



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

A report on

Pontrhondda Primary School

**Pontrhondda Road
Llwynypia
Tonypandy
RCT
CF40 2SZ**

Date of inspection: February 2024

by

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

About Pontrhondda Primary School

Name of provider	Pontrhondda 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	125
Pupils of statutory school age	107
Number in nursery classes	13
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 23.7%)	43.91%
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 13.2%)	3.2%
Percentage of pupils who speak Welsh at home	*
Percentage of pupils with English as an additional language	0.8%
Date of headteacher appointment	03/09/2018
Date of previous Estyn inspection (if applicable)	05/10/2015
Start date of inspection	05/02/2024
<p>During the time of the inspection, the substantive deputy headteacher was on compassionate leave due to a close family bereavement. There were three supply teachers in the school at the time of inspection.</p> <p>The school is in the process of recruiting for a school support officer. This role is currently being covered by the headteacher.</p> <p>The family engagement officer role is also vacant due to the promotion of the current post holder.</p>	

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

Pontrhondda Primary is a caring, supportive school at the heart of its community. Staff work closely with pupils and families, listening to their views carefully and adapting provision to meet pupils' needs. Most pupils with additional learning needs (ALN) make strong progress from their individual starting points. Despite low literacy and numeracy skills on entry to school, many pupils make appropriate progress during their time at the school.

Provision for pupils' well-being and individual learning needs are strengths of the school. Staff have warm relationships with pupils, supporting them effectively to manage their emotions and feelings and to be resilient in their learning. Nearly all pupils display exemplary behaviour as a result of the school's compassionate and thoughtful ethos. However, despite the school's efforts to make improvements, attendance levels remain too low.

Teachers use an appropriate range of resources to teach literacy, numeracy, digital and Welsh skills. They develop pupils' speaking and listening skills effectively, often from low starting points. However, pupils do not develop their writing skills well enough as they move through the school. This is due to the lack of opportunity to write at length and due to inconsistencies in the quality of teaching and assessment.

The school has begun to develop its curriculum effectively in line with national requirements. Overall, teachers plan stimulating activities that interest and engage pupils in their chosen topics. Whilst good use is made of visits to places of interest to stimulate pupils' curiosity, teachers do not provide pupils with sufficient opportunity to develop independence in their learning.

The headteacher works effectively with governors and staff and provides strong and thoughtful leadership. Leaders have a clear understanding of school strengths and areas for improvement. However, strategic actions do not always prioritise the areas in need of most attention.

Recommendations

- R1 Sharpen school improvement strategies to ensure that they prioritise the areas that need most improvement
- R2 Improve the quality and consistency of teaching and assessment so that it supports pupils to improve their writing skills and develop independence in their learning
- R3 Improve attendance

What happens next

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

Main evaluation

Learning

Most pupils begin school with literacy and numeracy skills below those expected for their age. During their time at the school, many pupils, including those pupils eligible for free school meals, make suitable progress in their learning. Most pupils with additional learning needs (ALN) make secure progress from their individual starting points.

Across the school, most pupils develop their speaking and listening skills well. The youngest pupils listen to staff carefully. They develop their early speech effectively and ask and answer questions appropriately. By Year 2, pupils begin to formulate suitable questions when gathering information, such as when questioning each other about their research on China. Older pupils speak with confidence and clarity. For example, they explain their thoughts well when discussing characters in the play *Macbeth*.

Most pupils develop their reading skills effectively and show an enthusiasm for books and stories. Younger pupils acquire a secure understanding of the relationship between letters and sounds and use this to sound out unknown words effectively. As they move through the school, many read with increasing fluency and expression. Older pupils build on this progress well and show appropriate awareness of character and plot. They start to develop suitable higher order reading skills. For example, they begin to skim and scan text when carrying out research.

Overall, pupils' writing skills do not develop well enough. The youngest pupils make suitable attempts to write their own names and use initial sounds when attempting to write unfamiliar words. By Year 2, around half of pupils begin to write extended pieces with appropriate spelling. The majority of older pupils start to develop their writing appropriately across a limited range of genres. For example, when writing a biography about the famous black activist Rosa Parks, they choose words for effect and sequence her life events successfully. However, pupils do not write at length often enough and do not edit or redraft their writing to improve its quality.

