



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

A report on
Gilwern C.P. School

**Cae Meldon
Gilwern
Abergavenny
Monmouthshire
NP7 0AY**

Date of inspection: October 2022

by

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

This report is also available in Welsh.

About Gilwern C.P. School

Name of provider	Gilwern C.P. School
Local authority	Monmouthshire County Council
Language of the provider	English
Type of school	Primary
Religious character	*
Number of pupils on roll	213
Pupils of statutory school age	189
Number in nursery classes	*
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 23.0%)	5.2%
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 16.1%)	12.2%
Percentage of pupils who speak Welsh at home	*
Percentage of pupils with English as an additional language	*
Date of headteacher appointment	03/01/2000
Date of previous Estyn inspection (if applicable)	
Start date of inspection	03/10/2022

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

Nearly all pupils enjoy their time at Gilwern Primary School. Most pupils start school with strong communication and personal and social skills. They settle into school life quickly and engage positively with each other and adults. They are happy and confident when learning indoors but especially in the school's enticing outdoor areas. Overall, they make good progress in developing a wide range of skills from their individual starting points. As pupils move through the school, they continue to engage positively with many of the experiences that school provides. In particular, they enjoy activities such as music and most make good progress in developing their creativity. They also continue to build well on their numeracy skills and learn how to apply these in real life contexts. However, pupils do not always make the progress they could as readers and writers and, as they get older, the attitudes to learning of a minority of older pupils, boys in particular, become less positive in class-based lessons.

The school provides a broad and balanced curriculum that matches the spirit and aspirations of the new Curriculum for Wales. This is exemplified in the creative 'Gilwern Around the World' project. Arrangements to develop aspects of pupils' creative skills are generally strong and often enhanced by expert tuition. Teaching and learning experiences for pupils from reception class to Year 2 are effective overall. However, they are less successful from Year 3 to Year 6 where they do not always support pupils to progress as well as they could in important aspects of their learning or in developing effective learning behaviours. The care, support and guidance provided by the school is strong. It ensures that all pupils experience a caring and nurturing environment and develop a sense of responsibility as citizens of Wales and the world. Support for pupils with additional learning needs is very good.

Leaders have a clear vision for the education and well-being of all learners. This is embodied in the school's curriculum offer. They have created a strong team ethos so that all staff feel valued and confident to contribute to the life and work of the school. Beyond the school, leaders and staff work well with the local cluster of schools to engage in beneficial professional learning. Leaders generally implement planned improvements with success. However, their processes to evaluate the standard of teaching are not effective enough. Consequently, leaders have not identified some important weaknesses in the teaching provided for older pupils. Governors undertake their roles purposefully. They support pupils to have a voice in local issues beyond the school gates. However, they do not ensure that the school has effective arrangements to promote healthy eating and drinking.

Recommendations

- R1 Improve teaching, particularly for pupils from Year 3 to Year 6
- R2 Improve pupils' reading and writing skills, especially from Year 3 to Year 6
- R3 Improve processes to monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of teaching
- R4 Address the site safety issue that was identified during the inspection

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

Many pupils make suitable progress during their time in Gilwern Primary School. Pupils with additional learning needs make strong progress from their starting points. Overall, many pupils develop their knowledge and understanding appropriately across the areas of learning and experience. However, as pupils move through the school, the progress they make is too variable. In general, older pupils, particularly boys, do not make the progress they could.

Most pupils start school with skills that are at least at the level expected for their age. A very few have less well-developed speech and language skills, and a very few require support to develop their personal and social skills. Most of the youngest pupils settle into school life quickly and engage purposefully in the range of hands-on experiences and practical learning activities that the school provides.

In the reception class, most pupils speak confidently and have good language and communication skills for their age. They interact successfully with adults and each other. By Year 3, most pupils speak clearly and have a good awareness of adapting their talk for different purposes and audiences, for example when delivering a 'breaking news' television broadcast about their imaginary discovery of China. Older pupils use a wide range of subject-specific vocabulary confidently when sharing their ideas. However, they are often hesitant to build on and develop others' suggestions or offer extended contributions in group discussions.

