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

# A report on

# Risca Community Comprehensive School

# Pontymason Lane
# Rogerstone
# Newport
# NP11 6YY

## Date of inspection: September 2022

## by

## Estyn, His Majesty's Inspectorate for Education

## and Training in Wales

## About Risca Community Comprehensive School

| | |
|---|---|
| Name of provider | Risca Community Comprehensive School |
| Local authority | Caerphilly County Borough Council |
| Language of the provider | English |
| Type of school | Secondary |
| Religious character | * |
| Number of pupils on roll | 657 |
| Pupils of statutory school age | 657 |
| Number in sixth form | * |
| 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 Secondary is 18.5%) | 20.2% |
| Percentage of pupils identified as having additional learning needs (a) (The national percentage of pupils identified as having an additional learning need in Secondary is 23.0%) | 19.5% |
| Percentage of pupils who speak Welsh at home | 8 |
| Percentage of pupils with English as an additional language | 1.7% |
| Date of headteacher appointment | 01/09/2009 |
| Date of previous Estyn inspection (if applicable) | 18/03/2014 |
| Start date of inspection | 26/09/2022 |

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

The headteacher and senior leaders provide supportive and compassionate leadership, which has helped to develop a strong sense of teamwork amongst staff. Leaders demonstrate clear commitment to the school community and staff and pupils feel valued, supported and respected.

The school has a wide range of strategies in place to support the well-being of all pupils, including those that have additional learning needs and those who require emotional support. Pupils who attend the Autistic Spectrum Condition (ASC) centre, make good progress in relation to their abilities and recognised needs. It is a supportive environment where pupils with profound needs develop a wide range of skills and an extremely positive attitude towards learning.

Overall, many pupils have positive attitudes to school life and feel safe. Many pupils behave well in school and a majority are enthusiastic to learn. However, in a minority of lessons, pupils do not listen attentively enough, are slow to settle to work and lack concentration to persevere with tasks. They make appropriate progress in lessons but there is too much inconsistency in how effectively teachers plan to promote strong progress. Overall, activities in these lessons do not provide enough challenge for pupils. The expectations of a minority of teachers are also not high enough in terms of behaviour.

In Key Stage 4, there is a wide range of interesting courses from which pupils can choose, considering pupils' aspirations and needs. There is a bespoke curriculum for vulnerable learners and a tailored curriculum to meet the needs of the pupils attending the ASC. There is a range of valuable extra-curricular experiences available for pupils to enrich their learning experiences further.

Leaders remained committed to supporting the well-being of pupils and staff throughout the pandemic and have a desire to secure improvements. Although leaders gather information about the school's work, evaluation and improvement processes are not precise enough. They have not had enough impact to drive the improvements needed in teaching, learning, provision for pupils' skills and attendance. Leaders do not have a clear enough strategic vision for improvement that is understood by all staff.

The school has a strong culture of safeguarding and a caring ethos towards all pupils. However, there are a number of health and safety issues concerning the school site.

## Recommendations

R1 Strengthen self-evaluation processes so that leaders at all levels have an accurate view of the school's areas for development and can plan for improvement precisely

R2 Improve the effectiveness of teaching to provide sufficient challenge and ensure progression

R3 Develop cohesive provision for the development of pupils' skills across the curriculum, particularly their literacy and numeracy skills

R4 Strengthen provision to improve pupils' attitudes to learning and attendance

R5 Address the health and safety issues identified during the inspection

## What happens next

In accordance with the Education Act 2005, HMCI is of the opinion that this school is in need of significant improvement. The school will draw up an action plan to show how it is going to address the recommendations. Estyn will monitor the school's progress about 12 months after the publication of this report.

# Main evaluation

## Learning

In the majority of lessons, pupils make suitable progress in developing their knowledge, skills and understanding. When given the opportunity, these pupils recall prior learning suitably and apply it in different situations, for example when explaining the effects of changes in the environment on population numbers. In a few lessons, pupils make strong progress, for example when developing strong understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of different research methods and using key terms and concepts confidently. However, in a minority of lessons, pupils do not make the expected progress, particularly in the development of their literacy and numeracy skills. Generally, this is because teaching prevents them from achieving their full potential.

