



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

A report on

Penywaun Primary School

**Coed Glas
Penywaun
Aberdare
RCT
CF44 9DR**

Date of inspection: October 2024

by

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

About Penywaun Primary School

Name of provider	Penywaun Primary School
Local authority	Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council
Language of the provider	English
School category according to Welsh-medium provision	
Type of school	Primary
Religious character	
Number of pupils on roll	191
Pupils of statutory school age	134
Number in nursery classes	34
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 22.9%)	57.6%
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 11.1%)	15.7%
Percentage of pupils who speak Welsh at home	0.0%
Percentage of pupils with English as an additional language	*
Date of headteacher appointment	01/01/2005
Date of previous Estyn inspection (if applicable)	19/05/2017
Start date of inspection	21/10/2024

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.

Summary

Leaders and a committed team of staff promote a supportive and inclusive environment with a strong focus on pupil well-being. As a result, most pupils feel safe, valued, and free from bullying. Leaders have introduced a new vision for the school, which aims to inspire pupils to reach their potential.

Leaders are beginning to create systems to monitor and evaluate aspects of the school's work, such as the quality of teaching and pupil progress. However, these processes lack rigour and clarity and do not drive sustained improvement. Since the last inspection, leaders have not maintained improvements in relation to the school's previous recommendations or in many other important areas of the school's work, such as the quality of leadership, teaching, and pupils' skills development. Consequently, many pupils, including those eligible for free school meals, do not make adequate progress or learn effectively.

Across the school, most pupils' engagement in their work is generally positive, with many showing appropriate attitudes to learning. Younger pupils benefit from an engaging curriculum and in these classes teachers develop pupils' speaking and listening skills well. However, across the school, teachers do not use information about the progress that pupils make well enough to match learning experiences to their needs. This means that many pupils' depth of knowledge and understanding is limited by weaknesses in their ability to use their skills effectively to support their learning. This is particularly true with their reading and writing, but in addition, many pupils' Welsh and digital skills are also underdeveloped.

Leaders and staff support pupils with additional learning needs appropriately, providing a range of approaches to support pupils to progress in their learning and to support their well-being. In the local authority specialist class (LASC), staff provide activities closely matched to the needs of the pupils and develop strong relationships. As a result, in this class nearly all pupils make good progress in relation to their starting points.

Recommendations

We have made three recommendations to help the school continue to improve:

- R1 Improve leadership at all levels to strengthen monitoring and evaluation processes to focus clearly on the impact of teaching on outcomes for pupils
- R2 Improve the quality and consistency of teaching to raise standards, particularly in pupils' literacy, Welsh and digital skills
- R3 Ensure that the curriculum provides effective opportunities for pupils to apply their skills at an appropriate level in meaningful contexts

What happens next

In accordance with the Education Act 2005, HMCI is of the opinion that special measures are required in relation to this school. 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 usually every four to six months.

Main evaluation

Leaders at Penywaun Primary know their school community well and promote a positive, inclusive environment that supports most pupils' well-being effectively. As a result, most pupils enjoy school, and feel safe and secure and free from bullying and harassment. Most pupils feel a sense of belonging, they are proud of their school and have developed good relationships with other pupils and adults.

Leaders, alongside a committed team of staff have recently introduced a new vision for the school, based on the idea of 'believe to achieve'. Leaders are beginning to develop appropriate systems of monitoring, evaluation and review that have begun to involve staff and governors. However, their evaluations often lack rigour and clarity. They do not focus sharply enough on the impact that teaching and leadership have on pupils' learning. Where leaders identify shortcomings in the work of the school, they do not show clearly enough what actions they will take to make improvements, or how the effectiveness of these will be measured.

Leaders have begun to focus on growing and developing the school's vision and improving the quality of teaching and learning. They are beginning to develop suitable approaches to professional learning linked to the school's priorities. In a few areas, professional learning is starting to have a positive impact on provision, pupil well-being and learning. For example, the foundation learning lead visited other schools to observe good practice in the use of additional adults. This practice has been shared with staff and, as a result, teachers' use of support staff, particularly in the younger classrooms has improved greatly. Teaching assistants in these classes ask purposeful questions, model language effectively and provide feedback to attempt to move learning on. However, leaders have not established a strong track record of sustained improvement across important areas of the school's work. Since the last inspection, the school's leadership has not focused strongly enough on maintaining progress against its previous recommendations and many areas of the school's work remain an ongoing concern. In addition, there has been a noted decline in the quality of teaching, reading standards, and the role of governors. As a result, many pupils, including those eligible for free school meals, do not make adequate progress or learn effectively.

The school's governors are beginning to understand their roles better and improve their skills, but lack the information and opportunity to support and challenge school leaders effectively. Vacancies on the governing body further hinder their ability to function successfully and they play a limited role in setting the strategic direction of the school. While financial planning is supported well by governors, the governing

body as a whole has little involvement in evaluating other aspects of the school's work, and their engagement with staff and pupils is limited.

Teachers create engaging and exciting environments for younger pupils, including using outdoor equipment like bikes and mud kitchens purposefully to develop learning. However, teachers have not adapted the learning environment for older pupils well and it does not always meet pupils' needs effectively. For example, the text on displays aimed at helping pupils with their work is at a reading level that is too challenging for many pupils to access. In a majority of classes, particularly for older pupils, teachers set work that does not always take sufficient account of pupils' starting points and levels of understanding. As a result, many pupils do not progress appropriately in their skills development as they move through the school. In contrast, in the local authority specialist class (LASC), staff provide activities closely matched to the needs of the pupils and develop strong relationships. Nearly all pupils in this class make good progress in relation to their starting points.

