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

A report on

Thornhill Primary School

Heol Hir
Thornhill
Cardiff
CF14 9LA

Date of inspection: October 2022

by

Estyn, His Majesty's Inspectorate for Education

and Training in Wales

About Thornhill Primary School

Name of provider	Thornhill Primary School
Local authority	Cardiff Council
Language of the provider	English
Type of school	Primary
Religious character	
Number of pupils on roll	461
Pupils of statutory school age	339
Number in nursery classes	62
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 the Primary sector is 23.0%)	14.2%
Percentage of pupils identified as having additional learning needs (a) (The national percentage of pupils identified as having an additional learning need in the Primary sector is 16.1%)	10%
Percentage of pupils who speak Welsh at home	*
Percentage of pupils with English as an additional language	4.1%
Date of headteacher appointment	07/09/2011
Date of previous Estyn inspection (if applicable)	20/01/2014
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

The pupils at Thornhill Primary thoroughly enjoy coming to school and make notable progress in their social skills. There is a feeling of mutual trust and respect between the pupils and the staff. Pupils know that adults in the school care for them and that they can turn to them at any time when they face challenges or have difficulties. Senior leaders have worked hard to create this culture and it plays a key role in ensuring the very positive attitudes the pupils have towards their learning. Pupils' behaviour across the school is exceptional.

The school has established a strong team over time which enabled them to deal with the impact of the pandemic well through community engagement activities from a distance. The wellbeing of the pupils and their families became an important focus of the school and through weekly family activities, continued to foster these strong links. The headteacher and staff have continued building on these activities which has impacted on nearly all pupils returning to school safe and well. These regular engagement activities such as Craft-a-noon's for the Grandparents and their grandchildren, Father Reading Every Day (FRED) and the Schools' Out Dads Out (SODA) club develop the pupil's tolerance, respect and confidence skills successfully which is very evident in and around the school's setting.

Most pupils make sound progress across the school, particularly those with additional learning needs (ALN). Nearly all pupils develop effective speaking and listening skills and use these well when discussing with each other and with adults alike. The provision for pupils' personal development is effective and overall, the school's curriculum offers a suitable range of learning experiences. However, teachers' expectations of what the pupils can achieve, particularly the more able, are low and pupils are only beginning to contribute to how and what they learn. The pupils do not always receive the opportunity to use their literacy, numeracy and digital skills across the curriculum often enough. Across the school, opportunities to develop independent learners is inconsistent.

The school has suitable processes to monitor the quality of teaching and learning and its provision. An example of this is the school's work to improve pupils' reading which has been successful and led to improvements in the provision and the progress pupils make. However, improvement processes have not been rigorous enough to identify all key areas for improvement.

Recommendations

R1 Improve the effectiveness of school improvement planning

R2 Ensure that teaching across the school challenges all pupils, particularly those who are more able

R3 Develop younger pupils' independence and creativity, particularly when using the outdoors

R4 Plan purposeful opportunities for pupils to develop their literacy, numeracy and digital skills across the curriculum

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

Most pupils start school with skills and understanding that are around those expected for their stage of development. During their time in school most pupils make suitable progress across the curriculum. Those pupils with additional learning needs (ALN) make good progress from their starting points.

Nearly all pupils listen very well to adults and to each other, they follow instructions carefully and respond positively to any guidance given by the staff. Younger pupils talk confidently about their work and listen well for long periods in class. Through role play they thoroughly enjoy talking to each other. For example, they decide what food they need for the barbeque and go to the outside shop to purchase the ingredients. As the pupils mature and move from Year 3 to Year 6 their oracy skills develop well and they use their wide-ranging vocabulary to discuss issues such as the impact of social media on images and its effect on society effectively. Most pupils in Year 6 are confident learners and talk freely with each other during class activities, addressing other pupils during whole school sessions and when speaking to adults.

Many younger pupils make sound progress from their starting points in developing their Welsh oracy skills. They use basic vocabulary with good pronunciation on a daily basis and respond correctly when questioned. However, Year 3 to 6, few pupils ask and answer simple questions appropriately and develop basic reading and writing skills. Most pupils have limited words and phrases and lack confidence to engage in Welsh conversation.

Pupils' enjoyment for reading is evident across the school. They discuss books and authors with enthusiasm and are able to share their reasons for choosing a style of book with ease. Most younger pupils develop good phonic skills to decode unfamiliar words confidently and by Year 2, most pupils read with fluency and expression. Most older pupils use their reading skills well in other areas of the curriculum and use skimming and scanning techniques to research facts for example, about micro-organisms or when creating factual leaflets about Whales and Octopi.