Many younger pupils join in enthusiastically with retelling familiar stories, varying their expression, as modelled by adults. By Year 1, most pupils identify initial sounds and blends. Year 2 pupils generally read with suitable independence and sustain interest in their reading activities. Most older pupils enjoy reading. They talk appropriately about favourite authors and read longer novels as they progress through the school. By Year 6, many pupils are fluent readers. However, overall, they lack confidence when reading aloud and do not have a secure grasp of strategies they can use to work out the meaning of unfamiliar vocabulary. Older pupils' reading response work in books is limited to showing a basic understanding of the text and to retrieving information from short passages. This means that their ability to infer from more complex texts, and to appreciate and evaluate how effectively authors convey ideas and engage the reader, is not as well developed as it could be.

By Year 2, many pupils spell common words correctly and use their knowledge of letter sounds and patterns to help them when writing independently. They use simple connectives to organise their ideas into a sequence of sentences and often use capital letters and full stops accurately. Many pupils quickly develop fluent, neat handwriting and take pride in the presentation of their work. Pupils in classes from Year 3 to Year 6 develop sound technical writing ability. When given the opportunity, many pupils show strong expressive language skills. They have an extensive vocabulary and use this well to add imagery to their work. However, across the school, pupils frequently write in a narrow range of genres, such as a recount, diary and letter. Often these pieces of work are fairly limited in length and quality. This means that pupils do not develop their ability to adapt their writing style to suit a wide range of purposes and audiences, or to explore and extend their ideas. On a few

occasions, pupils make improvements to their writing through redrafting, for example adding detail to their descriptions. However, generally, pupils spend too much time copying or typing work out without improving its accuracy or content.

Many pupils have a positive attitude to developing their Welsh language skills. By Year 2, many use simple greetings and phrases in Welsh lessons. Older pupils are developing confidence in speaking Welsh and generally communicate personal information appropriately. They recognise the value of being multilingual and respond positively to learning British Sign Language, alongside the Welsh language.

Most pupils make strong progress in developing their mathematical skills as they move through the school. Younger pupils represent a concept, such as multiplication, in different ways, for example verbally, using concrete materials or in a pictorial form. Across the school, pupils' thinking and reasoning skills develop well through practical activities, such as comparing their heights and weights, or through discussing cartoons that put forward different viewpoints about mathematical ideas. Most pupils engage well in 'maths chats' with their teachers in their written work and use language accurately to explain their ideas. Pupils' application of numeracy skills across the curriculum is developing well. For example, older pupils learn about saving money in the cost-of-living crisis by calculating the cost of running appliances for a day. However, more able pupils rarely experience challenge that fully extends them and tests their resilience.

Most pupils make sound progress in developing their digital skills as they move through the school. Younger pupils use technology competently to record their learning. Most older pupils create and manage folders to organise their digital work efficiently. Across the school, pupils develop their ability to write simple computer programs. For instance, older pupils program their model 'Mars rover' vehicles successfully.

Pupils enjoy using their creative, artistic and musical skills and they are proud of their achievements. Younger pupils experiment with using oil pastels to create their own striking pictures of the Northern Lights. Across the school, pupils play tuned instruments, such as ukuleles, reading musical notation accurately. This helps to develop their self-confidence and inspires pupils to develop a love of music.

Well-being and attitudes to learning

Nearly all pupils feel safe in school and attend happily. They benefit from positive relationships with staff and know who they can talk to if they are worried or upset. They interact very well with the adults who support them and respond positively to the school's reward system. Nearly all pupils conduct themselves well in classes and around the school. They are kind and courteous to each other and visitors. A few pupils benefit from support and interventions to help them to manage their emotions and access the curriculum successfully.

Pupils take full advantage of a wide range of opportunities to participate in clubs and activities, such as team sports that support their physical health and well-being. Attendance rates at after school activity clubs are very high. Pupils benefit from the extensive school grounds and use the array of apparatus, for instance the climbing wall, regularly and enthusiastically to further support their physical development. The 'Super School' pupil voice group works hard to promote physical activity and healthy

eating and drinking. Despite these efforts, pupils do not always make healthy choices in their snacks and drinks that they bring to school.

