



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

A report on

**Tonyrefail Community School
Gilfach Road
Tonyrefail
Rhondda Cynon Taf
CF39 8HG**

Date of inspection: May 2022

by

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

About Tonyrefail Community School

Name of provider	Tonyrefail Community School
Local authority	Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council
Language of the provider	English
Type of school	All Age
Religious character	
Number of pupils on roll	1592
Pupils of statutory school age	1156
Number in nursery classes	39
Number in sixth form	357
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 [SECTOR] is [xx]%)	25.2%
Percentage of pupils identified as having additional learning needs (a) (The national percentage of pupils identified as having an additional learning need in [SECTOR] is [xx]%)	28.9%
Percentage of pupils who speak Welsh at home	1.5%
Percentage of pupils with English as an additional language	*
Date of headteacher appointment	01/09/2018
Date of previous Estyn inspection (if applicable)	
Start date of inspection	23/05/2022

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

Tonyrefail Community School is a caring and supportive community that places the well-being of all firmly at its heart. The headteacher has worked closely with the school community to create a clear vision for the school based on togetherness, mutual respect and optimism. The headteacher and senior leaders are managing change successfully as the new school becomes firmly established. They are working effectively to overcome the challenges as the community recovers from the disruption caused by the pandemic.

During the pandemic, leaders strived to ensure that everyone was kept safe and continued to learn through provision online and in school. This was well received by pupils and parents, whilst staff appreciated the care given to ensure their own well-being during this time. The pandemic, however, hindered the school's ability to establish robust processes and policies to evaluate its work and plan for improvement and they remain in an early stage of development. Currently, the school's self-valuation processes do not evaluate well enough how teaching impacts on pupils' knowledge, understanding and skills. This makes it difficult for leaders to plan precisely and robustly to improve areas of the school's work most in need of improvement.

Most pupils feel safe in school and are confident that staff will deal effectively with any concerns that they raise. They behave well in the classroom and around the school and interact confidently with adults and visitors. Pupils participate enthusiastically in a wide range of well-attended school groups and extra-curricular activities. A few pupils lack confidence in their ability to work independently, partly due to long periods at home during lockdown periods.

Most teachers manage their classrooms well and establish positive working relationships with pupils based on mutual trust. This has led to many pupils making secure progress in their learning over time. They recall previous learning well and apply this to new contexts and tasks. Teachers provide sound support for pupils with additional learning needs, including those in the complex learning difficulties unit. However, teachers do not provide as well for more able pupils. In addition, leaders do not plan for the progressive development of pupils' literacy, numeracy or Welsh language skills strategically enough, particularly in the middle and upper schools.

Recommendations

- R1 Ensure that self-evaluation activities focus on pupils' progress and skills development, and link clearly to precise, robust improvement planning
- R2 Strengthen provision for and monitoring of the progressive development of pupils' skills across the school
- R3 Improve provision for developing pupils' Welsh language skills and the promotion of the advantages of learning Welsh, particularly in the middle and upper schools
- R4 Ensure that teachers consistently plan and deliver sessions that meet the needs of all pupils, particularly the more able

What happens next

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

Main evaluation

Learning

On entry to the school, most pupils' literacy and numeracy skills are below the level expected at their age. Over time, many pupils make secure progress in their learning. The majority recall previous learning well and apply this to new contexts and tasks. They develop their knowledge and understanding successfully.

In a few cases, pupils make strong progress, for example in mathematics when developing their understanding of percentages. In a minority of cases, pupils do not make as much progress as they should. This is largely as a result of shortcomings in teaching where there are low expectations of what pupils can achieve.

From an early age, pupils speak confidently and are keen to answer questions in class. They talk suitably about their experiences, for example describing how they are making a jewellery box or designing a cake for the queen's platinum jubilee. A minority of pupils in the lower school do not pronounce words clearly enough.

Many pupils across the school give brief verbal responses to simple questions and develop their subject-specific terminology successfully. The majority engage well in individual conversations. A few pupils ask complex questions of their teachers, for example while investigating the existence of a black hole. The majority of pupils can explain how they have developed their work and explored ideas and techniques in subjects such as art and music. Most pupils respond well when asked to expand on their answers.