Generally, most pupils develop their writing skills well. They achieve the standards expected for their age and work well when guided and within given frameworks. From an early age in Nursery, pupils use a range of media successfully to begin to write. By Year 2, many pupils form letters correctly, present their work neatly and use basic punctuation accurately when writing independently, for example when presenting the life history of Grace Darling. By Year 6, many pupils have a clear understanding of different writing styles, know their audiences well and present their work maturely. They capture the trauma of the Aberfan disaster in a newspaper article and let their imagination run wild to write a story. Although it is clear that more able and talented writers have the range of vocabulary and skills to write extensively to a high standard, there are only a few examples to demonstrate this in both their English and thematic work. Across the school, pupils do not apply their literacy skills in other areas of the curriculum sufficiently well and at the same level as in English lessons.

Through structured maths lessons most pupils gain a good understanding of a range of skills. They use these confidently when completing their tasks, and when given an opportunity they are beginning to use them more flexibly in a range of meaningful activities. Nursery pupils are beginning to use mathematical vocabulary, such as full and empty when using water vessels. In Year 2, pupils are developing sound mathematical skills and confidently use appropriate language to explain their methods to each other when completing word problem tasks. A few older pupils are beginning to apply their mathematical skills through creative activities to design patterns in the style of William Morris. Pupils in Years 5 and 6 use data handling skills appropriately to construct and analyse sets of given data. However, pupils do not develop these skills progressively across the Year 3 to Year 6 classes.

Pupils' digital skills across the school are developing slowly. The pupils in the Nursery class use the interactive white board independently to identify animal sounds and pupils in Year 1 design 2D buildings digitally. Nearly all Year 3 pupils support and extend their learning in class suitably by playing relevant maths games. By the time pupils reach Year 6 they use a simple coding programme, multimedia and word processing packages to a suitable standard to present and produce work across the curriculum.

Well-being and attitudes to learning

All pupils feel very safe as a result of the caring and nurturing ethos of the school. They know whom to turn to when they need support and speak highly of any adult's response if any friendship or behavioural issues arise. Most pupils have a beneficial understanding of how to stay safe when using the internet. From Year 3, most pupils understand the importance of needing to protect their identity online and take care about whom they contact.

Behaviour in all classes and around the school is excellent. All pupils are polite and well-mannered, and show respect for adults and to one another, listening carefully to what their friends and teachers say. The willingness of most pupils to support each other and to give careful consideration to their friends' needs, both inside and outside the classroom, is a notable feature of the school. The Yard Buddies have helped to reduce loneliness and upset on the yard, and the older pupils leading guided group reading sessions with the younger pupils is impacting successfully on their enjoyment of reading.

Most pupils enter the school with a big smile and enthusiasm for learning. During the school day they interact well in a variety of scenarios, work effectively with their peers and listen to, and respect, the views of others. Many pupils enjoy working collaboratively in groups when, for example, discussing how mouldy food produces new medicine. Although older pupils have little opportunity to contribute to the content of lessons, they continue to show great interest in their work and continue to be engaged. Overall, most pupils are beginning to evaluate and improve their own work and to make independent decisions about their own learning.

Most pupils from Year 2 upwards embrace their leadership roles confidently and fulfil their roles with pride. Most pupils can talk well about the purpose of the group and the planned actions for the school. The school Senedd, which has representatives from all pupil groups is having a very positive effect on the rights of all the pupils at

the school. Their clear understanding of how these rights impact on their learning is notable and they share their knowledge, for example, on discrimination, successfully during assembly times.

Pupils across the school have a sound knowledge and purposeful attitudes towards living healthy lives. They know how fruit and vegetables are an essential part of a healthy diet and most pupils take part regularly in physical activities during the day. All pupils benefit enormously from mindfulness sessions and taking part in recently re-established extra-curricular activities, such as rugby, football and dance. These benefit them physically as well as contributing to their general wellbeing.

Many of the older pupils are developing an empathy towards others by supporting local and world-wide charities. The school has recently raised money for a country engulfed in war by wearing clothes the colour of the country's flag to school. As a result of integrating with adults in weekly structured sessions, such as the Grandparents Craft-a-noon and Babies and Bumps, many pupils are becoming confident individuals. The interaction with a cross section of age groups from the community is having a valuable impact on the pupils' ability to become more resilient, they are developing empathy and learning new skills.

Teaching and learning experiences

Leaders have developed a vision for the school's curriculum based on a 'curriculum of opportunity' where every child can develop as an individual within their community. In response to the curriculum for Wales, the school has developed innovative strategies to engage pupils in their learning through community involvement. These include 'engagement events' when pupils share their learning with others. For example, the reception class invite families to their 'dinosaur park' to see and talk about the large dinosaur models they have made.