Pupils with additional learning needs (ALN), including those that attend the Autistic Spectrum Condition (ASC) centre, make good progress in relation to their abilities and recognised needs. Nearly all pupils in the ASC centre engage well with tasks and show pride in their achievements. They take part in real-life opportunities such as going to a café, which helps them to develop and enhance their social skills in a safe environment.

The majority of pupils have suitable listening skills and respond appropriately. When given the opportunity, they express their ideas sufficiently and justify their opinions competently. A few pupils use a wide range of vocabulary and provide well-developed responses to talk about their learning in a thoughtful and articulate manner. For example, in English pupils provide well-reasoned responses and justify their arguments well when discussing the benefits and disadvantages of the ‘fast fashion’ industry. A minority of pupils provide only brief, underdeveloped responses. Often this is because they are not prompted to expand on their answers by the teacher.

Many pupils demonstrate sound reading skills to locate and select relevant information. In English lessons, many pupils are comfortable reading a range of fiction and non-fiction texts, including Shakespeare and poetry, as well as analysing images. In subjects across the curriculum, more able pupils are confident in making inferences, for example when considering evidence about who would make the best husband for Elizabeth I.

The majority of pupils write accurately and produce appropriately structured extended writing for a suitable range of purposes and audiences. A few produce fluent, engaging pieces of writing. A minority of pupils make careless, repeated errors in spelling, punctuation and grammar. These pupils lack the breadth of vocabulary to express their ideas effectively. They are over-reliant on prompts and writing scaffolds to structure their writing. In general, pupils do not apply the reading and writing skills that they develop in their English lessons well enough across the curriculum.

In mathematics, the majority of pupils demonstrate secure basic number skills. For example, they are able to calculate repeated percentage changes and have a suitable understanding of measures. They can plot graphs accurately, carrying out

basic analysis of their graphs to draw sensible conclusions. However, a minority of pupils have weak numeracy skills and, as a result, struggle to apply these skills in new contexts, either in mathematics or other relevant subjects. In general, pupils use their digital skills suitably to complete a narrow range of basic tasks. This is because there are few opportunities for pupils to develop their digital skills across the curriculum.

When given opportunities, pupils develop their creativity and their thinking and physical skills well. For example, in science, they investigate the potential of different renewable energy sources when deciding on a range of ideas to provide Moja Island with a source of energy. Pupils experiment with a range of artistic styles in their art lessons and focus on ensuring fluency and accuracy when changing between the different rhythms within a song in their music lessons.

In a minority of cases, pupils make sound progress in their ability to communicate in Welsh. However, in general, pupils make only modest progress in Welsh lessons and make basic errors in pronunciation and sentence structure.

## Well-being and attitudes to learning

Many pupils feel safe and secure in school and that they are well cared for by staff. They are confident that any pastoral issues are followed up promptly in a sensitive and positive way. These pupils feel valued, treated fairly and are encouraged to show respect, for example during whole school assemblies and ‘home room’ periods. They show tolerance towards all members of the school community. Most pupils are courteous and welcoming towards visitors and other adults.

In many cases, pupils behave appropriately in and around school. The majority are quick to settle to work and are enthusiastic about their learning. They sustain concentration well and avoid distractions. This enables them to persevere and complete tasks. These pupils contribute constructively to class activities and work well in small groups and pairs. However, a minority do not focus suitably during lessons. They talk over the teacher and others, fail to settle when tasks are set and generally lack resilience in learning. There is a strong correlation between pupils’ attitudes to learning and the ability of the teacher to manage the classroom, the quality of provision, and the level of expectations of all pupils.

Nearly all pupils in the ASC centre engage well with tasks and show pride in their achievements. They enjoy school, feel safe and well supported in lessons and are engaged and interested in their work. They share their thoughts and feelings confidently and respect the views of others. They listen well to their peers and teachers and react thoughtfully to what they say.

Pupils from all backgrounds benefit from participating in opportunities to develop their leadership skills. The school parliament plays a purposeful role in school life, for example by playing an active role in the process to change the school uniform. These democratically elected pupils carry out their roles with enthusiasm. Around a half of pupils, however, do not feel that their voice is heard and acted upon.