A large number of pupils participate in a wide range of pupil voice groups confidently. Groups such as the 'Values Ambassadors' promote different values throughout the school year by taking responsibility for leading assemblies. Groups promote children's rights, equality and sustainability effectively. They develop well as ethical and informed citizens. For example, the 'It's Good to Give' group organise fundraising events and donate the money they make to local charities they consider important. Overall, pupils feel that they are listened to and that they have valuable opportunities to make a difference to the life of the school.

In the younger year groups, nearly all pupils participate in lessons with enthusiasm and resilience, for example when making recipes for an autumn cookbook in the role play area. They willingly explore their learning environment and find ways to solve problems, for example when finding out which materials are suitable to make a boat. Many pupils take great pride in their work. However, as pupils progress through the school, there is less evidence of pupil engagement and perseverance, especially amongst older boys. Whilst many pupils sustain their concentration and complete tasks, a minority lose interest in their work, and as a result do not achieve the standards of which they are capable.

Nearly all pupils value and respect the opinions and contributions of others, for example when discussing the best attributes of a flight machine in Year 6. At times, pupils respond well to verbal, written and electronic feedback from adults. However, this is inconsistent across the school. Pupils do not always have a clear understanding of what they need to do improve their learning.

Teaching and learning experiences

The school has taken appropriate steps to redesign its curriculum to align with the principles of the Curriculum for Wales and its own vision for pupils' learning and well-being. This includes using specialist expertise extremely well to develop pupils' skills, knowledge, understanding within areas of learning and experience, for example their musical skills. Provision for all pupils to develop their musical ability through learning to play tuned instruments is a strength. Teachers take good account of pupils' ideas about what they would like to learn and share their enquiry questions with parents, so that they can support pupils' interests in learning at home. There is suitable breadth across the areas of learning and experience.

The school uses a range of literature, including contemporary picture books and stories from Wales, to stimulate pupils' learning in their topics and to provide a rich context for their work across the areas of learning and experience. This is enhanced further through the school's creative and innovative, 'Gilwern Around the World' curriculum project. This provides valuable opportunities for contextual learning. For example, on their virtual journey around the globe, pupils learn about faiths, such as Hinduism, when they 'arrive' in India and develop their scientific skills through ice melting experiments, when 'visiting' Antarctica. Visitors from the UK Antarctica Heritage Trust help pupils to learn about animals, such as penguins, as they watch them via a live webcam. This helps to develop their knowledge of the wider world successfully, as well as deepening their understanding of important themes, such as sustainability, culture, diversity and citizenship. Whole-school projects, such as

enterprise week, also provide beneficial opportunities for pupils to develop their awareness of the world of work.

Teachers use resources from within the local area appropriately to support pupils' learning. For example, pupils visit Raglan Castle to watch a bilingual performance of a play, as part of their literacy study of tales from The Mabinogion. The school's provision for the development of pupils' Welsh language skills builds appropriately on their existing knowledge and skills. Teachers use Welsh language sessions to help develop pupils' fluency in language patterns. Alongside provision for Welsh language development, teachers are at the early stage of introducing pupils to British Sign Language. This is beginning to raise pupils' awareness of how languages work and the role gesture plays in communicating with others.

Staff identify relevant opportunities for the development of cross-curricular skills, with numeracy an emerging strength. Teaching ensures that pupils generally develop their digital skills progressively as they move through school. Provision for the development of pupils' early reading skills is good. Staff read aloud to pupils and act as positive role models, encouraging pupils to read for enjoyment and introducing them to new authors. They foster a positive culture of reading, for example by listening to pupils' recommendations of books for staff to read. However, the school's provision for the development of pupils' literacy skills across the curriculum does not always ensure that teaching builds on pupils' previous learning. This means that there is not always sufficient progression in pupils' reading and writing skills, particularly when older pupils are working independently.

