



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

A report on

St Mary's Catholic Primary School

**Llangwydd Road
Bridgend
CF31 4JW**

Date of inspection: February 2024

by

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

This report is also available in Welsh

About St Mary's Catholic Primary School

Name of provider	St Mary's Catholic Primary School
Local authority	Bridgend County Borough Council
Language of the provider	English
Type of school	Primary
Religious character	Roman Catholic
Number of pupils on roll	263
Pupils of statutory school age	207
Number in nursery classes	28
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%)	11.5%
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%)	10.1%
Percentage of pupils who speak Welsh at home	0.0%
Percentage of pupils with English as an additional language	44%
Date of headteacher appointment	September 2008
Date of previous Estyn inspection (if applicable)	01/06/2016
Start date of inspection	26/02/2024
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

St Mary's Catholic Primary is a caring school, putting its dedication to its community at its heart. The headteacher, governors and staff work thoughtfully and conscientiously together to promote an ethos characterised by its strong belief in creating a committed Catholic family.

The school's values underpin its vision for learning and well-being and permeate every aspect of school life. The headteacher leads by example. He is supported effectively by other leaders and staff in developing very strong partnerships with parents and the wider community. Pupils build strong relationships with staff and show positive attitudes to their learning.

On entry to nursery, there is a broad spread of abilities. Around half the pupils begin school with literacy and numeracy skills below age related expectations, however within a very short time, due to a wide range of rich learning experiences, the youngest pupils make strong progress. Nearly all pupils, including those who are eligible for free school meals (eFSM), those who have additional learning needs (ALN), or those who have English as an additional language (EAL), make strong progress as they move through the school. By the time they leave, nearly all pupils achieve well across most areas of the curriculum. However, pupils do not always make strong enough progress in developing their Welsh language skills.

Teachers are effective in delivering a curriculum which the school has developed over a number of recent years. Its principles are based on a focus on learning domains which are repeated as pupils move through the school. These domains allow pupils to explore the same topics and themes at repeated intervals, deepen their understanding and extend their knowledge, skills and vocabulary effectively. To support domain learning, teachers use the outdoors imaginatively to create exciting learning experiences, promoting strong pupil participation and enjoyment in learning.

There is a productive culture of reflection and evaluation within the school and leaders identify appropriate priorities for improvement. Leaders focus suitably on evaluating the quality of teaching at regular intervals, but it is not always clear enough to staff what they need to focus on most in order to improve.

Recommendations

- R1 Improve teachers' skills and confidence in the teaching of Welsh to improve the progress that pupils make
- R2 Improve self-evaluation processes to identify clearly the strengths and areas for improvement in teaching

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 on its work in relation to the provision of high quality learning experiences for their youngest pupils, for dissemination on Estyn's website.

Main evaluation

Learning

During their time at the school, nearly all pupils, including those who are vulnerable and those with ALN, make at least good progress from their starting points in most aspects of their learning. Pupils with EAL are particularly successful in acquiring the language skills they need to access the curriculum. Many pupils recall previously learnt knowledge, skills and understanding well, and apply these effectively when tackling new learning.

Pupils' speaking and listening skills are generally strong. The youngest pupils learn to listen carefully and speak to others willingly. Throughout the foundation learning classes, they acquire a range of relevant vocabulary to talk about their learning and share their ideas. As they move on, pupils express themselves clearly and ask and answer questions with increasing competence. Most older pupils contribute to discussions confidently and reason with others logically.

Pupils' Welsh language skills are less-well developed. Although nursery and reception pupils make a good start to learning some basic words and phrases, the progress of pupils as they move through the school is limited. Most pupils do not develop good enough levels of understanding or the confidence to hold simple conversations.

Most pupils develop good reading skills that enable them to access the curriculum successfully. The youngest pupils enjoy listening to stories. Pupils' phonic knowledge develops systematically as they move through the school, and this means that they become confident early readers. They read enthusiastically, discuss books with others and use their reading skills well to help them learn. Over time, most pupils develop a love of reading. Older pupils speak about their favourite genres and authors at length. They read fluently and expressively and develop an appropriate range of reading skills, such as skimming and scanning for specific pieces of information.

Pupils learn to write for a wide range of purposes as they move through the school. Younger pupils develop an early understanding of the purpose of writing through their play and, when they are ready, they begin to recognise and form letters and build words. As they move on, pupils express themselves in writing with increasing accuracy. By Year 2, many use flow charts to help them to order their writing. A few

who are ready to write without a framework use sequencing words, such as 'first', 'then' and 'next'. They use these words correctly to form a logical series of sentences to create a chronological account. Many older pupils achieve a good level of writing stamina and produce lengthy, accurate factual pieces. Most pupils use words and phrases to capture the engagement of the reader when writing creatively. However, there are too few opportunities for them to do this.