Most younger pupils develop their speaking and listening skills well and many listen attentively to adults and each other. Their teachers offer motivating activities that engage pupils and encourage interaction effectively and, as a result, many pupils make appropriate progress with their oracy skills. However, as pupils move through the school, teachers have lower expectations and provide fewer opportunities for meaningful collaboration. This hinders pupils' development in speaking, listening and vocabulary use. By Year 6, a majority of pupils listen well to adults but struggle to focus when listening to their peers.

Many pupils make limited progress in their writing as they move through the school. Most teachers provide too few opportunities to use writing at an appropriate level and in meaningful contexts. Many older pupils begin to learn the features of different forms of writing, for example, when writing instructions on how to make paper poppies, but they do not learn to apply these skills independently. Although a majority of younger pupils learn to form letters correctly, as pupils progress through the school, teachers do not have high enough expectations of the standard of pupils' handwriting and presentation.

Many of the youngest pupils learn their letter sounds well through regular, structured sessions with teachers and support staff. However, as pupils move through the school, a majority do not build on these early skills well. Teachers do not always ensure that reading materials match pupils' ability accurately to support their learning across the curriculum. Although a few older pupils can identify favourite authors and use their reading skills appropriately in class, nearly all older pupils, including those who are more able, do not demonstrate higher-order reading skills, such as the ability to infer meaning from a text.

Nearly all pupils' Welsh language skills are underdeveloped. Most pupils struggle with basic words and sentence patterns. Most teachers are starting to use simple speech patterns, but Welsh is not consistently modelled by teachers and staff in everyday school life. The oldest pupils have difficulty engaging in simple conversations in Welsh, limiting their ability to respond to basic questions.

Many pupils do not develop their digital skills progressively as they move through the school. Many older pupils struggle to locate saved work and by the time they reach Year 6 show limited skills in areas like coding.

Across the school, most pupils' engagement in their work is generally positive, with many showing appropriate attitudes to learning. When given the opportunity, many pupils work well in pairs or small groups. These pupils have strong, positive relationships with staff and each other. Nearly all pupils enjoy celebrating in the success and achievements of others. However, a minority of older pupils can become disengaged during poorly structured lessons. A majority of pupils throughout the school are beginning to influence how and what they learn. For example, pupils in Years 5 and 6 suggest questions that they would like to be answered as part of a topic on electricity.

The school's curriculum is in its early stages of development and is not yet fully effective in raising pupils' aspirations or in supporting them to develop and apply their skills in authentic ways. While it engages younger pupils well, the curriculum, particularly for older pupils does not provide enough opportunities for them to apply skills in meaningful contexts and at a level matched to their ability. Many pupils' depth of learning, knowledge and understanding is limited by the weaknesses in their ability to use and apply their skills, in particular in reading and writing. Although the curriculum includes important cultural and social themes, such as diversity and human rights, creative and spiritual aspects are less well developed.

Leaders and other staff work suitably to build relationships with families and the local community, for example using newsletters to keep parents informed about school events and the importance of regular attendance. However, only a few classes maintain clear communication with them about the progress that their children are making.

Leaders create a suitable culture of safeguarding. This ensures that all pupils feel safe, respected, and treated fairly. The school has adopted rigorous systems to monitor lateness and attendance. Staff track attendance appropriately issuing letters, and holding meetings with families of persistent non-attenders. These strategies are starting to have a positive impact on rates of attendance for this current year, when compared to the same period last year. Most pupils are aware of the importance of healthy eating and drinking. However, a few pupils make unhealthy choices at break times and classes provide unhealthy options when giving rewards.

The school uses a range of suitable approaches to identify and support pupils with additional learning needs. For example, staff use tools like sensory boxes and safe spaces, such as the 'Zen Den', which help pupils regulate their emotions appropriately. The school fosters strong partnerships with external agencies, such as the local authority educational psychologist, who offers drop-in sessions for staff and parents. The school facilitates smooth transitions for pupils, collaborating with families to support moves from home into nursery, primary to secondary or from the specialist unit to mainstream classes.

A small number of pupils currently take on leadership roles. Where staff and leaders ensure these roles are implemented effectively, pupils take on additional responsibility purposefully and their activity shows positive impact. For example,

pupils serve as attendance officers in their classes. This approach has been effective in raising the profile of attendance amongst pupils and has helped to improve attendance.

Additional information

The school's arrangements for safeguarding pupils do not give any cause for concern.

The school's arrangements for site security do not give any cause for concern.

The school does not have appropriate arrangements for promoting healthy eating and drinking.

Leaders and governors manage the school's finances appropriately, including the use of the pupil development grant.

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

Appendix 1: Numbers – quantities and proportions

The report makes references to different quantities and proportions e.g. '*most pupils...*' or '*very few pupils...*'. We use these terms to describe quantities and proportions as outlined in the table below:

nearly all =	with very few exceptions
most =	90% or more
many =	70% or more
a majority =	over 60%
half =	50%
around half =	close to 50%
a minority =	below 40%
few =	below 20%
very few =	less than 10%

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 publication. Any enquiries or comments regarding this document/publication should be addressed to:

Publications Section

Estyn

Anchor Court, Keen Road

Cardiff

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

This and other Estyn publications are available on our website: www.estyn.gov.wales