



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

A report on

St Francis R.C. Primary School

**Wilson Road
Ely
CF5 4JL**

Date of inspection: June 2022

by

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

About St Francis R.C. Primary School

Name of provider	St Francis R.C. Primary School
Local authority	Cardiff Council
Language of the provider	English
Type of school	Primary
Religious character	Catholic
Number of pupils on roll	352
Pupils of statutory school age	263
Number in nursery classes	48
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 21.3%)	51.9%
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 22.2%)	16.3%
Percentage of pupils who speak Welsh at home	
Percentage of pupils with English as an additional language	17.1%
Date of headteacher appointment	01/04/2021
Date of previous Estyn inspection (if applicable)	06/11/2012
Start date of inspection	27/06/2022

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

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

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

Overview

Leaders, teachers and support staff work hard to create a safe and happy school. Parents and carers are positive about the school's support for their children, families and the community. They praise leaders and teachers who go out of their way to make sure that all is well at home. Most pupils are confident and friendly. They feel safe and know that there is always someone to help and support them when they need it. They talk at length about the work they are most interested in. On occasion, they find their work less interesting and do not see the purpose of tasks.

Throughout the school, many pupils make good progress in aspects of their learning. They develop strong literacy skills in English and use these to support their reading well. When learning across the curriculum, pupils generally apply their writing skills well and develop their ideas through talking and listening to others. Opportunities for pupils to practice other important skills such as numeracy and digital skills are fewer, and for a minority of pupils these tasks are not challenging enough. As a result, a minority of pupils do not make the progress they could and do not always understand how to improve their work. Pupils make contributions to teachers' planning at the beginning of topics and a few take on roles in the school's leadership groups. Many pupils do not have enough opportunities to influence school life.

The school's vision to make sure pupils have equal opportunities to achieve excellence can be clearly seen in its strong support for pupil's additional needs. Leaders carefully consider ways to combat disadvantage and to provide high quality support for those with additional learning needs. Staff, including teaching assistants, ensure that these pupils make good progress in their work. School staff also provide space for pupils to deal positively with their emotions and support them to create good relationships with staff and other pupils.

Teachers are beginning to develop authentic opportunities which reflect the new Curriculum for Wales and its four purposes. However, teachers do not plan enough opportunities for pupils to become independent learners.

Leaders set purposeful priorities for school improvement that focus on pupils' learning and well-being. However, teachers do not regularly share the good practice in the school with each other often enough. As a result, there is variability in the quality of teaching, which affects progress and equality of opportunity in a minority of classes.

Recommendations

- R1 Ensure that leaders focus better on addressing the variability in the quality of teaching
- R2 Ensure that all teachers have high expectations in order to challenge pupils effectively
- R3 Improve pupils' independent learning skills
- R4 Provide more meaningful opportunities for pupils to influence the wider life of the school

What happens next

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

Main evaluation

Learning

During their time at St. Francis RC Primary School, many pupils make suitable progress from their individual starting points in many areas of learning. However, pupils, particularly the more able, do not work independently at an appropriately challenging level often enough. As a result, they do not always make the progress they are capable of.

Most pupils speak confidently to each other and to adults. They develop appropriate speaking skills as they move through the school. For example, younger pupils describe in some detail how music they are listening to makes them feel, giving reasons why. Pupils in Year 3, including those with additional learning needs, give comprehensive and descriptive explanations to questions they are asked about their work and school life. By the time they leave school, most pupils speak with an appropriately broad and varied vocabulary. They use language suitable to the situation. For example, when discussing forces and gravity in science, they use technical language and adapt their talk depending on the audience.

As they move through the school, many pupils improve their writing skills, including the quality of presentation, appropriately. Pupils in Year 2 enjoy writing imaginative stories and make good attempts to use their literacy skills to improve their work. They generally use punctuation correctly and include suitable description to engage the reader. Pupils from Year 3 to Year 6 write persuasively for different purposes and audiences. For example, pupils write a letter to the headteacher asking for a healthy tuck shop, drawing on research and outlining the advantages. Across the school, pupils have regular opportunities to write at length. However, in many cases these activities are overly structured and there are too few opportunities for pupils to redraft their work purposefully.

A majority of pupils from reception to Year 2 use their knowledge of phonics appropriately to support their progress in reading. They build words successfully and begin to read simple texts accurately. As they move through the school, most pupils make suitable progress in improving their reading skills and enjoy reading a variety of texts. More able pupils read with interest and use resources well to help with their understanding of what they read. They use dictionaries, for example, to find the meaning of unfamiliar words. Older pupils read and explore a variety of literature such as poetry, play-scripts, newspapers and stories and understand the varying language features used to engage the reader.