Most pupils up to Year 2 have a good understanding of letter sounds and use these to begin to spell out unfamiliar words. Many are able to read their own work with enthusiasm and expression. The majority of pupils in the middle and upper schools skim and scan effectively in order to extract information. For example, in science they locate and extract facts about morphological adaptation in elephants, penguins and polar bears. In a few subjects, pupils summarise information successfully, for example when considering various historical sources about the Black Death. When given the opportunity, many pupils read aloud clearly, and a few are enthusiastic to volunteer to read. The majority of pupils use inference and deduction successfully to improve their understanding of texts, for example how Bram Stoker creates tension in 'Dracula'. However, many pupils do not use a sufficient range of reading strategies to support their learning which is partly due to the lack of opportunities provided. A few pupils say that they enjoy reading and choose books that appeal to them such as 'Diary of a Wimpy Kid', but a few pupils struggle to maintain concentration when reading.

From an early age, pupils develop their writing skills appropriately. As they move through lower school, they write with enthusiasm and generally to a sound standard. Many write confidently for different purposes, sometimes with imagination, choosing vocabulary for effect. By the end of Year 6, most pupils write descriptive sentences and apply their writing skills appropriately across the curriculum. However, they do not use punctuation well enough.

Many pupils of secondary age write suitably for a range of purposes and audiences. A very few produce extremely well-crafted texts that engage and persuade the reader on topics such as feminism. In their English lessons, the most able pupils write perceptively about an author's presentation of character, incorporating relevant quotations to support their comments. A few pupils' sense of audience in their writing is less secure and too often they make incorrect language choices, so their writing lacks the correct tone. Too many pupils of all abilities do not use paragraphs to organise their extended writing. In addition, pupils do not take enough responsibility for proofreading, editing or correcting their work before they hand it to the teacher. Across the school, pupils often make repeated errors in spelling and grammar. The quality of presentation of written work is variable and handwriting is poor in a majority of cases.

Most pupils demonstrate sound basic number skills that are appropriate to their age and ability, such as when adding and subtracting numbers below one hundred in Year 4. Most pupils apply their numeracy skills appropriately in subjects other than mathematics when given the opportunity, for example when they compare and convert units of mass in science. Most pupils of primary age draw and interpret simple bar graphs and charts. However, across the school, pupils' ability to draw line graphs is variable, with many failing to plot and label graphs accurately.

From an early age, pupils develop their digital skills well. They are confident in using tablet computers, for example to play simple games, using the virtual reality function to look for dinosaurs and upload their work independently. By the end of Year 6, pupils search the internet for information purposefully and are beginning to develop their coding skills, such as when creating earthquake sensors. In the middle and upper schools, pupils develop their digital skills successfully through opportunities to collaborate on documents, analyse data through spreadsheets and produce vivid presentations. They make good use of digital tools to produce and edit podcasts, news items and film trailers. Pupils develop their coding skills by programming robots to move in specific patterns.

In the lower school, pupils' Welsh language skills develop suitably. Pupils respond to simple questions and are happy to engage in dialogue in Welsh. However, as pupils move through the school, their Welsh language skills do not progress well enough. The use of the Welsh language by pupils of secondary age is very limited outside of Welsh lessons.

When given the opportunity, many pupils develop their creative and thinking skills well. For example, they design prints creatively based on different foods and drink or consider how to create a mashup by combining elements of two different pieces of music. Pupils also make thoughtful decisions about composition when designing 'Pop Art' shoes. Pupils of primary age investigate and choose appropriate materials to use when making crowns and decorating them or when researching and exploring the techniques of the artist Sir Kyffin Williams.

Many pupils of all ages with additional learning needs (ALN) make appropriate progress against their targets. Nearly all pupils in the Complex Learning Difficulties (CLD) unit make suitable progress in line with their ability and individual needs. A minority make good progress, particularly in their life and social skills. Often, these

skills are related to improving their ability to cope with everyday life or basic literacy and numeracy skills.

Since sixth form pupils were not expected to attend school at the time of the inspection it is not possible to evaluate fully their standards and progress in learning.

Well-being and attitudes to learning

Tonyrefail Community School has a strong focus on the well-being of pupils. As a result, many pupils enjoy school and participate enthusiastically in class and extra-curricular activities. They appreciate the emphasis that the school places on well-being and understand how this benefits their emotional and mental health. However, the COVID-19 pandemic has had an adverse impact upon pupils' self-confidence and ability to work independently.

Most pupils feel safe in school and free from physical and verbal abuse. Nearly all pupils know who to turn to if they have any problems. Many feel that the school supports them well and are confident that staff will deal effectively with their concerns.

Most pupils arrive promptly to their sessions and are ready to learn. They settle quickly and behave well. Most pupils work well together in groups and as a class and many display sensitivity to the opinions of their peers, for example when collaborating to compose a short piece of music. Many pupils actively discuss their work with their peers without the prompting of their teachers. A majority of pupils sustain their concentration well in class and produce work of an appropriate standard. They use feedback from their teachers well to improve their work. A minority of pupils take real pride in what they produce. These pupils are able to produce work of a good or excellent standard independently, for example when analysing the reasons for and impacts of different rates of population growth in humanities. A few pupils struggle to maintain concentration in class and are easily distracted. These pupils will sometimes talk about things other than the topic for the session when working in groups.

