



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

A report on

Dolau Primary School

**Bridgend Road
Llanharan
Pontyclun
RCT
CF72 9RP**

Date of inspection: October 2023

by

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

This report is also available in Welsh

About Dolau County Primary School

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| Name of provider | Dolau County Primary School |
| Local authority | Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council |
| Language of the provider | English |
| Type of school | Primary |
| Religious character | |
| Number of pupils on roll | 520 |
| Pupils of statutory school age | 393 |
| Number in nursery classes | 60 |
| 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 Primary is 23.0%) | 6.3% |
| Percentage of pupils identified as having additional learning needs (a) (The national percentage of pupils identified as having an additional learning need in Primary is 16.1%) | 1.8% |
| Percentage of pupils who speak Welsh at home | 13.0% |
| Percentage of pupils with English as an additional language | 0.0% |
| Date of headteacher appointment | 07/01/1997 |
| Date of previous Estyn inspection (if applicable) | 01/07/2015 |
| Start date of inspection | 16/10/2023 |
| The school is a lead school for initial teacher education. | |

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

Ysgol Gynradd Dolau Primary School is a friendly, vibrant and inclusive learning community where everyone has high expectations and aspirations of themselves and others. Pupils are proud to be a part of the school and strive enthusiastically to achieve to the very best of their ability. They treat each other with respect and support each other with admirable maturity as they work and play. Nearly all pupils' behaviour is good. The school promotes a strong culture of safeguarding and, as a result, pupils enjoy their learning experiences and feel safe at school.

Many pupils make strong progress in developing their language, numeracy and digital skills from their starting points. As a result of the school's commitment to promoting bilingualism, pupils from the Welsh and English-medium classes progress well in both languages and access all areas of learning with confidence.

The school's curriculum is broad and balanced. Teachers plan engaging and exciting learning experiences that encourage pupils to explore, to be curious and to develop as independent learners. Pupils contribute suitably to what and how they learn as their ideas and likes are incorporated into activities and themes. Teachers model good learning behaviours well and provide timely feedback that reinforces understanding and stimulates pupils' deeper thinking. Activities challenge pupils purposefully and the indoor and outdoor learning areas are busy and productive places. In a very few examples, the pace of teaching is not quick enough and questioning does not guide the next steps in learning as effectively as it could.

The headteacher is an inspirational leader. He is an unrelenting advocate for all pupils and staff and his vision is based around aspiring continually for the very best standards, progress and well-being for all. The headteacher is supported highly effectively by a team of motivated and dedicated staff. They benefit greatly from the outstanding opportunities for developing leaders within the school that impacts effectively on pupils' learning experiences and progress. The governors support the school skilfully and enthusiastically and they have a strong understanding of their duties and obligations. They provide leaders and staff with purposeful support and ensure that the school makes the best use of its resources.

Recommendations

- R1 Share best teaching practice particularly to improve the pace of lessons and teachers' questioning skills

What happens next

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

Estyn will invite the school to prepare a case study for dissemination on Estyn's website on its work in relation to its outstanding professional learning pathways that strategically develop leadership at all levels.

Main evaluation

Learning

On entry to the school, many pupils have skills appropriate to their age and developmental stage, except their Welsh skills that are noticeably lower for most pupils. During their time at school, many pupils make strong progress across the learning areas from their individual starting points. They make very good progress in their Welsh communication skills. This is a notable strength of the school.

Nearly all pupils make good progress in developing their speaking and listening skills. For example, Year 1 pupils collaborate effectively as they build bridges in the outdoor area using plastic crates and wooden planks. They listen attentively to their peers and respect and value suggestions as to how they might strengthen their constructions. They respond maturely using appropriate language and tone. Year 4 pupils express their concerns about the threat of climate change adeptly. They use subject-specific language purposefully through the medium of Welsh and English to describe how the receding ice threatens the polar bear population.

Most pupils' reading skills are developing well across the school in both languages. They show enthusiasm towards their reading and appreciate greatly the access that reading gives them to the world around them. Younger pupils use purposeful strategies to help them to read unfamiliar words and they predict confidently what will happen next in their stories. By Year 3, pupils are beginning to use punctuation effectively to help them convey meaning as they read an expanding range of texts. The oldest pupils use more complex written sources skilfully to collect information and they use clues from the text to infer deeper meaning successfully.

During their time at school, many pupils make strong progress in their writing skills. Younger pupils experiment freely with their early writing as they make a variety of marks using a range of implements. They progress quickly to using construction bricks creatively to represent the shapes of simple words. Year 4 pupils make effective use of persuasive language and devise appealing slogans to promote a product of their choice. Older pupils choose language imaginatively and use a variety of sentence structures to create an informative biography of a well-known professor that engages the reader suitably. Most pupils apply their writing skills across the curriculum suitably.