Overall, pupils make strong progress in mathematics and use their numeracy skills well across the curriculum. For example, they measure and compare the heights of their friends, and use their skills effectively in measuring activities on geography field trips. From an early age, most pupils develop a secure understanding of number. They soon recognise and order numbers to ten. As they move through the school, they build on this knowledge effectively and, for example, learn to use the four rules of number successfully to solve simple problems. Older pupils apply their number skills highly effectively when working with aspects of mathematics such as percentages and basic algebra.

Pupils' digital skills build over time so that they can use technology purposefully to support their learning. For example, pupils in the foundation learning classes use tablet computers competently to take photographs to record their learning, listen to and read stories, and play games. By Year 6, many have a sound grasp of basic coding, they carry out research regularly, present their work in different forms and use programs competently to input data and create a range of charts, graphs and models.

Most pupils develop strong creative skills. They respond positively to a range of specialist teaching experiences that build their creativity.

From an early stage, most pupils develop their gross and fine motor skills by using a wide range of equipment and apparatus in classrooms and in the outdoor learning areas. A particular strength is the way in which pupils learn to move around the woodland area using their balancing and climbing skills. Most pupils develop a good selection of ball skills through interesting PE lessons and a workshop with members of a Welsh football club.

Well-being and attitudes to learning

Nearly all pupils enjoy school, and they feel safe and well cared for. Older pupils develop the skills needed to resolve disagreements independently and are proud of their role as 'peace makers'. Nearly all pupils treat each other with respect, and they show empathy and support to their friends.

Most pupils behave well in lessons and move around the school sensibly. They are polite and courteous to each other and visitors. They collaborate well and show respect when listening to the views of others. Nearly all pupils play co-operatively, and take turns in games during playtimes.

Most pupils show positive attitudes to their learning. They talk enthusiastically about their work and engage positively with the class topics called domains. From an early age, pupils settle in lessons quickly, concentrate well and avoid distractions as they complete their tasks. Younger pupils explore the learning environment confidently

and show perseverance through play, for example when trying to add a Welsh flag to their model castle.

Nearly all pupils take part in planning their daily Liturgy. This results in pupils displaying high levels of interest and engagement in daily acts of collective worship. When given the opportunity, many contribute their ideas to planning their domain topics. By Year 6, many pupils show an increasing ability to make choices about how and what they learn. However, pupils have too few opportunities to make independent choices about how they approach and present their work.

Most pupils reflect on their learning from an early age. Many respond well to verbal feedback to develop their skills further. Many older pupils make appropriate use of self and peer assessment to make changes to their work. This supports their progress as they move through the school.

Many pupils develop their leadership skills suitably through a range of roles and pupil voice committees, for example the Peace Makers and the Criw Cymraeg. While undertaking these roles, many pupils present themselves with confidence and can explain where their work has made a difference to school life. For example, the Environment Committee arrange provision of new play equipment for the school yard.

Nearly all pupils demonstrate a sound understanding of cultural diversity by learning about different religions and celebrating various cultures from around the world. They have a clear understanding of the concept of fairness and equality. Most demonstrate an appropriate understanding of some of the ethical issues facing the world, such as the need to protect the environment. As an example, they collect rainwater to use for gardening. They are proud of their efforts in support of national and local charities such as the local food bank and the Cafod Ukraine Humanitarian Appeal. These initiatives have a positive effect on their awareness of the needs of others and help them to develop as ethical and responsible citizens.

Nearly all pupils have a good understanding of how to stay safe when online. For example, younger pupils understand the consequences of too much screen time and older pupils demonstrate a good understanding of the importance of adhering to age restrictions on digital platforms. Nearly all pupils know the importance of keeping healthy and fit. They talk maturely about the importance of developing good routines with making healthy food choices and taking regular exercise. They are knowledgeable about the impact of a good routine on their health and well-being.

Teaching and learning experiences

School leaders and staff have put considerable thought into the development, design and planning of the school's curriculum over time. This process has been supported effectively by pupils, parents and governors. Leaders have a secure understanding of how these plans fulfil the requirements of Curriculum for Wales and reflect on them regularly to ensure that they meet the needs of their pupils, including those who are affected by the impact of poverty. Parents are well informed about the areas or domains their children are studying and this encourages them to support their children with their learning at home.