Most pupils listen carefully to each other and to their teachers' instructions. Younger pupils listen well in class, they take turns and respect the views of others. Older pupils follow and participate attentively in group discussion, for example when interviewing a star of the West End via a video call. When given the opportunity, most pupils use their literacy skills well to support their work in other subjects. For example, in Year 4, pupils write detailed explanations of the life cycle of a bee independently.

Most younger pupils make suitable progress in developing their number skills. Pupils in Year 1 order pots of popcorn from lightest to heaviest based on their shape and size. They weigh the contents to confirm that their ordering is correct. Many older pupils make good progress in developing their mathematical skills. By the end of Year 6 a majority successfully apply their skills when consolidating their understanding across the curriculum. For example, older pupils measure and compare heart rates before, during and after exercise and calculate the number of new websites created each day when exploring internet safety. However, pupils do not always have opportunities to apply what they have learned to problem-solving at an appropriately challenging level.

Many pupils make an appropriate start in developing their basic skills in Welsh. By Year 2, they recognise numbers and colours and repeat simple phrases. In Year 4, many use a range of support materials confidently to develop their Welsh. They know the parts of the body and can express in short phrases how they feel. As they progress through the school, many read simple texts and their own writing aloud, with generally accurate pronunciation. Most enjoy practising with their friends and with visitors. A minority of pupils engage in basic conversations in Welsh confidently, and use a limited vocabulary to reply to questions. By Year 6, many pupils use familiar language patterns to write short sentences about their hobbies.

Pupils use digital skills to support their learning in most subjects regularly. Younger pupils use mobile devices to draw pictures and animate characters using early coding skills. Older pupils use digital devices to access reading activities and to research topics of interest on the internet. However, throughout the school, pupils do not systematically develop their digital skills well enough across the curriculum.

Pupils enjoy opportunities to be creative, for example when designing costumes for a West End musical or choreographing an acted Celtic battle. However, these opportunities are generally limited, particularly for those pupils who enjoy using their imagination more freely, and those who have aspirations to be involved in creative careers.

Well-being and attitudes to learning

Pupils at St Francis RC Primary School feel a strong sense of belonging. The school's nurturing and caring environment, underpinned by an ethos of tolerance, kindness and respect, ensures that pupils feel safe. They know who to turn when they need support or advice and are confident that problems will be dealt with swiftly and effectively.

Nearly all pupils' behaviour is exemplary. They are polite, welcoming and courteous to visitors, and older pupils are often good role models for younger learners. Pupils are treated fairly and are listened to by their teachers. They reflect thoughtfully on their rights and their responsibilities towards other people. For example, during lessons, nearly all pupils allow others to share ideas and show respect when others have a different opinion to their own.

Many pupils show a good understanding of healthy eating and identify food groups when creating healthy meals and snacks. For example, pupils in Year 4 apply their knowledge well when producing a healthy meal plan suitable for a professional

footballer. Most understand the dangers that may arise in their everyday lives and know what steps to take to stay safe, such as taking care near busy roads. Nearly all pupils understand the importance of staying safe online and take steps to report anything that makes them feel unsafe.

Recently, all pupils were asked to contribute their ideas on how the school's outdoor spaces can be improved. In response, the school has installed a new climbing frame and constructed a pleasant gardening area. The school's Pupil Ambassadors are beginning to resume their meetings with leaders to discuss their views on school life and wider issues such as sustainability. However, opportunities for pupils to take leadership roles that influence decision-making within the school are less well developed.

Following a challenging period for the school community, pupils have developed resilience and take pride in their school and their work. When learning experiences interest and engage them most, pupils participate enthusiastically and focus well to complete tasks. However, there are too few opportunities for them to develop independence and resilience. At times, low-level tasks and over directed teaching restrict opportunities for problem-solving.

Most pupils use success criteria well to reflect on their learning in literacy. A few pupils consider teachers' written feedback, but do not always know their next steps in learning. When given the opportunity, most pupils can work well both independently and collaboratively. For example, in physical education lessons, pupils develop their ability to work as a team. They discuss how these skills help them work together in other lessons. Most pupils have positive attitudes towards learning and enjoy joining the activities provided in the school's clubs as they resume.

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

Teaching and learning experiences

Most teachers and staff have positive working relationships with pupils and manage their behaviour well. This ensures a friendly and caring ethos. Lessons have clear objectives and, in the best instances, teachers plan a range of activities and resources that engage pupils appropriately. However, there is variation in the quality and impact of teaching across the school. In a minority of instances, teachers do not have high enough expectations of what pupils can achieve and consequently pupils spend too much time on undemanding tasks. From time to time, teachers structure lessons and guide learning too much, and this hinders pupils' creativity and independence.

Many teachers give pupils useful verbal feedback as they work. In most cases, teachers and support staff use various questioning techniques to extend and further develop pupils' responses, and to gain an indication of their understanding. In pupils' workbooks, teachers also provide feedback on the accuracy of their work, and occasionally on the quality of the content, but this does not always help pupils to understand how to improve their work further.

