



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

A report on

Penygarn Primary School

**Penygarn Road
Penygarn
Pontypool
Torfaen
NP4 8JR**

Date of inspection: January 2024

by

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

About Penygarn Primary School

Name of provider	Penygarn Primary School
Local authority	Torfaen County Borough Council
Language of the provider	English
Type of school	Primary
Religious character	*
Number of pupils on roll	419
Pupils of statutory school age	318
Number in nursery classes	51
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%)	51.8%
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%)	14.2%
Percentage of pupils who speak Welsh at home	*
Percentage of pupils with English as an additional language	*
Date of headteacher appointment	25/04/2022
Date of previous Estyn inspection (if applicable)	01/12/2015
Start date of inspection	29/01/2024

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

Penygarn Primary School is a caring community where pupils feel safe, happy and make effective progress. Most pupils forge positive relationships with their peers and staff alike and demonstrate respect for each other. They enjoy coming to school and are enthusiastic about their learning. Pupils know that staff expect them to behave well and to be considerate to everyone in the school and the community.

The school places a strong emphasis on supporting the well-being of all. There are strong relationships with parents and families and the school provides an effective range of support in collaboration with outside agencies. Provision for pupils with additional learning needs (ALN) is highly beneficial. There is a strong culture of safeguarding across the school.

The headteacher is effective in her role and provides strong and caring leadership. She knows the school well. She is supported well by the senior leaders and most staff. The team works purposefully alongside the governing body to secure improvements for the school. Together, they understand the school's strengths and identify accurately most of the areas for development. However, some important areas for improvement are not prioritised, such as the need to address inconsistencies in the quality of teaching.

Staff offer pupils a variety of relevant learning experiences, which help to keep pupils interested in their learning. As a result, many pupils, including those with ALN, engage well with their learning, make good progress and achieve well. The school's curriculum takes account of pupils' interests. Teaching assistants and many teachers are skilful and support pupils to develop a range of skills well.

Recommendations

- R1 Address inconsistencies in the quality of teaching
- R2 Sharpen self-evaluation so that improvement focuses on pupils

What happens next

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

Main evaluation

Learning

Many pupils start Penygarn Primary School with skills below those expected for their age. By the time they leave the school, many pupils, including those who are eligible for free school meals, make good progress in their learning and well-being. Many pupils with additional learning needs make strong progress towards their individual targets.

During their time at school, most pupils make strong progress in the development of their speaking and listening skills. The school's youngest pupils are keen to communicate with each other, staff and visitors through talk, gestures and movements that help them to share their thoughts. By the time they leave school, many pupils are confident speakers. They use age-appropriate vocabulary to hold conversations, express their ideas and share their learning.

The development of writing skills across the school is strong and most pupils make good progress. Younger pupils happily make marks using a range of media such as pens, pencils, paint and chunky chinks. By Year 2, many pupils write simple sentences independently and use adjectives purposefully to add effect and interest to their work. By Year 6, most pupils write for a variety of purposes and audiences. In general, they use basic punctuation accurately and present their work neatly. However, pupils' ability to use a joined script neatly is underdeveloped in a majority of cases.

Many pupils develop their reading skills appropriately. The youngest pupils show their interest in books and use them naturally as part of their play. By Year 2, many pupils begin to use a range of strategies to help them read unfamiliar words, such as sounding out, reading ahead and using picture cues. By Year 6, many pupils read with good pace. They answer simple questions about their reading and can recall and retell passages they have read. However, a minority of pupils have difficulty extracting meaning from their reading or drawing conclusions sufficiently well.

A majority of younger pupils develop a sound understanding of mathematics including number, shape and data through practical activities. For example, reception pupils happily explore, identify and sort shapes in the natural environment and identify numbers to 10 with ease. As they move through the school the progress most pupils make in mathematics is appropriate. By Year 6, most pupils use the methods they have learned to solve calculations and problems. Generally, they explain their work accurately and apply their skills well in real life contexts. For example, they budget for the creation of a theme park efficiently and calculate profit and loss during an enterprise project.