The curriculum is broad, engaging and interesting. It focuses on the development of pupils' knowledge in a wide range of domains and ensures that pupils acquire the vocabulary they need to talk about each one. The range of knowledge within these offers a level of challenge for pupils that is intended to raise their aspirations and offer career possibilities that young pupils may not otherwise have considered, such as astronomy. Alongside this, the curriculum offers a range of suitable opportunities for all pupils to build and use their skills in literacy, numeracy and digital learning progressively.

An outline of agreed domains to be studied over time means that pupils can revisit similar areas of study at different stages as they move through the school. This encourages them to make links with previous learning and experience and consolidates their learning in a meaningful way. Teachers have the flexibility to tailor the curriculum to suit the needs and interests of their pupils and to respond to pupils' ideas. The pupils' consultative group for the curriculum discusses the curriculum at its meetings and offers suggestions and ideas for its development.

Staff maximise the use of the school's outdoor learning areas and the locality to offer authentic learning experiences to pupils. For example, pupils learn about and experience bee-keeping and growing vegetables in the allotment area. They harvest the honey to sell and use the vegetables to cook healthy meals. Teachers' skilful use of the outdoors enriches learning, particularly for the youngest pupils. Teachers' planning of rich learning experiences for these pupils substantially enhances pupils' ability to take risks, grow in confidence and be ambitious about their learning.

Most teachers know their pupils well. In many cases, teachers give clear explanations and use opportunities during lessons to clarify concepts and confirm next steps in learning appropriately. They have high expectations and demonstrate good levels of subject knowledge and confidence across most aspects of the curriculum. The school's use of particular expertise in some areas of teaching, for example in the teaching of class music lessons, enhances the curriculum positively. However, provision for Welsh language development is not as strong. The school has a programme of study in place to support the teaching of Welsh, but staff do not use this confidently and rigorously enough to inspire pupils to enjoy and value learning Welsh and to make good progress.

Nearly all staff have developed strong working relationships with pupils. They use a suitable range of strategies and approaches that best suit individual learning needs. As a result, most pupils engage purposefully with their learning tasks and maintain focus throughout lessons. Most teachers deploy staff purposefully in their classrooms and outdoors to help meet the needs of individuals and small groups of learners. These staff support pupils' learning and well-being effectively. For example, staff working with the youngest pupils carefully plan together. They make best use of the environment and available resources to enhance learning and respond to pupils' interests and developmental needs.

Teachers are refining their approaches to the promotion of independent learning. They have established pupil led research projects and are developing 'Curious Quests', presenting opportunities for pupils to explore in more depth the domains they are studying. Occasionally, teachers do not provide enough opportunities for

pupils to make independent choices about how they approach and present their work.

A majority of teachers provide pupils with an appropriate range of both written and verbal feedback in order to help move the learning on. In a few classes, worthwhile 'in the moment' feedback supports pupils to make immediate improvements to their learning.

Care, support and guidance

The school is a caring community, where staff and pupils show a high level of respect for each other. Staff know the pupils, their families and the local community very well. The positive relationships between pupils and adults are a strength of the school that is valued greatly by all pupils and parents. Staff place a high priority on pupils' well-being. They ensure that the school provides a nurturing environment in which pupils feel safe, happy, and cared for. They support pupils to manage disagreements independently and create an ethos that promotes kindness, respect, and good manners.

The school offers highly effective provision to support pupils with ALN. Staff identify pupils' additional learning, social and emotional needs at an early stage and provide for them effectively. Teachers create detailed individual plans for all pupils with ALN which include specific targets that effectively identify the needs of the pupils. They are evaluated regularly with pupils and parents playing a full part in the process. Teachers involve pupils, parents and the views of outside agencies to plan interventions and evaluate the impact of this work well. The school's procedures for tracking and monitoring pupils' progress are robust and this ensures that nearly all pupils make strong progress towards their individual targets.

The school's environment and collective worship promote pupils' moral and ethical development successfully. The school has strong links with the local church and pupils often participate in events and services throughout the year, for example, pupils sing alongside the Bridgend Male Voice Choir at the annual Christmas concert in the church. Staff provide regular planned opportunities for pupils to find out about different religions, and they celebrate the different cultures represented in school proudly, through their whole-school culture day. Staff encourage pupils to consider other people's views sensitively, and to acknowledge and respect diversity and the importance of values such as kindness and love.

Leaders build strong relationships with parents. Parents and carers appreciate how approachable leaders and staff are and value the regular communication they receive about school events and their child's progress. There are regular and worthwhile opportunities for parents to share in and support their child's learning journey, for example through opportunities to volunteer in the school to support reading.