Participation rates in the wide and varied range of extra-curricular clubs such as netball, badminton and football are strong. This helps pupils to develop their physical skills and understand the benefits of exercise. However, a minority of pupils show a

lack of awareness of the importance of making healthy choices and a balanced diet, for example by drinking sugary drinks in lessons.

Pupils are attending school more regularly this year compared with last year, when the COVID-19 pandemic had a negative impact nationally on school attendance. However, regular attendance and persistent absence continue to be significant concerns for the school.

## Teaching and learning experiences

In general, teachers foster positive working relationships with pupils. They greet pupils at the classroom door and use positive language to draw attention to good behaviour and attitudes to learning. In the majority of lessons, teachers manage pupils' behaviour well and ensure they engage positively with activities. These teachers insist that pupils listen carefully to instructions and explanations and challenge pupils if they do not engage with the work set. In a minority of lessons, teachers do not manage pupils' behaviour well enough. This has a negative impact on the progress pupils make in these lessons.

Many teachers have sound subject knowledge and are appropriate language models. They use and explain subject specific terminology suitably. The majority of teachers give clear instructions and explanations which help pupils understand what to do in the lesson.

In a few lessons where teaching is particularly effective, teachers have high expectations in terms of pupils' behaviour and achievement. They plan purposeful activities which challenge and motivate pupils to make good progress in their learning. These teachers provide well-designed resources that support pupils' learning effectively. They use questions skilfully to probe and monitor pupils' understanding and adapt their teaching in response to the needs of pupils.

In a majority of instances, teachers' expectations of what pupils can achieve are too low. Their planning does not consider progression well enough and they plan undemanding or repetitive activities that do not provide pupils with opportunities to independently apply and develop their knowledge, understanding and skills. They focus on what pupils will do rather than what they will learn. These teachers do not question pupils well enough. Often, their questioning does not challenge pupils to offer explanations, develop their thinking or apply their prior knowledge and understanding.

Many teachers offer pupils in Key Stage 4 constructive verbal and written feedback. This includes meaningful comments which help pupils understand what they are doing well and what they need to do to improve. A majority of teachers provide limited personalised written feedback for younger pupils. As a result, pupils in Key Stage 3 often do not fully understand how they can improve their work. Only a few teachers provide useful opportunities for pupils to respond to feedback.

The school has suitable systems for tracking and monitoring pupils' progress. Departments are trialling a range of approaches to assessment. Reports to parents are suitably regular and contain useful information. Annual reports include comments on pupils' strengths and targets in subject areas as well as valuable personalised comments from form tutors on pupils' well-being and attitudes to learning.

The school's curriculum builds suitably on pupils' prior learning. At Key Stage 4, the school considers pupils' aspirations carefully to inform curriculum planning. There is a wide range of subjects on offer including global business, enterprise, home cooking, sport and coaching. The school provides well for its vulnerable learners who follow a bespoke curriculum which includes beneficial courses that develop these pupils' life skills. The school offers valuable support and guidance for pupils to enable them to make sensible option and career choices.

Pupils in the ASC centre benefit from a tailored curriculum where pupils are involved in creating their own tailored timetables. Learning experiences in the centre are successfully crafted to meet the needs of a wide range of ability and interests and teaching assistants support pupils well in their learning. For example, in their swimming lessons, they remind pupils of the dangers of taking unnecessary risks, and challenge them instead to assess the dangers and respond appropriately.

Leaders make effective use of data from a range of external skills tests to target pupils who require support in developing their basic literacy and numeracy skills. The school has a helpful programme of interventions which is helping many pupils to make good progress in improving these skills. However, there is a lack of strategic planning for the progressive development of pupils' skills across the curriculum. Skills leaders are beginning to work with subject leaders to plan and co-ordinate opportunities for pupils to apply and develop their literacy skills in subjects outside of English, but is currently at an early stage of development. There is a range of generally suitable opportunities for pupils to develop their numeracy skills. However, a minority of these tasks do not offer pupils a suitable level of challenge. There are insufficient opportunities for pupils to develop their digital skills across the curriculum.

The school has introduced its new curriculum this year for pupils in Year 7. Useful guidance has been provided for parents on the experiences that each faculty will provide, and how they can best support their children. The school has consulted with a range of stakeholders and worked appropriately with its cluster primary schools. As a result, the school has a clear vision for its curriculum. Leaders are continuing to plan the further development of the curriculum, and teachers have been encouraged to experiment with new approaches. However, the school has not focused well enough on improving the quality of teaching alongside planning for the new curriculum.