The school has adapted the focus of topics suitably to broaden learning outcomes and make them more relevant to pupils. For example, a topic on World War 2 now focuses on the concept of conflict and developing pupils' empathy. Many authentic experiences support the curriculum well. For example, younger pupils take part in a 'welly walk' to raise money for a community bench. This enables pupils to gain a sense of community and understand the benefit of helping others.

Prior to the pandemic, learning outside the classroom, that linked directly to the planned curriculum, was a strength of the school. This aspect of the school's curriculum is gradually being reintroduced. For example, pupils in Year 5 develop their knowledge of pollution during a visit to Rest Bay, and Year 3 pupils develop their creative and problem-solving skills when making animal shelters in Cefn Onn park. Visitors to the school support pupils' learning in a variety of areas across the curriculum well.

Overall, the curriculum provides a suitable breadth and depth of learning experiences to develop pupils' wider skills. However, the school's provision to develop key skills such as literacy and numeracy is suitable. The teaching of writing and numeracy does not provide pupils with sufficient opportunities to apply, develop and extend these skills in a range of contexts across the curriculum. Provision for developing

Welsh language and digital skills competency is underdeveloped and, as a result, pupils do not make sufficient progress in these areas.

Staff plans to develop pupils' curiosity, creative, and independent skills are well developed in the nursery class. These arrangements allow the young pupils to move freely between the in-door and outdoor successfully. They engage well and confidently move from one activity to another. For example, pupils develop their physical, mathematical and thinking skills well as they experiment with rolling apples down lengths of guttering. However, the quality of provision is inconsistent in reception to Year 2 and tend to be more structured. The use of the outdoor learning area for these classes is underdeveloped.

Nearly all teachers share relevant lesson objectives and provide pupils with clear explanations. The use of resources in a very few lessons is good. For example, after learning about the 'blackout' during the war, older pupils investigate the transparency of a range of materials using a light meter. Overall, teachers use a suitable range of approaches and resources to engage pupils' interest

In a very few classes, the pace of learning is effective and supports pupils to maintain interest and make progress. However, in many classes, learning moves forward at a slow pace and is heavily directed by adults which reduces opportunities for independent learning. In many cases, younger pupils spend too long sitting on the carpet during lengthy introductions, which results in a loss of engagement and concentration for many. Overall, staff do not have high enough expectations of pupils. They do not take sufficient account of assessment in order to plan for different levels of learning effectively. As a result, the more able pupils are not always provided with effective challenge.

Staff encourage pupils and praise them for their achievements. A few teachers provide pupils with useful verbal or written feedback. However, overall, feedback in classes does not support pupils' learning effectively enough and there are few opportunities for pupils to reflect on their own, and each other's learning.

The school has created safe, colourful, and relevant areas to support the emotional needs and well-being of pupils successfully. Staff use the Rainbow Rooms effectively for planned sessions to support pupils' well-being. These also provide a space for pupils to reflect on their thoughts and feelings if they struggle to cope in class, before returning to lessons to continue engaging with their learning. Staff have very effective working relationships with pupils, which foster an inclusive, supportive environment for learning. This impacts positively on nearly all pupils, for example supporting them to return to school safely following periods when the school was closed.

Care, support and guidance

The school has a warm, friendly, and compassionate ethos that helps support excellent pupil behaviour. The highly positive relationships between pupils and adults are a strong feature of the school that contribute very effectively to pupils' level of happiness and sense of well-being. Since returning to school, staff have prioritised the well-being of pupils and supported them thoughtfully and sensitively, through activities that encourage them to talk about their experiences during periods of lockdown.

Across the school, familiar routines helpfully support pupils' health and well-being. For example, the presence and availability of adults at the start of the school day helps pupils to settle and be ready to learn. Although disrupted by restrictions during the pandemic over the last two years, the school is beginning to reintroduce a variety of after-school clubs. For example, choir, dance and football clubs help to promote pupils' well-being and extend their learning beyond the school day.

The school has a range of pupil voice groups who are contributing successfully in promoting fairness and justice by supporting pupils to understand their rights. Although the school encourages the pupils to take on responsibility, they currently have very few opportunities to make meaningful decisions about the school. Pupils organise activities, such as cake sales and a non-uniform day, to raise awareness of war and conflict. This helps them to understand important issues relating to equality, diversity and inclusion and develops the values of empathy, courage and compassion. Overtime, the school has developed clear values reinforced through the positive relationships the pupils have with the whole community. The range of intergenerational activities, such as the Schools Out Dads About (SODA) club, and working with grandparents, develop pupils' sense of respect and understanding of how to celebrate similarities and differences well.