Staff provide valuable opportunities for pupils to develop their creative skills. They arrange for the school choir to sing at the Christmas lunch with senior citizens and encourage pupils to use the school's extensive outdoor space to play and explore. In addition, they provide opportunities for pupils to learn how to manage money

effectively. For example, pupils have the option to set a target and save money in the weekly schools' saving club.

The school ensures that pupils are given worthwhile opportunities to become members of various pupil voice committees. Staff ensure that these groups meet regularly and involve pupils in decisions about how to improve their school. Most teachers seek pupil opinions when planning class Liturgy and provide opportunities for younger pupils to make decisions about free play provision in their learning environment.

The school has appropriate arrangements to promote healthy eating and drinking. Teachers ensure pupils learn about the importance of making healthy lifestyle choices. They provide valuable opportunities for pupils to benefit from a range of physical activities such as creative dance and team sports, including football and netball. These effective arrangements motivate pupils to keep fit and deepen their understanding of developing healthy routines.

The safeguarding culture is robust, and all staff understand their roles and responsibilities in contributing to pupils' safety and well-being. There is effective provision to support pupils to keep themselves safe when working online. The school has sound strategies in place to promote good pupil attendance including daily monitoring and regular communication with parents.

Leadership and management

Working closely with governors and other leaders, the headteacher has established and communicated a purposeful vision for the school, based on providing pupils with the best opportunities to learn. Leaders place the strong Roman Catholic ethos of the school at the heart of its vision and these principles underpin all aspects of its aims and strategic objectives.

The headteacher has developed an engaged team of staff. He is supported effectively by other senior leaders who model and promote professional values and behaviours that contribute positively to school improvement and in promoting and sharing the school's safeguarding culture. Together, leaders and staff build extremely productive working relationships with families and the wider school community. They communicate effectively with parents about pupils' learning, their well-being and the curriculum developments, for example through regular and informative newsletters.

Leaders have appropriate systems of monitoring, evaluation and review that involve all staff and other partners, including pupils and parents. These processes support the purposeful evaluation of the school's strengths and in identifying priorities for improvement. They produce useful termly monitoring and evaluation reports based on the collection and analysis of a range of first-hand evidence and in the use of a variety of assessment information. These reports are shared with staff and governors to promote their understanding of what is working well and what areas require improvement.

As part of ongoing monitoring and evaluation, leaders identify areas of good practice and provide suitable recommendations regarding where improvements are needed. However, evaluations of the quality of teaching, in particular, tend to focus too much

on judgements and, as a result, staff do not always have a clear enough understanding of how they can improve their teaching further. Following evaluation and the identification of good practice, staff have occasional opportunities to share and observe effective teaching within the school, but opportunities for them to explore and observe teaching beyond the school is limited. Leaders do not always ensure that teaching is of a good enough standard in Welsh and, as a result, pupil progress in this area is limited.

Governors are knowledgeable about the school; they work hard and dedicate a good deal of their time to discharging their roles and responsibilities. They support the headteacher in contributing appropriately to the setting of the school's strategic priorities, viewing their role as a critical friend in holding senior leaders to account.

Governors receive useful and timely information from the headteacher to support them to discharge their duties suitably. Many governors support aspects of the school's monitoring and evaluation procedures appropriately. Whilst governors have begun to accompany school leaders in evaluating first-hand evidence in order to gain a better understanding of the school's strengths and areas for further development, this is at an early stage. Working with the local authority meals service, they ensure that food and drink provided by the school complies with legislation. There are appropriate arrangements in place to promote healthy eating and drinking across the school.

The headteacher has worked with staff to embed a culture of research-based professional learning that helps grow and develop the school's vision and aims. Professional learning is suitably linked to the priorities of the school development plan. In addition, leaders encourage staff to consider their own needs, providing them with the autonomy to pursue their interests. As a result, for example, staff have been supported to gain teaching qualifications and to gain higher level degrees.

The headteacher works effectively alongside the governing body to review and evaluate school finances and resources. They allocate and monitor spending efficiently, including that of the pupil development grant and pay due regard to the impact of poverty on attainment. Careful management has supported a number of recent small buildings projects like the school library and resources for staff.

The school is a lead training school for initial teacher training with a local university. Through this partnership the school provides school-led training. This supports teachers who are new to the profession effectively whilst providing useful opportunities for current staff to reflect on their own practice and to learn and embed their thinking about teaching and learning through the professional development of others.

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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