The personal and social education (PSE) programme is comprehensive and there are valuable opportunities across the curriculum for pupils to develop their social and emotional skills. A valuable programme of clubs and enrichment opportunities is available to pupils. This includes a school choir, drama, dance, art and board games clubs, as well as numerous sporting activities. The school's extra-curricular activities also include opportunities for pupils to grow pumpkins and other produce in the school garden, which are then used in food technology lessons and shared with parents.

Most pupils are entered for a qualification in Welsh at the end of Key Stage 4. However, across the school, provision to develop pupils' Welsh language skills and their understanding of Welsh heritage and culture is limited.

## Care, support and guidance

Leaders and staff at Risca Community Comprehensive School foster a strong, caring culture and pupils recognise that there is a genuine concern for their well-being.

The pastoral team have developed an effective range of provision to support pupils' well-being and address a range of emotional and mental health issues. They are well informed and are proactive in dealing with any actual or perceived issues around well-being. Senior and middle leaders and non-teaching staff in the pastoral team work extensively with outside partners and parents to ensure that pupils are well supported.

The Additional Learning Needs Co-ordinator (ALNCo) and ASC centre lead have developed successful provision to support the learning and social needs of pupils with ALN, ensuring strong progress from their starting points. The leadership of ALN and ASC supports teaching assistants to understand the needs of their pupils and equip them with strategies that improve pupils' learning. Teaching assistants are given valuable professional learning opportunities and ample time to plan the support for pupils in mainstream lessons and to tailor the provision for interventions beneficially. Pupils in the ASC centre receive excellent care, support and guidance that helps them to develop their confidence and feelings of self-worth. Safeguarding is a priority for ASC and ALN staff and they work successfully with parents and partner agencies to provide comprehensive support for the safety and well-being needs of ALN and ASC pupils.

The school promotes pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development well. This is mainly delivered through a comprehensive PSE and Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) programme and religion, values and ethics (RVE) curriculum, as well as 'home room' periods and assemblies. This helps many pupils to respect and accept the cultures and religions of others and to be suitably aware of important topics for their personal growth. This provision, as well as opportunities to help others within the community, such as raising money for a local children's heart charity, is also effective in supporting their emotional, health and social needs.

The school offers suitable opportunities for pupils to express their opinions on a range of school-based issues. For example, the School Parliament was consulted about and informed plans for staff supervision at break, lunch and lesson changeovers. The school provides beneficial sporting and cultural opportunities for pupils to engage in extra-curricular activities such as football for boys and girls, dance and expressive arts clubs. There is also appropriate provision to provide impartial advice and guidance on career choices.

The school is developing suitable systems, processes and interventions to address poor attendance. However, these have had a limited impact on raising attendance since the return to school post-pandemic, mainly because there is a lack of forensic analysis of attendance information. The well-being team and classroom teachers have worked appropriately to reduce the number, and impact, of significant behavioural concerns. Despite this, routines and systems to tackle low-level disruption in lessons do not have sufficient impact. Too many teachers are inconsistent in applying behaviour policies, for example they allow pupils to leave

during lessons or to use mobile phones inappropriately. There is a general lack of clarity around the expectations of how staff manage low-level incidents.

Senior leaders are beginning to use a range of useful evidence to identify, monitor and evaluate targeted well-being support for individuals and groups of students. As a result, they are developing an improved understanding of the quality of provision for care, support and guidance. They have begun to identify priorities for improvement accurately, for example, the need to tackle low-level behaviour in classrooms. However, the systematic use of this evidence to identify and improve well-being provision at middle leadership level is not effective enough.

All staff and most pupils are clear about the arrangements for reporting child protection and well-being concerns to appropriate staff. Leaders have created effective systems to identify and support pupils vulnerable to child protection or wider safeguarding concerns. However, there are a number of health and safety issues concerning the school site. Leaders have not identified well enough the associated risks and therefore do not manage these risks adequately enough. The very limited site security also means that it is possible for pupils to leave site during the day, which is reflected in lower afternoon session attendance in comparison with the morning.