Pupils benefit from the school's extensive outdoor environment. Staff plan appropriate learning opportunities for pupils to explore, practise and enhance their skills. For example, the youngest pupils collaborate well using natural materials in the mud kitchen to create potions. Forest school provision contributes effectively to the development of pupils' problem-solving and physical skills, as well as their well-being.

Staff adopt a common approach to organising teaching and learning across the school, which aims to develop pupils as motivated, independent learners. This approach involves staff working with small groups of pupils, while other pupils engage in planned independent learning activities. However, too often, these tasks are not sufficiently challenging for older pupils and do not consolidate their previous learning or extend their skills well enough. Consequently, a minority of pupils lose focus, especially boys, and they make limited progress in their learning.

The school's approach to teaching pupils from reception to Year 2 is effective overall. Staff are developing well as a team to provide pupils with engaging experiences both indoors and outside. Interactions between adults and pupils are positive, nurturing and relaxed. Adults support pupils' progress with useful questions and allow plenty of time for pupils to respond and express their views. There are a few examples of pupils initiating their own play, for example to make towers and bridges from blocks. However, most learning experiences, including creative activities, are initiated and directed by adults.

In a few areas of learning, teachers from Year 3 to Year 6 have strong subject knowledge and use effective questioning strategies to probe pupils' understanding and extend their learning, for example in science and maths. However, the quality and effectiveness of teaching within this age range are too variable overall. It does

not always support pupils to make the progress they could in developing their skills or in developing effective learning behaviours. Teachers do not use assessment for learning strategies effectively and pupils are often unclear about the purpose of their learning. The level of challenge or pace of learning does not always match pupils' developmental needs well enough. Teachers generally provide too much scaffolding to support pupils' learning, which limits their development as resilient, independent learners. The organisation of classrooms, routines and activities often leads to a loss of learning time and a lack a motivation especially amongst older pupils.

Care, support and guidance

The school is a nurturing and caring environment where staff and pupils display mutual respect so that all members of the community feel valued. Provision to support pupils' emotional health and well-being is effective and staff plan additional support for pupils where needed to strengthen pupils' emotional resilience. The school has very strong links with families, the community and the on-site nursery.

There are robust systems for identifying pupils with additional learning needs through a team approach that includes valuable input from teaching assistants. These staff monitor pupils closely and provide timely support. The leader for additional learning needs liaises closely with outside agencies to plan interventions and support to accelerate pupils' learning and progress. The school is making good progress in implementing individual development plans in response to recent additional learning needs reform. Arrangements to monitor patterns of attendance in pupils with additional learning needs are effective. This is a strength of the school and, as a result, further support has been put in place to raise the attendance of individuals. Arrangements to analyse and support the attendance of all pupils are effective.

Throughout the school, staff provide opportunities for pupils to understand the benefits of leading a healthy lifestyle. There are many opportunities for pupils to be physically active at playtimes. In addition, there is a good range of extracurricular sport activities. The school provides regular opportunities and experiences to develop pupils' understanding of healthy eating. However, this does not have a strong influence on pupils' snack choices at break times.

There is a strong whole school focus on the importance of promoting pupils' rights and values. As a result, pupils have a good appreciation of equality, fairness and justice. The school provides pupils with valuable opportunities to develop their knowledge of the importance of behaving as active citizens and accepting responsibilities sensibly. A wide range of groups ensure that pupils have valuable leadership opportunities and play a very active part in the work and life of the school. For example, the 'It's Good to Give' fundraising group supports significant charitable donations that are generated through the 'Gilwern Around the World' project.

The school promotes pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development successfully and supports pupils to explore issues related to specific values. Provision supports pupils well to develop a sound awareness of issues relating to equality, diversity and inclusion. Pupils, staff and governors have raised their awareness of inclusion through their recent training to learn about autism. This has had a positive impact on the school community's understanding of diversity.

The school ensures that pupils learn how to stay safe online. Pupils are aware of what they need to do if they see something that worries or upsets them. Staff support this through effective communication with parents when any issues occur.