Many pupils make strong progress in their mathematical skills as they progress through the school. The youngest pupils develop their awareness of number as they confidently count objects up to 10. They build successfully upon this early understanding to recall their multiplication tables using reggae songs to support their learning in Year 3. By the time pupils reach Year 6, they utilise appropriate strategies for multiplying increasingly complex numbers. They justify their calculation choices

skilfully and can compare the advantages and disadvantages of differing methods maturely. Most pupils apply their numeracy skills across the curriculum purposefully.

Many pupils make appropriate progress with their digital skills. They apply their skills suitably to support their learning in other areas. From a young age many pupils use online platforms confidently to access and save their work independently. As their skills develop, they begin to make purposeful use of digital resources to create comprehensive multimedia presentations utilising a range of effects that consider the intended audience well.

Most pupils' physical skills are developing well and they show a positive attitude towards physical activities. Younger pupils show good endurance and control as they ride their bikes energetically around the outside area. As they progress through the school, they co-ordinate their movements with increasing purpose and accuracy. They apply these skills successfully, for example when working to score as part of a team during ball games. Many pupils enjoy using the outdoor climbing areas to develop their whole-body strength during breaktimes.

Most pupils develop their creative skills appropriately. In Year 1 and 2, for example, they make crowns and decorate them to their own preferences using natural items such as leaves and twigs that they have collected from the outside area.

Well-being and attitudes to learning

Nearly all pupils feel a strong sense of pride in their school and feel happy within its caring, nurturing environment. Across the school, nearly all pupils behave well, for example as they move around the school to participate in activities purposefully and responsibly. They have a comprehensive understanding of right and wrong and why the school rules are important. Nearly all pupils feel safe and know who to turn to if they need help. Most have a thorough understanding of how to stay safe online, for example how to keep their personal information confidential.

Nearly all pupils show a high degree of care for one another and treat each other with admirable kindness. They are polite and courteous and are respectful towards staff and visitors to the school. Pupils take great pride in being able to support others through their elected roles across a number of pupil voice groups. They influence improvements and decisions purposefully across the school, for example as members of the school council, 'Eco Council', 'Sports Council' and 'Dreigiau Dolau'. The Eco Council have visited the local recycling centre to build upon their understanding of the importance of sustainability and the positive changes that can be made at the school to promote this aspect. Pupils then suggest imaginative ideas and feel that staff listen to their views and act upon them decisively.

From a young age, pupils take ownership of their learning and enjoy opportunities to work independently. Nearly all pupils show positive attitudes to learning and are thoroughly engaged in the wide variety of activities provided. Most pupils listen attentively to teachers' instructions and concentrate well on their work for sustained periods. Many pupils choose challenging activities from a range of tasks that extends their learning effectively and they demonstrate perseverance and determination to complete tasks to the best of their ability. They readily engage in new, unfamiliar experiences. For example, pupils in the nursery class develop their mathematical

skills as they are encouraged to discover, hold and experiment with natural items in the forest area. As they move through the school, pupils develop the ability to act purposefully on timely feedback from teachers and improve the quality of their work.

Nearly all pupils have a clear understanding of how diet, physical activity and mental health all impact upon their quality of life. There are valuable opportunities for pupils to develop their physical skills during lessons, break times and an abundance of extra-curricular activities. For example, younger pupils show commitment as they hone their football skills in a series of sessions that are themed in line with a well-known children's animated film.

Most pupils use a range of strategies to support their own well-being maturely. For example, they speak enthusiastically about the designated outdoor well-being areas and how it gives them a purposeful retreat where they can manage their emotions. In addition, pupils access an online 3D building programme that utilises characters and emojis to develop their understanding of how to control their feelings.

Most pupils are developing a strong awareness of fairness, equality, and children's rights. For example, older pupils compare how children's rights have changed during the last hundred years and the magnitude of these changes. Most pupils have a thorough understanding of the importance of inclusion and diversity. Older pupils discuss gender equality in the construction industry and the significance of equal access to employment for all. Most pupils have a comprehensive age-appropriate understanding of relationships as a result of completing activities focusing on empowerment, safety and respect.

Teaching and learning experiences

School leaders and staff have collaborated effectively to develop a shared understanding of the principles of curriculum reform and how these can be best integrated into the school's provision. The school's curriculum is broad and balanced and builds systematically upon pupils' existing knowledge, understanding and skills. For example, the focus on 'Cynefin' includes opportunities for pupils to better understand the physical and human features of their locality.