Estyn will issue a well-being letter to the school and the local authority requesting that the school responds appropriately to these issues within a required time frame.

**Leadership and management**

The headteacher has a clear vision focused on supporting pupil and staff well-being and fostering an inclusive and welcoming community where relationships are prioritised. This vision is embraced by staff and valued by pupils.

Senior leaders are supportive and advocate a strong sense of teamwork. They worked together particularly well during the pandemic when they swiftly set up a hub provision for the community and remained open throughout the pandemic. The roles and responsibilities of senior leaders are balanced and shared appropriately.

Line management processes focus on some common themes and events in the school calendar, as well as themes that are particular to a faculty or area. However, there is too much variation in how whole-school priorities are addressed. Actions to address important aspects are not followed up from one meeting to the next. Overall, performance management is not used to support professional learning and school improvement well enough. Objectives are often too broad or too vague and links to school priorities are not always clear.

Leadership of the ASC centre and ALN provision is pupil centred, calm and assured. Leaders are well informed and know the pupils and the complexity of their needs well. The ALNCo and ASC centre lead work together closely. They collaborate to identify and provide the support needed for individual pupils. They are aware of the strengths in provision and outcomes and have planned well to address the areas of improvement identified.

Governors are very supportive of the school and are suitably informed about many aspects of the school's work. Despite the considerable support that they give to the school, their oversight of important areas of the school's work such as safeguarding and financial management lacks sufficient rigour. Their role in ensuring that the school promotes healthy eating and drinking is underdeveloped.

Leaders use a range of platforms and methods to communicate with parents and the local community. For example, the headteacher creates videos on a variety of topics including information for new Year 7 pupils and updates on important events for the locality such as recent forest fires. There are opportunities for parents to share their views through surveys and the headteacher shared the analysis of a recent survey through a video presentation.

The school makes suitable use of the pupil development grant to support the well-being and basic skills of pupils from deprived backgrounds. This is having a positive impact on these pupils' literacy skills. Leaders also work suitably to mitigate the impact of poverty by ensuring that the school uniform is affordable and subsidising trips and activities. There are suitable systems for the monitoring of day-to-day spending and capitation, but general oversight of financial matters by leaders and governors is not sufficiently robust. Leaders at all levels carry out a suitable range of quality assurance activities that involve all staff, as well as parents and pupils. Senior leaders use the information from external and internal pupil surveys well to identify targeted and general provision to meet the well-being needs of the pupils at the school. They also identify broad areas for development in teaching. Overall, self-evaluation processes are not robust enough. Too often, activities focus on compliance rather than quality and pay insufficient attention to the impact of teaching on pupils' progress. There is not a consistently clear understanding of the most appropriate and effective use of interviews and surveys with pupils. In addition, attendance data is not analysed forensically enough for trends and patterns to identify relevant interventions.

In general, evidence is not triangulated well enough. As a result, a minority of leaders have an insufficient grasp of specific strengths and areas for development in their areas, particularly with regards to the quality of teaching. This hinders their ability to plan effectively for improvement. Quality assurance calendars do not align between levels of leadership and are not used strategically to review progress towards national and whole school priorities. Consequently, leaders are not able to drive forward these priorities collectively.

Whole school improvement planning prioritises four broad areas for improvement. However, overall, leaders' approach to improvement planning is not sufficiently strategic and the school's main priorities are not understood well enough by staff. Because of this, leadership is not having sufficient impact on important areas of the school's work such as the quality of teaching and learning, provision for the development of pupils' skills and attendance.

The school provides beneficial professional learning activities, including helpful opportunities to collaborate and observe each other's lessons as well as effective practice in other schools. Support staff have also received valuable training to help them support pupils' well-being and respond to their individual needs. The ALN team and ASC centre staff are committed to engaging with professional learning that

benefits the pupils and improves their own knowledge and practice. These staff identify their own professional learning needs and those of others such as teachers in mainstream. On the whole, leaders do not have a sufficiently strategic approach to planning or evaluating professional learning. In particular, they do not focus closely enough on specific aspects that need improvement such as the aspects of teaching that need improving or the individual teachers that need bespoke support.

## 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' wellbeing, 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 (http://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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