Many pupils develop their mathematical skills appropriately as they progress through the school. The youngest pupils count to ten and show early understanding of number. Younger pupils improve their understanding of place value suitably. They sequence and halve numbers accurately. As they move through the school, pupils improve their ability to add, subtract, multiply and divide. They begin to use and apply their skills to solve problems and carry out investigations. For example, older pupils plot their heart rate accurately on a line graph when exploring the effect of exercise on the body.

The majority of pupils develop their Welsh language skills suitably. They understand and respond appropriately to questions and instructions. Older pupils use and understand simple words and phrases, such as when describing their hobbies. Whilst pupils develop the necessary vocabulary and language patterns, they do not always have the confidence to hold basic conversations in Welsh.

Overall, many pupils' digital skills develop appropriately. A few younger pupils begin to use digital applications confidently, for example when using a device to identify shapes on a screen. By Year 4, pupils use a range of programmes well, such as when they design and create their own dragon using a digital package. Older pupils insert and create text within a presentation successfully and begin to develop their ability to code.

Many pupils develop their physical skills well. The youngest pupils use their fine motor skills effectively such as when picking up small items with tweezers. As they move through the school, pupils improve their overall agility, balance and control. Older pupils develop a wide range of skills and learn to play competitive games successfully, such as football and hockey.

Most pupils develop their creative skills appropriately. They create their own artwork using a variety of materials and tools. They work well as a team and think carefully of solutions to solve a problem. For example, when younger pupils design and build a large castle out of junk materials, they consider the impact of rain on cardboard.

Well-being and attitudes to learning

Nearly all pupils are polite and considerate, and demonstrate excellent behaviour both within classrooms and around the school. They show great pride in their school and its community and provide high levels of care and kindness to each other. For example, older pupils enjoy helping younger pupils during break time. Relationships with staff, other pupils and visitors to school are strong and pupils show high levels of respect.

Most pupils show an increasing awareness of their emotions and articulate how they feel in a variety of situations. They appreciate the care and support the school provides and know who to go to if they have a problem. As a result, most pupils feel safe and secure in the school's nurturing environment and regulate their reactions appropriately when their emotions change. Most pupils have a good awareness of how to stay safe online. For example, they know the importance of not sharing passwords.

Across the school, most pupils participate enthusiastically in lessons and show focus and interest in their learning. When faced with a problem, they show appropriate levels of resilience and learn how to cooperate within a team. For example, younger pupils persevere and work together effectively when designing a dragon from materials during their outdoor play. However, as a result of limited opportunities, pupils do not develop sufficiently strong independent learning skills. Most pupils develop an awareness of what it means to be ethical. For example, they gain an understanding of the importance of saving energy and the benefits of recycling. As they move through the school, many pupils enjoy the opportunity to be involved in leadership roles, such as the Pupil Power Squad. These groups have recently begun

to impact positively on the wider life of the school. For example, The Pupil Power Squad launched a poster competition to raise awareness of the importance of saving energy.

During their time at Pontrhondda, most pupils develop a strong understanding of equality and diversity. They celebrate what makes them special and they value one another's backgrounds and cultures. Most pupils have a strong sense of justice and equality and demonstrate respect for each other and visitors to school. For example, when older pupils explore issues of stereotyping in society, they recognise the injustice of having different rules based on someone's gender.

Most pupils understand the importance of a balanced diet and the value of exercise to stay healthy. They benefit from regular access to water throughout the day and enjoy participating in extra-curricular activities, such as the school football club, to keep fit. Many pupils enjoy a healthy start to the school day through regular attendance at the school's breakfast club.

Many pupils are conscientious and are keen to improve the quality of their work. Generally, they respond appropriately to teachers' questions during lessons. However, overall, due to the lack of opportunity, pupils do not always use teacher feedback well enough as a means of improving the quality of their work.

Whilst pupil attendance shows improvement over the last year, overall, pupil attendance rates are too low.

Teaching and learning experiences

Staff build positive relationships with pupils, working effectively to provide high levels of emotional support. They act as positive role models, taking time to get to know the talents and needs of every pupil. There is a consistent approach to behaviour management that ensures that pupils feel well cared for and are ready to learn.

Whilst at an early stage of development, the school's 'Curriculum Pontio' reflects the interests and needs of most pupils and is in line with the requirements of Curriculum for Wales. Teachers provide pupils and parents with appropriate opportunities to contribute suggestions for learning. This helps to enrich the curriculum and makes it relevant to the pupils' experiences and their local community.