In the lower school, many pupils show suitable engagement and enthusiasm in their learning. They work sensibly with an adult and collaborate well in pairs and small groups, for example working thoughtfully with a partner to build a treasure box.

Many pupils understand the importance of a healthy lifestyle and how to keep themselves safe online. They feel that the school is an inclusive environment, which respects and celebrates diversity. Pupils engage enthusiastically with a wide variety of groups within the school, such as the pupil parliament and eco-committee. They take on beneficial leadership roles as reading buddies or mentors to younger pupils. Pupils enjoy taking part in a wide range of extra-curricular activities, including sports practices and matches, art club and a school production of 'Matilda'.

Pupils can give examples of ways that senior leaders have made changes because of requests made, for example, for longer lunch breaks and sports equipment to be provided in play areas. Around half of pupils do not feel that the school seeks their views sufficiently on matters relating to teaching and learning.

Nearly all pupils who attend the CLD unit are enthusiastic and curious learners. They enjoy working in groups to solve problems. In doing so, they demonstrate resilience, a willingness to ask questions and the ability to anticipate solutions to challenges.

Most pupils across the school show respect and are courteous to their peers, staff and visitors. Most behave well in corridors and around the school site. Nearly all pupils understand and support the school's rules and behaviour system.

Owing to the coronavirus pandemic, inspectors will not report 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

The school's curriculum provides a wide range of learning experiences to meet the needs and interests of most pupils. There is a strong curriculum offer for pupils including a wide range of option choices for the sixth form. The school has embraced Curriculum for Wales positively and established processes to trial, develop, evaluate and refine practice.

In the lower school, there is a successful approach to curriculum planning and provision. Continuous and enhanced provision supports learning effectively both indoors and outdoors with engaging, purposeful and topic-themed tasks. Teachers plan effectively to provide subject specific experiences throughout the primary phase. Use of specialist school facilities enhances experiences for primary age pupils, for example using cookery rooms to bake cakes for their jubilee party. Across the school, enriching learning experiences enhance the curriculum well, such as a 'Gruffalo' trip, sessions by a resident author and a forest school.

Teachers plan for the development of the Welsh language effectively in the lower school through progressive planning and strategies such as 'helpwr heddiw'. However, provision for developing Welsh language skills and the promotion of the advantages of learning Welsh are underdeveloped in the middle and upper schools.

Curriculum provision for pupils with additional learning needs is a positive feature of the school. The curriculum and learning experiences for pupils in the CLD Unit are broad and cater well for the needs of pupils with a range of complex learning difficulties. This includes access to mainstream provision and enhancement activities that broaden their horizons and helps them develop life skills.

The personal and social education programme supports the development of social and emotional skills of pupils well and helps them to make healthy lifestyle choices. It includes an appropriate range of topics and visits from external speakers which enhance the curriculum. The curriculum pays suitable attention to equality and diversity, through, for example, the Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic communities project.

In the lower school, staff plan suitably for progression of pupils' literacy, numeracy and digital skills. Planning for the progressive development of pupils' skills across the middle and upper school is less cohesive. Although the school identifies

appropriately how each of the areas of learning experience will cover a range of skills, its approach is not systematic enough to ensure coverage and progression. Furthermore, the school's monitoring of the provision of skills is underdeveloped.

Most teachers establish positive working relationships with pupils based on mutual trust. They manage their classrooms effectively, organising pupils, resources and space to ensure that sessions run smoothly. Most teachers have secure subject knowledge and are enthusiastic practitioners.

A majority of teachers plan interesting and engaging sessions. They structure their sessions thoughtfully in order to build pupils' knowledge, skills and understanding. These teachers have a clear view of intended learning and help pupils to understand how to make progress towards these goals. They explain tasks clearly and exemplify success through sound modelling.

In a minority of cases, teachers tailor activities carefully to meet pupils' needs. The school has developed some worthwhile additional provision for more able pupils, for example a 'Brilliant' club and visits to the Hay festival. However, overall, provision to challenge and extend more able pupils in the classroom is underdeveloped. Teachers tend to focus on those pupils who require additional support, rather than the more able. In many instances across the school, teachers collaborate effectively with support assistants to support pupils' learning.