A majority of pupils make suitable progress in the development of their Welsh language skills. Most younger pupils have positive attitudes towards the Welsh language. They use simple Welsh words and phrases naturally in their play and ask and answer basic questions with confidence. However, as pupils move through the school their progress slows. Opportunities for them to develop their Welsh skills

progressively as they get older are limited, and as a result older pupils are not able to extend their sentences.

When developing their digital skills, most pupils make strong progress. From an early age, pupils begin to understand their uses. In Year 2, pupils use digital programmes confidently to order images of themselves making xylophones and write instructions. By Year 6, pupils competently compose musical scores to accompany games they have coded using an online programme. They diligently edit images and create videos to promote the sale of Christmas related products.

Many pupils make appropriate progress in developing their problem solving and thinking skills. By Year 2, many pupils access classroom resources independently to support their work. Pupils in Year 6 consider and test how weight affects a pendulum. They make sensible predictions for the pendulum's movement as they add weight. They evaluate their plans and findings well.

Most pupils make suitable progress in the development of their creative and physical skills and enjoy doing so. Younger pupils take great care and show attention to detail when creating monochrome images of a tin soldier. Older pupils use natural materials to make potions. They carefully consider and select effective language to describe their products.

Well-being and attitudes to learning

Nearly all pupils enjoy their time at Penygarn Primary School. They are proud of their school and benefit from its inclusive, caring, and nurturing ethos. Many pupils feel safe in school and know who to talk to if they are worried. They value the many opportunities they have to share their feelings with staff and feel listened to, supported and respected. They are confident that staff will deal with their concerns quickly.

Across the school, most pupils behave well in class, during assemblies and at play times. They are welcoming, friendly and communicate with visitors confidently. Most pupils are polite, kind and respectful of others and their school. For example, nursery pupils show care by helping each other to put on their hi-visibility vests in the outdoor construction area.

In all classes pupils demonstrate strong attitudes towards their learning. Most listen well to teachers and support staff and are diligent in following instructions. Younger pupils move to different classes for phonics sessions sensibly and independently, taking care to ensure that they arrive on time. Most pupils are keen to share their learning. They are proud of their work and are excited by the positive feedback they receive from staff. Many pupils value the constructive responses they receive from teachers and when given the opportunity, pupils use this feedback constructively to improve their work and address misconceptions. However, a few pupils lack confidence and resilience and struggle to persevere with work that they find challenging.

Throughout the school, most pupils demonstrate curiosity, and a few are confident in asking challenging questions of their teachers. For example, Year 6 pupils rightly question whether a character from a story who screams in outer space could be

heard. In general, pupils are good at ignoring distractions. They are sympathetic to the needs of other pupils and understand that some pupils find certain situations challenging. Many older pupils identify future job aspirations and understand the value of their education in helping them to achieve these goals.

Nearly all pupils have useful opportunities to contribute to a range of pupil groups which form part of the school Senedd. However, although pupils voice their views, many feel that their views are not impacting on the decisions of the school and would like to be able to make more positive changes. Most pupils have a good knowledge of children's rights and discuss these rigorously when given the opportunity. For example, they recognise that pupils in some countries do not always have their rights fulfilled and question the fairness of this. Most pupils develop well as ethical and well-informed citizens and demonstrate a strong understanding of the importance of caring for each other and our world.

As they move through the school, most pupils develop a good understanding of how to use the internet sensibly and safely. For example, they know not to share their passwords with others or message people they do not know. Most pupils realise the importance of regular attendance at school and diligent pupil ambassadors support the school's work in this area well by gathering, analysing and displaying current attendance figures.

Almost without exception, pupils take part enthusiastically in a range of physical activities such as skills sessions, after-school clubs and the daily mile. They recognise the benefits of physical exercise on their health and older pupils enjoy participating in sports such as netball, football, rugby and cricket. A few pupils are proud to participate in competitive sports matches with other schools. Most pupils have a understand of the importance of healthy eating and drinking and feel that the school encourages this well through lessons, events and lunchtime options.

Teaching and learning experiences

The school's curriculum is broad and authentic. Teachers plan learning experiences that develop pupils' understanding of the locality, Wales and the world. Generally, this provides pupils with meaningful contexts to develop and apply their skills and knowledge well. Teachers plan immersion days to engage pupils in learning experiences that spark pupils' curiosity. For example, when learning about space, pupils view a virtual solar system in an inflatable planetarium provide by a local company.