Teachers encourage pupils to share ideas for weekly tasks and thematic days which enables them to contribute suitably to what and how they learn. Provision for younger pupils supports their early developmental needs well and includes engaging opportunities to learn through free play and exploration. The learning experiences for the older pupils provide effective opportunities for pupils to develop as motivated, independent and collaborative learners. Teachers plan exciting and authentic opportunities for learning in the outdoor areas across all age groups, which enhances pupils' learning experiences across the curriculum. For example, during the work on African culture, pupils participate in drumming sessions and prepare a healthy salad containing authentic ingredients.

Opportunities for pupils to develop their understanding of the history, culture and traditions of the local area and Wales are developing appropriately. For example, pupils learn about local history through researching the story behind the Llanharan spaniel. They also collaborate with local Welsh artists, which supports the pupils' creative development well.

The provision to develop pupils' numeracy and digital skills is effective across all ages. In addition, the teaching of literacy is well-thought-out and meets the need of planning equitable opportunities for two language medium streams. Staff ensure sufficient opportunities to apply and extend pupils' skills in a range of contexts across the curriculum in Welsh and English. The school supports the development of pupils' social and emotional skills successfully through the implementation of a well-being hour and an extra-curricular club open to all pupils.

The provision to develop the Welsh language across the school is a notable strength. Pupils benefit from being immersed within a bilingual and supportive environment where pupils from both the Welsh and English classes support each other with the development of Welsh oracy. Teachers ensure that Welsh is generally used when giving instructions and discussing feelings with the younger pupils. Among the older pupils, teachers build systematically on the pupils' ability to use the Welsh language. The strategies used across the school are engaging and effective. Pupils and staff are proud of the fact that the school is fully bilingual.

The school's plans for developing pupils' understanding of relationships and diversity are developing well. Younger pupils are provided with opportunities to think about and celebrate how they are the same, but different to others. As they move through the school they learn about the history and experiences of other cultures, for example through life stories of influential and inspirational figures such as Betty Campbell and Rosa Parks. As a result, pupils empathise maturely with the hardships and struggles that others may be facing on a day-to-day basis.

Teachers have clear aims for learning experiences and provide effective explanations to help pupils make progress. They model positive approaches to learning and provide beneficial teaching resources that support pupils' independent learning skills successfully. Most teachers employ a range of purposeful questioning strategies well to recall pupils' prior learning and encourage thinking. In general, activities proceed at a good pace and classrooms are a hive of activity. In a very few sessions, the pace of learning is not brisk enough and questioning does not promote learning as effectively as it could. As a result, a few pupils do not always make as much progress as they might.

Staff have developed robust assessment arrangements. They provide productive opportunities for pupils to review their own and peers' work. Staff provide pupils with useful and timely feedback and, as a result, pupils have a good understanding of what they have done well and where they can improve their work. Many pupils respond positively and progress well in their learning. End of year reports for parents detail pupils' progress and the next steps in their learning appropriately.

Care, support and guidance

Care, support and guidance for pupils is a clear strength of the school. The school is a happy, friendly and inclusive learning community and this permeates each and every aspect of the school's life. All staff develop warm, nurturing relationships with pupils, and this supports their well-being and learning effectively. Pupils are encouraged to work to the best of their ability throughout the school and are courteous and respectful towards each other and towards staff.

The school has robust systems to support pupils with additional learning needs (ALN). As a result, most pupils with ALN make strong progress from their individual starting points. The school collaborates well with pre-school settings and outside agencies and, consequently, pupils who require additional support are identified early. Staff work closely with pupils and parents to plan the most appropriate support programmes for the needs of individual pupils. For example, pupil and parent questionnaires are used to further inform the staff's understanding of pupils' needs. As a result, relationships between staff and families are very good. Learning support requirements are identified purposefully for each pupil and delivered by highly committed staff. The highly effective ALN co-ordinator monitors the impact of support programmes carefully to ensure that they meet pupils' learning and well-being needs. As a result, the school has a good understanding of the effect and impact of support given and adjusts support swiftly when required.

The school supports pupils' emotional, health and social needs successfully and maintains a strong focus on physical and mental health and well-being. Staff know pupils well and respond to their social and emotional needs sensitively. For example, pupils share feelings through a daily 'check in: check out' system and post kindness remarks on the 'Confetti Caredigrwydd' display board. Staff react to any identified needs quickly and sensitively. The school promotes the importance of exercise effectively. For example, many pupils attend a variety of extra-curricular clubs such as the cricket club, which develops pupils' resilience and valuable teamworking skills.

The school promotes pupils' spiritual, social and cultural development appropriately. Staff link school assemblies and activities purposefully to national and international events, for example delivering an eco council assembly promoting the need to recycle. Local community groups play an important role in supporting the curriculum and provide engaging opportunities for learning. For example, Year 3 pupils have the opportunity to role play the story of Noah's Ark during an assembly delivered at the school by a local group.

