

A report on
Hirwaun Primary School

**Glannant Street
Hirwaun
Aberdare
RCT
CF44 9NF**

Date of inspection: December 2025

by

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

About Hirwaun Primary School

Name of provider	Hirwaun 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	294
Pupils of statutory school age	225
Number in nursery classes	31
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 21.7%)	36.6%
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 9.2%)	3.1%
Percentage of pupils who speak Welsh at home	1%
Percentage of pupils with English as an additional language	0.5%
Lead partner in Initial teacher education	No
Date of headteacher appointment	01/10/2009

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Date of previous Estyn inspection (if applicable)	22/03/2019
Start date of inspection	01/12/2025

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 staff use the well-designed, modern school building effectively to create a calm and nurturing learning environment where pupils feel valued and respected. Staff make the most of the large open spaces to promote positive attitudes to learning. Relationships between staff and pupils are caring and respectful.

Teachers have designed a curriculum that meets the needs of pupils at Hirwaun successfully. The curriculum reflects the local area and Welsh context effectively and allows pupils to contribute meaningfully to what they learn. Teachers use successful strategies that help pupils understand what they are learning and what makes a good piece of work. They provide opportunities for pupils to reflect on their learning and how they can improve. This supports pupils to make clear progress over time.

Overall, most pupils make good progress from their starting points. In literacy, most pupils develop strong oracy skills. Teachers use a structured and consistent approach to teaching reading and developing writing. By Year 6, pupils apply their strong skills purposefully across different areas of learning.

In mathematics, many pupils make good progress in their understanding of number. The development of pupils' problem-solving skills in mathematics lessons and across the curriculum is at an early stage of development.

Provision for pupils with additional learning needs (ALN) is good. Staff working in the recently established Learning Resource Base (LRB) and with other pupils with ALN ensure these pupils make good progress from their starting points.

Leaders use a wide range of evidence to identify strengths and areas for improvement. They implement well-considered plans and use structured approaches that have led to a range of successful improvements. However, leaders have not been rigorous enough in raising attendance levels, which remain below national averages, and not all staff and governors have completed mandatory safeguarding training.

Recommendations

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

- R1 Ensure that all staff and governors undertake all mandatory safeguarding training
- R2 Improve attendance
- R3 Develop pupils' problem-solving skills

What happens next

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

Main evaluation

Hirwaun Primary School provides a caring and nurturing environment. The headteacher and deputy headteacher lead a dedicated staff team that focuses on pupils' well-being and learning successfully. They provide clear and purposeful direction, ensuring that the school's vision is communicated and understood for the benefit of the whole school community.

Over time, most pupils make strong progress from their individual starting points because staff use the well-designed school building to create a calm and respectful learning environment, where they foster positive relationships. They know their pupils well and relate to them with warmth and empathy. As a result, most pupils behave well in class and around the school and have positive attitudes to learning.

Leaders and staff have designed a curriculum that meets the needs of its pupils successfully. Staff skilfully weave pupils' ideas about what they want to learn into the planned curriculum. This supports pupils to engage well in their learning and motivates them to do their best. Teachers incorporate digital technology purposefully across the curriculum, and pupils use their skills confidently and independently to support their learning. The curriculum develops pupils' spiritual, moral and cultural understanding well. Activities such as learning about hero figures from the global majority enable pupils to become empathetic and considerate towards others, respect differences and have a growing understanding of equity. This understanding is enhanced through pupil leadership roles such as the Rights Respecting group.

During lessons, many teachers set clear learning objectives, and plan engaging lessons and activities. In the best examples, teachers pause learning to address misconceptions and help pupils to reflect on their work. Teachers use success criteria when appropriate to ensure pupils know what they are trying to achieve. Many older pupils talk about the process of learning, explain how their teachers provide feedback on what they are doing, and how this helps them to improve their work and identify their next steps. As a result, most older pupils understand how to improve their work, and this enables them to make good progress with the development of their skills, knowledge and understanding. Staff provide pupils with worthwhile opportunities to develop their oracy skills. Consequently, from often low starting points, most pupils make at least good progress over time in their oracy skills. By Year 6, most pupils communicate confidently in a range of contexts expressing themselves with increasing expression and clarity. Teachers use a systematic approach for teaching reading and writing that ensures most pupils make good progress over time. Staff provide opportunities for pupils to access a wide range of interesting reading materials, and this helps foster a sense of enjoyment in reading. By Year 6, most

pupils read with fluency, confidence, and enthusiasm. Teachers provide pupils with worthwhile opportunities to develop a range of writing skills and apply them across the wider curriculum purposefully.

Teachers plan methodically for the development of pupils' mathematical skills. In many classes teachers provide pupils manipulatives, both concrete and representational, to develop pupils' understanding of abstract concepts, enabling most pupils to make good progress in their understanding of number. However, in a few classes, teachers focus on the process of solving calculations without developing pupils' mathematical understanding deeply enough. Pupils apply their numeracy skills across the curriculum purposefully. Overall, opportunities for pupils to apply problem-solving skills in mathematics and across the curriculum are at an early stage of development.

The Welsh language and culture are a consistent focus of the school's curriculum. Many staff are good Welsh language role models. This supports most pupils to develop effective Welsh language skills over time. By Year 6, many pupils can hold simple conversations in Welsh using an increasing range of vocabulary.

Many pupils develop their creative skills well. Using local artists as a stimulus, pupils develop their creative and fine motor skills to produce a range of engaging artwork. Many pupils sing with enthusiasm and a few take the opportunity to learn to play a musical instrument. Participation in local events provides a sense of purpose and enjoyment.

The support for pupils with ALN, including those in the Learning Resource Bases, is good. Staff use the thoughtfully designed modern school building to good effect to help meet their needs. They understand that pupils may need time out of the classrooms to be ready for learning. A strength of the school is staff's use of breakout spaces, such as the 'heart areas', to provide a calm area for pupils to regulate their emotions and engage in learning. In addition, skilled teaching assistants deliver focused interventions successfully to pupils at risk of falling behind.

Pupils who attend the Learning Resource Bases engage positively with both staff and peers. Staff know their pupils exceptionally well and use this knowledge to anticipate their needs and provide personalised support. This helps to provide pupils with the confidence to express themselves freely and participate fully in learning activities. Opportunities for these pupils to integrate into the wider school are developing suitably and have a positive impact on their well-being and sense of belonging.

Monitoring and self-evaluation activities ensure that leaders have a good understanding of the school's strengths and areas for development. They have a good track record of addressing and identifying areas for improvement that impact positively on pupils'

learning and well-being. For example, the school's focus on oracy has improved the ability of pupils to speak clearly and with confidence.

Governors engage well in the school's self-evaluation processes and undertake a valuable range of monitoring exercises, such as learning walks, listening to learners, and governor open mornings. This helps them to support leaders to drive school improvement.

Rates of attendance are too low, and the rate of persistent absence is significantly higher than the national average. The school has correctly identified attendance as an area to improve; however, leaders do not challenge low attendance effectively enough. The school has appropriate safeguarding arrangements. However, not all staff and governors have completed all mandatory safeguarding training.

Additional information

The school's arrangements for safeguarding pupils give cause for concern.

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

The school has 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/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

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:

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