Teachers provide purposeful opportunities for pupils to contribute meaningfully to their learning. For example, younger pupils decide what they want to learn about pumpkins and leaves when learning about autumn. Older pupils make effective plans to find out how roller coasters work and calculate the cost of building these when learning about theme parks.

Most teachers develop beneficial working relationships with pupils. Overall, they establish calm learning environments where pupils usually interact positively.

Many teachers have a secure knowledge of the concepts and skills they teach. They provide clear explanations and intentions for learning. Generally, teachers use

effective questioning to advance pupils' thinking and clarify their understanding. They provide pupils with useful success criteria for pupils to evaluate their own work and that of their peers. Many teachers adapt their approaches to suit the needs of pupils, as the learning unfolds. However, in a few lessons, the pace of learning is slow, tasks lack suitable challenge and learning lacks a clear focus. As a result, a few pupils do not understand what they need to do and lose interest in their learning. A very few pupils' behaviour deteriorates as a result.

Generally, teachers organise their classrooms well to promote pupils' independence. Many teachers make good use of the outdoor learning environment. For example, reception pupils manipulate tools when digging and write number sentences precisely using chunky chalks. Year 5 pupils use the outdoors effectively to develop their collaborative skills and widen their vocabulary when writing descriptively. However, a few teachers do not fully exploit the use of the school's ample outdoor areas often enough to support learning for all pupils.

Leaders and teachers deploy support staff effectively across the school. Skilled teaching assistants ensure that pupils focus on their learning and are successful. Teachers and teaching assistants use an effective range of strategies that enable most pupils with additional needs to access the school's curriculum. In many cases, teachers provide effective support and challenge. For example, highly skilled staff meet the needs of the youngest pupils effectively.

Provision for the development of pupils' literacy, numeracy and digital skills builds successfully on pupils' learning. This is particularly notable in writing. Most teachers provide useful opportunities for pupils to develop their mathematical skills well using concrete and pictorial resources. The school ensures that pupils have access to a variety of digital resources and teachers plan a sequential range of activities to develop pupils' digital skills successfully.

Across the school, most staff model the Welsh language effectively during planned lessons. However, Welsh is insufficiently used in other lessons and in informal situations.

Teachers and leaders make good use of worthwhile visits, events and community links to support pupils to learn about the educational opportunities available to them as they become older, and to develop their aspirations.

The school uses a range of informative assessments to evaluate pupils' learning, and monitor pupils' progress. Teachers use this information appropriately to plan for pupils' next steps in learning. Pupils have opportunities to reflect on their learning in class, but their ability to do this effectively is underdeveloped.

Care, support and guidance

Penygarn Primary is a caring, inclusive school that places a high priority on the development of pupils' well-being. Provision to support pupils' social and emotional skills is a strength of the school. Most staff provide pupils with a calm and nurturing environment and the school offers bespoke support to vulnerable pupils. These approaches help most pupils to manage their feelings and behaviour successfully. As a result, many pupils focus well on their learning and develop positive friendships.

Across the school, relationships are strong and staff work closely with families to benefit pupils. The school's family engagement officer provides thoughtful support for families and intervention for vulnerable pupils. For example, the toddler numeracy groups and the classes for 'cooking on a budget' for young carers enrich the school's provision for families.

The additional learning needs co-ordinator (ALNCo) is effective, has a good understanding of national reform and shares this information with staff well. The ALNCo and class teachers assess pupils' needs effectively and devise useful support plans, including one-page profiles with targets that focus suitably on the small steps towards success. Staff monitor and evaluate pupils' progress regularly and, where appropriate, outside agencies provide further support.

Leaders have developed a wide range of interventions across the school to meet pupils' needs, including support for pupils' emotional and social needs. As a result of effective collaboration between all staff running interventions, class based staff and the ALNCO, most pupils with ALN make good progress against their targets.

The school encourages nearly all pupils, including those eligible for free school meals, to take on responsibilities by joining one of the pupil leadership groups. However, the impact of these groups on school improvement is limited.