There are several appropriate opportunities for pupils to undertake leadership roles through the numerous hardworking pupil voice groups that meet regularly. The inclusive nature of the school ensures that pupils from all backgrounds are represented on the pupil voice groups. The school suitably combines the work of these groups with enriching learning experiences. The pupil-led group 'Dreigiau Dolau', for example, supports and encourages pupils to converse in Welsh. Teachers plan meaningful opportunities for pupils to celebrate Welsh heritage, identity and culture. For example, they learn about the tradition of love spoons and the meaning of the symbols carved into them.

The school encourages pupils to engage with the creative arts. For example, pupils work with local artists to create imaginative artworks and also visit a nearby film production centre.

Staff encourage pupils to respect other people's views and beliefs, to acknowledge and respect diversity and to understand the importance of tolerance. Pupil voice is of paramount importance and pupils' ideas are listened to and acted upon, where possible. For example, in the class planning books, lessons and activities take into account pupils' prior knowledge as well as their interests. The school is fully inclusive and places a strong emphasis on ensuring all pupils feel a sense of belonging. Pupils

benefit from guests and visitors who share their experiences of success in adult life and consequently raise pupils' aspirations. Visitors, including a former Welsh women's rugby international, support pupils to develop values such as commitment and perseverance.

There is a robust culture of safeguarding at the school and staff understand their roles and responsibilities in contributing to pupils' safety. As a result, pupils feel safe in school. The school has effective strategies in place to promote regular pupil attendance.

Leadership and management

The headteacher has a clear vision for the school where all pupils flourish within a happy, safe and bilingual learning community. He works tirelessly to share this vision and sets high expectations for all at the school. Leaders, teachers and support staff respond with enthusiasm and vigour and collaborate successfully to realise this vision. Pupils from both the Welsh-medium and English-medium streams respond positively to being challenged to be the best that they possibly can. They enjoy playing and socialising together at break times. There is a strong supportive ethos at the school and all staff encourage pupils to fully respect both languages. As a result, across all classes, pupils demonstrate an excellent attitude toward the Welsh language and value their opportunities to learn and speak Welsh. Leaders promote a culture of safeguarding effectively and, as a result, pupils feel safe at school.

The headteacher leads by example. He is an inspirational role model for leaders and staff at all levels and is passionate about maintaining a supportive, nurturing environment for pupils and staff. He is ably supported by the deputy headteacher and senior leaders who constantly embrace change as they aim for excellence in all aspects of the school's work. Senior leaders have clearly-defined roles and responsibilities that support the school's development purposefully. Leadership roles are shared highly effectively and teachers and support staff are encouraged to take on responsibility for different aspects of the provision which, in turn, develops their leadership skills successfully. This greatly enhances the school's capacity for continuous improvement. Staff who take on leadership roles greatly value the autonomy that they are given. For example, they carry out personal research before trialling and evaluating innovative approaches to learning as they develop the school's curriculum.

Senior leaders work very closely with members of the governing body. Governors meet regularly across an appropriate range of committees to consider all aspects of the school's provision and development needs. They monitor the school's budget and expenditure closely. For example, they ensure that the pupil development grant is spent appropriately and impacts pupil progress successfully. Governors actively promote a culture of healthy eating and drinking at the school. There are valuable opportunities for governors to visit the school to observe provision and talk to pupils. They hold leaders to account skilfully about standards and pupil progress. For example, governors question the appropriateness of the challenge pupils receive within digital activities. As a result, leaders consider the feedback and amend the school's approach purposefully.

Leaders have embedded an effective range of processes to monitor provision and support improvement planning. They gather a range of direct evidence to evaluate the provision and its impact on pupils' learning, progress and well-being successfully. As a result, leaders have an in-depth understanding of the school's strengths and areas where it needs to develop further. Leaders at all levels analyse the evidence from the monitoring processes and use it effectively to formulate detailed improvement plans that address the school's improvement needs and wider national priorities well.

The school promotes an outstanding culture of professional learning for staff. Staff at all levels are encouraged to develop their expertise to support pupils' learning and well-being. The school has well forged links with a range of partners. For example, the school is a lead school for initial teacher education and this encourages staff to consider their approaches to curriculum and pedagogy well. The school is highly effective at providing opportunities for staff to develop their leadership skills through introducing a range of initiatives successfully. This encourages staff to develop their approach to engaging with parents and carers, implementing action plans and evaluating impact. There is also an effective range of professional learning opportunities provided for support staff which successfully builds the school's capacity to promote pupils' learning and well-being. There are well-established performance management structures, which encourage career development and ensure appropriate accountability for staff.

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 publication. Any enquiries or comments regarding this document/publication should be addressed to:

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