In a minority of sessions, teachers have high expectations of pupils and plan learning that is suitably challenging. A minority use questioning skilfully, both to help pupils recall previous learning and to make connections to new ideas. They support pupils well to develop their oracy skills by encouraging them to articulate their thinking and structure their verbal responses clearly. These teachers are strong language models who focus closely on the accurate use of subject-specific terminology. In a minority of cases, particularly in humanities, teachers improve pupils' writing skills effectively by helping them to express themselves appropriately and construct their ideas coherently.

A few teachers are particularly proficient. These teachers plan particularly imaginative activities and design stimulating resources that inspire pupils to achieve high-quality outcomes. They not only plan skilfully, but also respond well to the needs and interests of pupils.

A minority of teachers do not focus well enough on pupils' learning and progress. They have low expectations of pupils and devise learning opportunities that are not challenging enough. These teachers are not always clear enough about their expectations of pupils' learning. They use questioning in a limited way and do not probe pupils' responses or support them to explore ideas or to deepen their thinking. In these sessions, teachers over-direct pupils' learning. They use worksheets too often and over-scaffold pupils' work. This limits pupils' progress and inhibits the development of their independence.

A majority of teachers check pupils' understanding regularly during sessions and provide helpful verbal feedback to support pupils' progress. Although a few teachers provide beneficial written feedback, including specific targets for pupils, a majority of teachers' comments are overgenerous and do not help pupils to improve their work.

Care, support and guidance

The school is a caring and supportive learning community with the well-being of all securely at its heart. An organised and extensive well-being team enables this provision to be co-ordinated and tailored to meet the needs of pupils well.

Leaders continue to build upon the wide range of useful information they gathered on pupils' welfare during the pandemic to identify their well-being needs. Staff use this information effectively to provide comprehensive support to individuals. As a result, many pupils feel a strong sense of belonging to the school. In the nurture room, groups of pupils who require extra support are able to access individual sessions with a variety of specialist staff. This enables these pupils to engage positively with their education and develop self-confidence.

Leaders have constructed a comprehensive well-being curriculum called 'In It Together', based on the NHS '5 ways to well-being'. They have increased the time dedicated to the delivery of this programme and, in the many cases, this helps pupils gain a comprehensive understanding of the importance of leading a healthy life. However, leaders do not monitor this provision robustly enough to ensure that all teachers deliver sessions effectively.

The school's arrangements for safeguarding pupils are robust and give no cause for concern. Staff at all levels understand their roles in keeping pupils safe and know how to raise concerns with designated persons in the school. The school works closely with outside agencies to respond effectively to concerns and provide support to pupils and their families.

Processes for identifying and tracking pupils with ALN in the lower school are robust and beneficial. Teachers have a sound understanding of these pupils' needs and ensure that they provide targeted support through a wide range of intervention strategies that support their numeracy and literacy skills. In the middle and upper schools, teachers use a more limited range of information to identify pupils who may need support and notify the additional needs co-ordinator when concerns arise. This means that they have a narrower set of intervention strategies to support these pupils needs. As such, strategies to secure improvements in pupils' skills in these areas of the school are less well developed.

The school has clear processes in place to track and monitor pupils' attendance. Parents are contacted immediately when pupils are absent, with parents of pupils who are identified as vulnerable being contacted as a priority. When pupils return to school, they receive well-being checks with the attendance and well-being officers. Pupil punctuality is monitored carefully throughout the day, with attendance officers challenging lateness and absenteeism from lessons diligently.

The school is developing appropriate processes to allow pupils to participate in decision-making, including giving them opportunities to influence what and how they learn. The school parliament is representative of the school community and parliamentarians undertake their roles diligently. A suitable range of wider pupil groups, such as the eco-group in lower school and digital leaders in the middle and upper school, allow pupils to take on responsibilities and play a growing part in school life. For example, digital leaders have set up their own website where pupils

are able to ask for support if they have difficulties or questions about computing. However, the school parliament is heavily adult-led and their impact on whole-school decisions is underdeveloped.

The school helps pupils to develop a strong understanding of their culture and of their place in their local community. Links with a wide range of local groups, such as the Efail community group, allow pupils to contribute to local initiatives and support groups and individuals living in the area. For example, pupils ran stalls at the Efail's Christmas market to raise money for local charities.

A wide range of thoughtful initiatives and curriculum provision helps pupils to understand issues relating to equality and diversity, and challenge attitudes to stereotypes. During a health and well-being fortnight, for example, pupils promised to challenge homophobic language and created a display of pledges to support LGBTQ+ individuals. The work of the 'diversity matters' action group further helps raise awareness of the importance of respecting others beneficially. Activities within the personal and social education curriculum and extended registration periods help many pupils consider important values, such as honesty and fairness, and provide opportunities for pupils to reflect on religious and non-religious beliefs suitably. However, a few teachers do not use this time with pupils productively enough.