The school's curriculum develops pupils' understanding of equality and diversity suitably. Many teachers use local and global events to plan authentic and relevant learning. For example, pupils explore values such as respect and empathy. Pupils explore facts and share opinions on current world conflicts. Staff provide pupils with regular opportunities to develop their spiritual, moral and ethical understanding through the curriculum and daily acts of worship. They provide regular opportunities for pupils to reflect on their own beliefs, and the beliefs of others.

The school provides a variety of opportunities for pupils to develop their physical skills successfully. Teachers enhance learning using the expertise of visiting sportspersons and provide pupils with beneficial opportunities to play competitive team games.

The school has appropriate arrangements to promote healthy eating and drinking. For example, Year 1 pupils design healthy plates and talk about the benefits of eating fruit rather than sweets. The school is working hard to encourage pupils to bring healthy snacks, lunch boxes and drinks to school. This is beginning to have a positive impact on pupils' choices of snacks.

The school supports pupils' understanding of cynefin, and their sense of belonging. Teachers plan whole-school topics that start in the locality before expanding to Wales and then internationally. This is enhanced by a range of local visits and visitors including musicians and artists that support and develop pupils' artistic skills.

Teachers plan opportunities for pupils to develop their financial and entrepreneurial skills. For example, pupils in Year 6 use coding to design and then market and sell a game to other pupils in the school.

The school monitors pupils' attendance effectively. Attendance has improved notably since the headteacher's appointment. Staff promote a positive and robust culture of safeguarding, ensuring that the welfare of all is a high priority. The school adopts a strong multi-agency approach to provide appropriate help and to support the welfare of pupils and their families.

Leadership and management

Leadership in Penygarn Primary School is effective. The headteacher successfully places high importance on creating a sense of community within the school. They foster an inclusive ethos where all pupils are welcomed and valued. The headteacher has successfully established a vision for the school based on its motto 'Nurturing the hearts and minds of the future.' This is shared and understood well by pupils, parents, staff and governors. Communication and relationships with parents are strong and parents appreciate the nurturing, caring ethos the school promotes.

The school has developed effective partnerships with a beneficial range of external partners who support the school's community-focussed vision well. The school has established effective relationships with other on-site local authority providers and these close associations enhance support for vulnerable pupils and those with additional learning needs.

The headteacher places a strong emphasis on the well-being of pupils and staff. She leads this aspect of the school's work effectively. This approach has a beneficial impact on school improvement, including a significant reduction in the number of exclusions and a notable increase in attendance.

Governors know the school, pupils, parents and the community well. They are proud and supportive of the school and have a good understanding of the many challenges the school faces. Governors have a sound knowledge of their roles and responsibilities and support the school's leaders in prioritising the well-being and behaviour of the pupils. Members of the governing body discharge their duties well through a range of link roles and committees, often bringing useful expertise to these responsibilities. Governors use their expertise to effectively support leaders to manage finances and develop a strong safeguarding culture within the school. They understand their roles and take a diligent approach to promoting healthy eating and drinking.

Leaders have a good understanding of pupils' life experiences and how the school can make a positive difference to their lives. Comprehensive financial and strategic planning and provision to meet all pupils needs and reduce the impact of poverty on educational attainment has been especially successful. The pupil development grant (PDG) is used effectively to support learners in school-based interventions. The valuable deployment of skilled teaching assistants contributes to improving pupils' standards of learning, well-being, and social skills well.

The headteacher has implemented useful new procedures and policies to drive school improvement. Leaders and staff have a good understanding of the school's strengths and accurately identify aspects of the school's areas for improvement. They show good awareness and commitment to address national priorities in education, which they also prioritise for improvement. Leaders have developed

extensive systems and processes to evaluate the work of the school. However, monitoring activities are too wide ranging and do not always focus enough on improvements that will have the greatest impact on pupils' learning. For example, the school has not identified the need to improve the consistency of teaching.

School leaders have successfully created a beneficial culture of professional learning and development. The recent focus on developing staff skills in teaching numeracy through tailored mentoring, has been successful and resulted in improved progress for most pupils. School leaders are beginning to use and promote action research to explore approaches to teaching. The headteacher has rightly instigated a focus on professional development in Welsh. The youngest pupils are beginning to benefit, as teachers put their development into practice. Senior leaders co-ordinate processes for teachers' performance management suitably and objectives are linked well to school priorities.

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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