The school's arrangements to support pupils with their learning needs is robust and enhanced by creatively using external services and partnerships. Based on secure tracking and monitoring procedures, the school identifies the individual needs of these pupils carefully. The additional learning needs (ALN) co-ordinator provides very effective support for all staff and manages the team of teaching assistants effectively. They provide beneficial sessions for pupils with ALN, and those who need extra support in their learning or with their emotional needs. Staff produce comprehensive individual education plans which are child friendly and strengthen the school's broader understanding of each pupil well.

Through valuable opportunities, such as during Black history Month, the pupils consider the importance of democracy and inclusion effectively. They demonstrate a thorough understanding of equality and diversity, for example by addressing the whole school about the negative effects of discrimination. The school considers the moral and social understanding of its pupils well during lessons and whole school sessions. The school is beginning to organise activities for the pupils to reflect on their own, and others', spiritual and ethical beliefs. Opportunities to develop a sense of their Welsh identity are developing appropriately through cultural events, such as the annual school Eisteddfod.

There is a strong culture of safeguarding within the school and the school's arrangements to keep pupils safe meet requirements and give no cause for concern. Regular update meetings are held to share relevant information about pupils to ensure they are supported and kept safe. The deputy headteacher works closely with the pupils whose attendance is not good enough and for those who are late in the morning. This has a positive impact on improving attendance rates for these pupils.

Leadership and management

Leaders ensure that Thornhill Primary School promotes a caring, responsive, and inclusive environment, where all pupils can learn safely and contribute confidently

and with courtesy. There is a strong professional ethos that fosters a sense of belonging and collective responsibility. The school's values of openness, trust, commitment, and community underpin the work of the school and support everyone involved with the school to realise the mission statement of 'Being Our Best.' There is a keen sense of community, where all staff value each pupil, and positively encourage families to become an integral part of school life. Pupils', staff, and parents' wellbeing, is a high priority. This is a strength of the school.

The headteacher and his team, along with other stakeholders, have secured an appropriate vision for improvement. The strategic plan addresses a range of suitable priorities that link to national expectations, such as preparing for the new Curriculum for Wales and securing the key elements for the provision for pupils with ALN. There is a successful whole school approach to developing the health and well-being and learning attitudes of the pupils. Developing leaders at all levels is beginning to increase leadership capacity to support a range of improvements. However, the strategic vision lacks clarity and does not sufficiently secure the necessary impact. Leaders do not communicate their expectations to improve the quality of teaching and learning, and the provision for pupils to apply their skills in independent ways, well enough.

Leaders are aware of their role in implementing the school's priorities. They engage regularly in a range of monitoring activities to evaluate the work of the school and consider a range of evidence, such as learning walks, looking at pupils' work and listening to pupils' views. However, these procedures do not have enough of a focus on evaluating pupils' standards. As a result, leaders have not identified important areas for improvement, such as the opportunities provided to develop the younger pupils' independent learning skills and the lack of challenge for more able pupils.

Staff roles and responsibilities are developing so that they play a fuller part in the whole school strategic process. They are beginning to collaborate so that the approach towards designing a new curriculum and adapting teaching practices across the school is more consistent. These opportunities are increasing the capacity to drive improvement.

The school has an appropriate performance management cycle that links to school improvement priorities. The school plans a suitable programme of training opportunities to respond to the professional learning needs of the staff as well as their interest. Staff value the investment in their development and are beginning to apply aspects of this in their lessons. For example, the use of co-operative learning strategies positively supports the exemplary learning attitudes of the pupils. However, there are too many occasions where leaders do not evaluate the impact of the training well enough.

The governing body are supportive of the pupils and wider community. Through the various sub-committees, they have a sound understanding of the school's many strengths and areas for development. Governors demonstrate a keen interest in the life of the school and are enthusiastic about what the school is trying to achieve. They work with leaders and pupils to ensure that the school has appropriate arrangements to promote healthy eating and drinking. Governors have benefited from accompanied learning walks and, for example, they report on the early impact of

the outdoor provision. However, governors do not have a full understanding of the progress pupils make, or the quality of the learning experience to ensure this.

Leaders and governors manage finances appropriately and have successfully maintained a stable budget. They review spending regularly and take suitable actions where necessary. The school uses the pupil development grant creatively to improve the literacy, numeracy skills and well-being of pupils who are eligible to receive it. As a result, these pupils make sound progress from their starting points. School leaders establish and maintain a strong safeguarding culture at the school.

Evidence base of the report

Before an inspection, inspectors:

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

During an inspection, inspectors normally:

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

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

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

Copies of the report

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

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

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

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