Processes for helping pupils to understand expectations of their behaviour are clear, and staff use the school's online system to monitor pupils' ongoing conduct appropriately. However, the rewards' system makes a limited contribution to improving pupils' attitudes to learning.

Staff in the complex learning difficulties unit care exceptionally well for the emotional and behavioural needs of their pupils. These pupils are helped to engage in mainstream classes where they participate fully and with enjoyment.

Leadership and management

The headteacher and senior leaders are managing change effectively as the new school becomes firmly established and the community recovers from the disruption caused by the pandemic. The headteacher has worked closely with the school community to create a clear vision for Tonyrefail Community School based on togetherness, mutual respect and optimism. This vision is central to the work of the school and has recently been reviewed to enable staff to reflect upon their own personal development and how these principles can be applied to approaches to the Curriculum for Wales. Leaders have high expectations of themselves and all staff to promote positivity and openness across the school. Leaders have placed well-being at the heart of their work and provide opportunities for regular reflection and support. As a result, almost all staff feel valued and there is a strong sense of community.

The headteacher and senior leaders plan strategically to develop leadership capacity that supports the direction of the school. They have established useful leadership structures, including teams with clearly identified responsibilities which communicate effectively and provide mutual support. These leadership teams are flexible enough to be refined when required to further support Curriculum for Wales. Middle leaders lead their teams enthusiastically to design and trial approaches to curriculum within

each faculty. However, senior leaders do not always ensure that these middle leaders have a rigorous enough focus on pupil standards and improving teaching. In addition, leaders are beginning to develop the Welsh language strategically across the school but this is at the early stages of development. While arrangements for performance management are generally suitable, for example in developing leadership skills, they do not always focus well enough on the impact of teaching on pupils learning.

There is a varied calendar of self-evaluation and improvement planning activities that provide leaders with first-hand evidence about the school's work. However, processes generally focus too heavily on routines or compliance instead of the impact that activities have, in particular on pupils' progress or skills. Information from self-evaluation processes is synthesised suitably but this is not linked to improvement planning well enough. Leaders have identified three broad improvement priorities but planning within each of them is frequently not precise or robust enough. In addition, it is often unclear what success might look like. This reduces leaders' ability to monitor accurately the impact that actions have on pupil progress in particular.

Middle leaders engage in self-evaluation activities such as work scrutiny and learning walks, but most do not demonstrate a good enough understanding of the features of effective teaching or assessment. This limits the impact they have in improving the quality of teaching and the standards that pupils achieve.

The school is creating a culture of professional learning and innovation successfully. This is inspiring practitioners at all levels to engage in research and to develop their practice. The school has a range of 'pathways' to support professional learning for all practitioners, including developing the specialist expertise of support staff. There is a wide range of professional learning opportunities for teachers, both external and in-house. The school is a lead school for initial teacher education and this work is having a positive impact, particularly in developing approaches to research and inquiry.

Although the school is developing well as a learning community, planning for the provision of professional learning is not linked precisely enough to the school's improvement needs. In addition, processes to evaluate the impact of professional learning are at an early stage of development. As a result, professional learning has had limited impact on improving teaching and learning.

Governors are proud of their school and take an active role within the community. There is a well-developed culture of trust between senior leaders and governors, and they are kept well informed about the school's progress. Governors provide appropriate challenge, for example around budget spending, and have an input into school policy and procedures such as the behaviour policy. Prior to the pandemic, governors had a more active role in self-evaluation than at present and were regular visitors to the school. Governors ensure that appropriate arrangements are in place to promote healthy eating and drinking.

Leaders and governors manage the budget appropriately, ensuring the school is well resourced and the school's priorities are well funded. Senior leaders utilise grant funding appropriately, including the pupil deprivation grant, to increase the school's capacity to support pupils' learning and well-being.

Senior leaders have created a strong culture of safeguarding throughout the school. Pastoral teams support pupils effectively and as a result most pupils feel safe in school and know where to go to seek help.

Leaders are developing useful lines of communication with parents. These include an app that keeps parents informed about their child's behaviour and regular parent meetings to discuss pupils' progress. The pandemic has restricted opportunities for parental involvement in the life of the school, for example through the parents and teachers' association.

Evidence base of the report

Before an inspection, inspectors:

- analyse the outcomes from the parent 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 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 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, where appropriate
- visit a broad sample of lessons, 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:

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