Overall, teachers use a range of resources and schemes as part of a systematic approach to teaching pupils literacy, numeracy, Welsh and digital skills. For example, they provide regular opportunities for pupils to develop their knowledge of the sounds that letters make, which supports pupils to improve their early reading and spelling skills. However, provision for the development of pupils' writing skills is inconsistent and this means that pupils do not always make the progress of which they are capable. In addition, teachers do not provide sufficient opportunities for pupils to develop their writing across a wide range of genres or to write at length frequently enough. Recently, teachers have begun to introduce increased opportunities for pupils to use and apply their skills in mathematics. For example, when challenged to interpret information from graphs about life in local coal mines, Year 6 pupils explain why the life expectancy of boys is lower than girls. Teachers use a suitable range of

resources to enable pupils to develop their digital skills effectively, for example when they learn how to code simple programs.

The school's curriculum provides good opportunities to develop pupils' understanding of issues, such as equality and diversity. For example, older pupils demonstrate maturity and empathy in their approach to sensitive subjects, such as the impact of dementia, racism and stereotyping on society today. Teachers enhance school topics effectively using introductory 'hook' days that help to ignite pupils' interest successfully. For example, through the topic 'Cymru am byth', pupils develop a sense of belonging and explore what it means to be Welsh. In addition, visits to the local community, such as the local supermarket, support pupils' understanding of the world of work. Many teachers model the Welsh language effectively and promote a sense of pride in what it means to be Welsh. They use opportunities to celebrate different languages, cultures and religions suitably, for example through their work on continents and countries, like Africa and China.

Across the school, most teachers provide an appropriate range of resources to support learning and organise classrooms effectively to ensure that pupils develop an understanding of books and a love of reading. They consistently provide appropriate 'calming' or 'well-being' areas that support pupils to regulate their emotions and develop resilience in their learning. Many pupils benefit from the well organised outdoor environment. Teachers of younger pupils plan appropriate learning opportunities for them to explore, practise and promote their curiosity. During 'Welly Wednesday', the youngest pupils collaborate well through a variety of stimulating and open-ended activities. For example, when mixing paint in puddles, they experiment with combinations of different colours and observe the impact. However, generally, there is a tendency for adults to over-scaffold learning and pupils do not have sufficient opportunity to think for themselves, make choices and develop independence in their learning.

Overall, teachers' feedback does not consistently help pupils to understand the next steps in their learning. Many teachers share clear learning intentions and give effective explanations and instructions. They model learning suitably and ask a beneficial range of questions to check pupil understanding and to move learning on. In the best examples, teachers provide helpful verbal feedback and are beginning to provide opportunity for pupils to self and peer assess their work. However, this work is at an early stage and is not yet having sustained impact on improving the quality of pupils' work.

Care, support and guidance

Pontrhondda Primary is a caring, helpful school that provides effective support for the well-being of pupils and their families. Staff build positive working relationships with parents. This helps them to understand any potential barriers to learning that pupils may have and to tailor support appropriately to meet individual pupil and family needs. For example, following feedback, the school worked with outside agencies to provide parents with beneficial literacy and numeracy training.

Staff provide high levels of care to pupils. There are effective systems in place to ensure that pupils know who to go to if they have a concern or a problem. Regular lessons, use of outside speakers and whole-school events, such as Safer Internet

Day, provide purposeful ways for pupils to learn about keeping themselves safe, including whilst online. Highly trained staff collaborate well with outside agencies to provide valuable emotional care and support for pupils. This helps pupils to understand their emotions and feelings and to learn strategies to regulate their behaviour when things become difficult.

The school's support for pupils with ALN is highly effective. The school adopts a person-centred approach ensuring that the voice of every child is valued. Teachers and leaders work effectively in partnership with parents and outside agencies. This enables staff to adjust provision and plan support to meet the specific needs of pupils. For example, support staff provide a wide range of interventions that help pupils to improve their reading and numeracy skills effectively. The school ensures that pupils identified with ALN have carefully thought-out individual development plans that comply with ALN legislation. Teachers and leaders monitor the impact of additional provision carefully and regular review meetings contribute effectively to the evaluation of pupils' progress.