Teachers have adapted their planning well and have thoughtfully considered the four purposes and areas of learning and experience in preparation for the new Curriculum for Wales. Leaders and teachers have worked well together to begin structuring the curriculum so that it builds systematically and coherently on pupils' existing knowledge, understanding and skills as they move through the school. Teachers from the same year groups work well together to ensure that learning activities are coherent and purposeful. The learning topics planned for the last few terms reflect well on the context of the school, including designing learning activities that reflect the cultural, linguistic and diverse nature of the local community and the wider world. The current topic is designed to provide sound opportunities for pupils to develop their confidence and willingness to perform and appreciate how literature fires imagination. Pupils enjoy the opportunities to learn about different plays and older pupils are beginning to structure their own playscripts. The previous topic provided worthwhile opportunities for pupils to learn about nature and their local environment, including how biodiversity and living things can depend on each other for survival.

Leaders and teachers continue to focus on developing the curriculum and their teaching approaches by planning, trialling, and testing new ideas. However, this is at an early stage of development.

The majority of teachers provide relevant real-life opportunities for pupils to apply their skills across the curriculum. For example, younger pupils make predictions about which food will rot the quickest and older pupils draft interview questions for a local actor and singer. In a few instances, teachers do not plan and deliver activities that consolidate pupils' skills across the curriculum. For example, they do not develop pupils' numeracy and digital skills fully, or enable pupils to write independently and creatively often enough. A few teachers and staff use Welsh well in their classrooms and this encourages pupils to use the language themselves. There are a few appropriate opportunities to develop pupils' knowledge of the culture and heritage Wales.

Care, support and guidance

St Francis RC Primary School is a calm and safe place for pupils and adults to be. All staff place a high priority on the well-being of pupils. Leaders, teachers and support staff support pupils' emotional well-being thoughtfully through a wide range of highly effective strategies. For example, pupils find different ways to manage their emotions successfully and use a range of strategies to help them relax.

The school has robust and effective systems to meet the additional needs of learners. This is a strength of the school. The additional learning needs co-ordinator supports all staff to use a range of information that quickly identifies pupils' individual needs. Teachers and teaching assistants provide appropriate resources and implement strategies effectively to create inclusive classrooms. A few staff receive specific training to provide effective and sustained support for pupils with social and emotional needs. The school liaises well with external agencies and in partnership with other schools to ensure that it is well prepared for additional learning needs reform.

The school has suitable provision for pupils with English as an additional language. Staff work well together to identify the language needs of these pupils and plan

appropriate targeted support. As a result, most pupils with English as an additional language make good progress from their starting points.

When COVID restrictions allow, the school provides a range of trips and visits to support the curriculum and to engage pupils in their learning. These include trips to nearby Cardiff Castle and to theatres in the locality. Older pupils enjoy adventurous activities during their residential trip. Additionally, the school has begun to reinstate its after-school clubs to promote physical and mental well-being. Pupils develop their awareness of sustainability when attending the nature club. Lessons that focus on developing pupils' emotional and social needs help pupils to form friendships and to understand how to stay safe online and when playing outside at home.

Daily acts of collective worship make a valuable contribution to pupils' spiritual and moral development. Staff provide pupils with the opportunity to reflect on the key message and how it might apply to their daily lives. The school celebrates its Welsh heritage positively. For example, the school celebrates St. David's Day by considering the life of St David and holding an annual Eisteddfod. When thinking about future careers, pupils have opportunities to interview people who live locally such as actors and firefighters. Pupils develop their understanding of the wider world well when researching. For example, they look at the locations of a popular musical and experiment with geometric patterns during their work on Africa. Teachers are beginning to identify opportunities for pupils to reflect on issues around diversity.

The school provides opportunities for all pupils to be included in what they learn. For example, at the beginning of a topic, pupils share what they already know and what they would like to find out. However, there are too few opportunities for pupils to develop their leadership skills by taking on additional responsibilities. This prevents many pupils from actively making decisions about important aspects of school life. Pupils learn about their rights and think about the rights and feelings of others. They consider the consequences of their actions and when it is important to tell an adult when someone needs help.

The school's safeguarding culture is robust. All staff understand their roles and responsibilities in contributing to pupils' safety and well-being. The school monitors attendance effectively. It supports families and works closely with external agencies to challenge and reduce persistent absenteeism and lateness. The school addresses any incidents of racism and bullying well. Overall, safeguarding meets requirements and gives no cause for concern.