The school provides high quality opportunities for pupils to participate in sporting events and performances, such as a well-attended open-air extravaganza during the summer, which showcases pupils' music, dance, art and drama skills. This is extremely well supported by parents and the wider community.

The school has capitalised on opportunities for pupils to explore work-related experiences through the 'Gilwern Around the World' project. For example, Year 6 interviewed a communications officer from a large finance company in Singapore to explore what their job involved. They have also made beneficial links with a higher education institution.

The school has a strong overall safeguarding culture and arrangements to safeguard pupils meet requirements in most respects. An issue regarding site safety was identified during the inspection. The school is aware of the issue and in the process of addressing it in partnership with the local authority.

Leadership and management

Leaders have established a clear vision to support the learning and well-being of pupils. They have worked creatively and thoughtfully to design a curriculum that matches the aspirations and ethos of the new Curriculum for Wales. Leaders ensure that pupils receive a broad and balanced range of learning experiences and draw well on specialist provision, visits and visitors to enhance the curriculum. Leaders have high expectations for pupils' happiness and well-being at school. They ensure an inclusive and welcoming environment for all. Overall, leaders establish and maintain a positive safeguarding culture.

School leaders are committed to staff well-being. This underpins a strong team ethos where all feel that they have the opportunity to contribute purposefully to the life and work of the school. There are useful arrangements to support professional learning with the school taking a lead role in the local Abergavenny cluster of schools. This collaborative work supports common practice across local schools to help pupils transition to high school. Staff in all roles at the school value opportunities to learn and to develop professionally, for example by developing Welsh language skills as part of the overall strategy to improve provision for Welsh.

The headteacher and deputy headteacher share leadership responsibility for the school. This means that the school has consistent leadership, for example while the substantive headteacher engages in regional and national activities within the education system in Wales. There are appropriate arrangements to distribute roles and responsibilities across the school and worthwhile opportunities for staff to develop their leadership skills. In a few instances, staff in these leadership roles make a notable difference to pupils' progress and school experience. For example, effective leadership of the additional learning needs reform strategy has been beneficial. However, a few other leadership roles are at an earlier stage of development and do not currently have sufficient impact on improving teaching and learning.

The school uses a range of suitable approaches to evaluate many aspects of its work and to identify opportunities for improvement. Generally, leaders implement improvement strategy successfully, for example by using professional learning opportunities, staff meeting time and performance management processes. Leaders generally have a sound understanding of many of the school's strengths and of the difference that parts of its improvement strategy have made, for example in the development of numeracy skills across the curriculum. However, overall, the school has an overly positive view of aspects of its provision. Leaders have not identified important shortcomings in the quality of teaching, particularly for pupils in the 7-11 age range. Arrangements to evaluate teaching lack rigour and do not identify instances of ineffective teaching that limit pupils' progress and engagement in learning. Overall, leaders and staff in this age range do not have high enough expectations for pupil progress.

Leaders manage the school's finances diligently. They use additional funding such as the pupil development grant well, for example to ensure that all pupils have the opportunity to learn to play a tuned musical instrument. The school has worked innovatively with the local cluster to appoint a cluster bursar to secure financial efficiencies, to access additional grant funding and to further support the well-being of staff and pupils.

The school engages positively and effectively with parents. There are regular and valuable opportunities for parents to share in and support their child's learning journey, for example through regular digital communication and by attending valuable celebratory events at school.

Governors are suitably experienced and supportive of the school. They support the school's self-evaluation activities appropriately, for example by helping to review the school's provision for developing pupils' Welsh language skills. Governors have broad awareness of national priorities in education and how these developments inform school improvement goals. Through their wider roles as community councillors, they encourage pupils to influence what happens in their local community, for instance by inviting pupils to contribute to a community-led plan and by offering their suggestions as to how to develop a skate park. This contributes beneficially to pupils developing their knowledge and understanding of their roles as citizens. Governors have suitable awareness and understanding of their statutory responsibilities in respect of safeguarding but do not ensure that arrangements to support pupils' healthy eating and drinking are robust.

Evidence base of the report

Before an inspection, inspectors:

- analyse the outcomes from the parent/carers 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:

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