Through a range of appropriately planned learning activities, teachers ensure that pupils develop an effective understanding of equality and diversity. Pupils gain an awareness of their own identity and their place as citizens of Wales and the wider World. For example, older pupils develop an understanding of different cultures and backgrounds through their study of famous heroes, such as Mary Prince, the first black woman to publish an autobiography of her experience as a slave. Provision for relationships education is appropriate and supports pupils successfully to understand how to keep safe.

The school ensures that pupils have a voice in school improvement through the work of The Pupil Power Squad and Criw Cymraeg. Their work is beginning to have a suitable impact on school life such as their anti-litter campaign to improve the school grounds. The school provides a range of extra-curricular opportunities that promote pupils' enjoyment in learning successfully. This includes the school football, brass and expressive arts club. The school works effectively in partnership with the local authority music service to provide music lessons to all pupils.

A regular programme of school assemblies, alongside curriculum work, promote the development of pupils' moral, spiritual and social skills appropriately. Through this, pupils gain an appreciation of the school values, such as perseverance and trust.

The school's arrangements for safeguarding are appropriate and give no cause for concern. The school operates suitable strategies to support pupils who are absent from school and there are relevant procedures in place to manage persistent absenteeism. However, despite the school's efforts to address the issue, attendance levels remain too low.

Leadership and management

The headteacher provides effective, thoughtful leadership with a clear vision to support each child to reach their full potential. She works successfully with staff to build positive relationships with parents and the local community. The well-being of all is at the heart of the school's strategic vision. This is evident in the positive, friendly ethos that permeates the school.

The school engages well with its families. The Parent Council provides worthwhile feedback and enables leaders to adjust policies and provision appropriately. For example, following input from the group and through collaboration with outside agencies, the school now provides a range of beneficial learning opportunities for parents. Leaders ensure that all stakeholders have a voice in school improvement. For example, Year 6 pupils and the Parent Council supported the development of the school's anti-bullying policy by providing leaders with valuable suggestions. This strong collaborative working ensures that policies appropriately reflect the views and needs of the whole school community.

The headteacher works effectively with senior leaders and staff to monitor and evaluate pupil progress. Beneficial pupil progress meetings enable leaders to identify areas of pupil need as well as potential barriers to learning. Through this work, leaders gain a clear understanding of the progress made by pupils. They use this information effectively to adjust support for pupils, including those who are vulnerable.

Senior leaders model and promote the school values of perseverance, opportunity, nurture and trust, successfully. They work closely with the headteacher to monitor and evaluate progress. This provides the school with a clear understanding of areas of strength and areas requiring improvement. For example, following a period of evaluation and improvement, the quality and consistency of the school's provision to support pupil well-being have improved across the school. However, leaders do not always focus specifically enough on the areas that require most urgent attention, such as the need to improve opportunities for pupils to write more frequently at length and across a wider range of genres.

The headteacher holds teachers to account sensitively and uses performance management processes effectively to drive school improvement. She has an accurate understanding of the quality of teaching across the school and provides an appropriate range of support and professional learning to help staff to improve their practice.

Leaders link professional learning to whole school targets appropriately. They provide valuable opportunities for staff to improve their professional practice through work with external providers and through learning opportunities within the school. For example, teachers and teaching assistants collaborate when planning lessons and activities, and teachers observe each other's classroom practice. This helps staff to develop their confidence and improve their skills. In addition, staff work well in collaboration with other local schools to develop a shared approach to the development of the curriculum. The headteacher and governing body pay due regard to national priorities. This is evident in the school's work to develop its curriculum and its work to meet the legislative requirements of the ALN Act. Leaders know the local community well. They adopt a whole-school approach to tackling the impact of poverty on attainment through the provision of family learning activities and through work with outside agencies. The school uses the pupil development grant effectively to support pupils who are eligible for free school meals or from low-income households, to have equality of access in their learning. For example, the majority of pupils, from all backgrounds, benefit from learning to play a musical instrument. Grant funding ensures that family finances are not a barrier to learning.

Governors provide dedicated support to the school. They have a clear understanding of local priorities and work effectively alongside school leaders to monitor the impact of strategic initiatives. Involvement in school self-evaluation activities, such as learning walks, provides governors with valuable information about school processes and helps them to ask informed questions about progress. Governors support the school successfully to promote healthy eating and drinking and they ensure that arrangements for safeguarding are robust. The headteacher works effectively alongside the governing body to manage and monitor school finances and resources.

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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