curriculum for Wales. Leaders are beginning to make progress towards developing pupils' Welsh language skills although progress has been hampered due to the pandemic.

Leaders work suitably to gather useful information from across the school to identify strengths and areas for development. However, monitoring of the school's provision lacks rigour. As a result, leaders do not have enough accurate first-hand information to successfully identify the school's most important areas for improvement. For instance, leaders have not addressed the inconsistencies in the quality of teaching and the impact this has on pupils. Furthermore, expectations in all aspects of teaching and learning are not always high enough to help support teachers and learning assistants to maintain and raise standards. Evaluations lack focus and are not specific enough to support effective progress towards targets. Overall, the school's systems for monitoring and evaluating the quality of its work and the standards achieved by pupils are underdeveloped.

Suitable staff meetings are held to address school improvement priorities. All members of the teaching staff are responsible for a particular area or aspect of the school's work. This has recently been introduced in preparation for the new curriculum. However, staff do not monitor or evaluate their area of responsibility effectively, which means that their contributions towards improving pupils' standards and progress are limited. The new leadership team has not clarified a cohesive

staffing structure which details relevant responsibilities across the school. As a result, staff are not clear about roles and responsibilities

Communication and relationships with parents are strong and they particularly like the nurturing, caring ethos the school promotes. The school is effective in gathering the opinions of a wide range of stakeholders. For example, leaders survey pupil and parental opinion effectively through the use of questionnaires. Teaching assistants are key members of the school team and contribute effectively and consistently to improving pupils' standards of learning, well-being, and social skills. Overall, leaders have a focus on supporting its pupils and their well-being, by working successfully with pupils, parents and governors to promote an effective culture of safeguarding with sound arrangements for healthy eating and drinking. This is a strength of the school.

Leaders manage finances well, with the pupil development grant spent appropriately. For example, provision of dance lessons, fitness sessions and skateboarding workshops for pupils support their well-being and help address emotional issues. Members of the governing body support the school to manage and deploy its resources purposefully. They are highly supportive of the school and committed to their role. They discharge their duties well through a range of link roles and committees, often bringing useful expertise to these responsibilities. The headteacher keeps them up to date with developments at the school. However, they have a limited understanding of pupil progress and the school's developing curriculum and this restricts their ability to hold the school to account and fulfil their duty as a critical friend.

Leaders arrange regular professional learning opportunities for staff, which link effectively with the school's priorities for improvement. Through various professional learning activities, all members of staff are beginning to develop an understanding of the requirements of the Curriculum for Wales. Generally, arrangements for the management of staff performance are appropriate, although performance management targets do not link well enough to whole school priorities to ensure a collaborative approach to school improvement among all staff.

The school collaborates well with other local primary schools and the high school. For example, all pupils in Key Stage 2 recently completed a successful STEM project. Cluster staff are also working together to develop a shared approach to teaching aspects of the Curriculum for Wales and developing a cluster approach to coaching and mentoring.

Evidence base of the report

Before an inspection, inspectors:

- analyse the outcomes from the parent/carer 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/carers 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' well-being, 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)

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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