Leadership and management

Leaders at St Francis RC Primary School have a clear vision focused on high quality teaching and developing aspirations for all learners. Although the headteacher and the deputy headteacher are relatively new to their roles, they work well to support each other. Together with the school's middle leaders, the senior leadership team is well placed to bring about improvement. Following a period of significant challenge for the school community in recent years, they have secured improvement in a number of important areas.

Across the school, leaders at all levels and most staff have a strong understanding of the needs of pupils and their families. The school's response to the impact of the

pandemic on pupils leads to high standards of behaviour and effective provision to address the impact of social disadvantage. Working together to improve well-being, staff have created a caring and inclusive environment where pupils feel happy and safe. The school builds positive relationships with the community and supports vulnerable families in need sensitively. Parents and carers are appreciative of the communication and work of the school during periods of closure and the ongoing support they receive.

A notable strength of the school is its highly effective provision for pupils with additional learning needs. Leaders ensure that staff understand their role in meeting the needs of individuals. They plan effective professional learning opportunities, which provide staff with the skills they need to support pupils. As a result, the school provides a range of purposeful interventions, which allow those with additional learning needs to make good progress.

Leaders identify the school's priorities for improvement accurately. They monitor the difference that development work makes to pupils and share their findings with teachers. Most recently, the school has focused on supporting well-being, developing their curriculum and improving learning and teaching. Where improvement planning is productive, the school makes good progress, for example in supporting the health and well-being of the school community and safeguarding its pupils. However, leaders do not always focus suitably on addressing the variability in the quality of teaching across the school.

Nearly all staff feel supported, valued and listened to. They benefit from opportunities to work together when developing aspects of their new curriculum and appreciate opportunities to trial approaches to planning and teaching. Newly appointed teachers feel supported to develop their practice. Leaders are beginning to structure and distribute roles and responsibilities across the school to improve teaching and to share the successful practice that exists in the school. This is at an early stage of development. Whilst there is a strong culture of shared leadership across the recently formed senior leadership team, opportunities for all staff to observe and evaluate teaching across the school are limited. Leaders ensure that professional development is linked to school improvement priorities and make suitable arrangements for performance management. However, processes for improving performance do not link closely enough to professional standards to secure improvement in the quality of teaching.

Leaders plan appropriately to address local and national priorities. This includes the Curriculum for Wales, additional learning needs reform and supporting pupils to recover from the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. The school has appropriate arrangements to promote healthy eating and drinking.

The governing body has been through a period of marked change. Governors generally have a good understanding of the challenges the school has faced in recent years and are keen to support its future development. They understand and support the school's priorities and are beginning to challenge leaders in their role as a critical friend.

Leaders and governors monitor spending plans and the impact of these plans efficiently. The school allocates its grant funding effectively, linking it to the priorities

in the school improvement plan. For example, the school uses the pupil development grant effectively to provide individual support for pupils' emotional well-being.

Leaders and governors at St Francis RC Primary School ensure that the learning experiences they provide help to develop pupils' understanding of how to keep themselves and others safe. They establish and maintain a strong culture of safeguarding.

Evidence base of the report

Before an inspection, inspectors:

- analyse the outcomes from the parent/carer and pupil questionnaires and consider the views of teachers and the governing body through their questionnaire responses

During an inspection, inspectors normally:

- hold a meeting with parents/carers to hear their views on the school and its effectiveness
- meet the headteacher, governors, senior and middle leaders (where appropriate) and individual teachers to evaluate the impact of the school's work
- meet pupils to discuss their work, to listen to them read and to gain their views about various aspects of their school
- meet groups of pupils in leadership roles, such as representatives from the school council and eco-committee
- visit a broad sample of classes, including learning support groups and undertake a variety of learning walks to observe pupils learning and to see staff teaching in a range of settings, including classrooms, support groups and in outdoor areas
- where appropriate, visit the specialist resource base within the school to see pupils' learning
- observe and speak to pupils at lunch and break times and at a sample of after-school clubs, where appropriate
- attend assemblies and daily acts of collective worship
- look closely at the school's self-evaluation processes
- consider the school's improvement plan and look at evidence to show how well the school has taken forward planned improvements
- scrutinise a range of school documents, including information on pupil assessment and progress, records of meetings of staff and the governing body, information on pupils' well-being, including the safeguarding of pupils, and records of staff training and professional development

After the on-site inspection and before the publication of the report, Estyn:

- review the findings of the inspection alongside the supporting evidence from the inspection team in order to validate, moderate and ensure the quality of the inspection

Copies of the report

Copies of this report are available from the school and from the Estyn website (www.estyn.gov.wales)

The report was produced in accordance with Section 28 of the Education Act 2005.

Every possible care has been taken to ensure that the information in this document is accurate at the time of going to press. Any enquiries or comments regarding this document/publication should be addressed to:

Publication Section

Estyn

Anchor Court, Keen Road

Cardiff

CF24 5JW or by email to publications@estyn.gov.wales

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