Dros ddysgwyr, dros Gymru
For learners, for Wales

A report on

St Mary's Catholic Primary School

Havard Road
Llanelli
Carmarthenshire
SA14 8SD

Date of inspection: January 2026

by

Estyn, His Majesty's Inspectorate for Education

and Training in Wales

This report is also available in Welsh

About St Mary's Catholic Primary School

Name of provider	St Mary's Catholic Primary School
Local authority	Carmarthenshire County Council
Language of the provider	English
School category according to Welsh-medium provision	
Type of school	Primary
Religious character	Catholic
Number of pupils on roll	184
Pupils of statutory school age	154
Number in nursery classes	15
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%)	16.7%
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%)	4.5%
Percentage of pupils who speak Welsh at home	*
Percentage of pupils with English as an additional language	27.9%
Lead partner in Initial teacher education	No
Date of headteacher appointment	01/09/2013

Date of previous Estyn inspection (if applicable)	05/11/2018
Start date of inspection	19/01/2026

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

St Mary’s Catholic Primary School is a happy, caring and nurturing school where all staff act as positive role models and create a highly effective learning environment. They foster respectful working relationships with pupils and each other, and pupils develop excellent attitudes towards their learning. Leaders and staff have high expectations for pupils’ behaviour. Nearly all pupils behave extremely well and are polite and supportive of each other. Leaders, staff and governors promote a strong culture of safeguarding. While the school works rigorously to improve attendance, overall, pupils, especially those who are eligible for free school meals, do not attend school regularly enough. Most pupils feel safe and enjoy their time in school. The school develops strong relationships with members of its community. Parents appreciate the caring and nurturing ethos and the engaging learning experiences the school provides.

Teachers plan interesting, real-life learning opportunities that capture pupils’ imagination, engage them in their learning and help to develop their knowledge, understanding and skills across the curriculum. Most pupils, including those from low-income households, make effective progress in their learning. However, teachers over-direct learning and use photocopied task sheets for pupils to complete too often. In these instances, pupils do not have sufficient opportunities to plan their responses to learning, including making decisions about how they will work, or express and present their learning. Teaching assistants are highly skilled at meeting pupils’ individual learning and well-being needs. They support pupils with additional learning needs (ALN) effectively to make good progress towards their individual targets.

Governors play an active role in school life and make a strong contribution to the self-evaluation process. Together with leaders, they have a sharp focus on identifying and addressing areas for improvement well. Leaders and governors rightly prioritise pupils’ progress when evaluating the school’s work. Leaders have developed a highly successful approach to evaluating pupils’ progress, which they use effectively for improving the school.

Recommendations

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

R1 Improve attendance, especially for pupils entitled to free school meals

R2 Give pupils more choice in how they express and present their learning

What happens next

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

Main evaluation

St Mary's Catholic Primary School is a welcoming, happy school. Leaders provide purposeful and effective leadership and promote a warm and inclusive ethos. Teachers and support staff respond promptly and sensitively to pupils' emotional, social and learning needs. Parents and carers appreciate the support and guidance offered by the school. All leaders, including governors, understand the strengths and needs of pupils and the school community. They work well to meet these needs effectively.

Teachers across the school provide pupils with interesting real life learning experiences which engage pupils and develop their knowledge, understanding and skills successfully. These experiences capture pupils' imagination and help them to develop as positive, enthusiastic learners who demonstrate resilience and determination to succeed. Most pupils, including those from low-income households, make good progress during their time at school. They engage positively in all aspects of school life and grow into confident learners who have strong attitudes towards their learning.

Leaders, staff and governors promote a strong culture of safeguarding. Most pupils feel safe in school. Leaders and staff are determined to improve attendance and engage constructively with parents to raise awareness. Despite this, overall attendance, especially that of pupils who are eligible for free school meals, is too low.

Staff model and develop positive relationships with all members of the school community. Behaviour across the school is exemplary. Pupils develop as kind and caring individuals. They are consistently polite and respond well to each other and adults. There is a strong, evident and mutually beneficial sense of respect throughout the school.

Teachers establish calm, inviting classrooms and plan many activities that provide pupils with a good level of challenge. While the school has made positive steps in developing pupils as independent learners, teachers often over direct pupils' learning and use photocopied sheets for pupils to complete too frequently. This limits challenge in pupils' learning. It restricts their responses and the opportunities for them to make decisions about their learning, including planning their work and deciding how to express and present what they have learnt.

The school's provision for pupils with additional learning needs (ALN) is strong. There are effective arrangements to facilitate early identification of pupils who may require additional support. Teaching assistants provide well to meet the individual needs of pupils, including those with ALN. This helps these pupils to make strong progress towards their individual targets.

Staff intervene effectively to prompt and question pupils to clarify and extend their understanding, and to advance their learning. Where appropriate, all teachers support pupils to review their learning and to make improvements. They use swift, succinct and specific feedback and provide pupils with worthwhile opportunities to evaluate and improve their work.

Spotlight: The valuable use of assessment processes to inform school improvement

The school has developed a highly effective, comprehensive approach to assessment. Leaders hold pupil progress meetings termly. They gather the information gained from these meetings every year to create a whole school profile of progress and to identify trends. This informs a robust understanding of pupil progress at an individual, group and whole school level. Teachers use this information successfully to plan for pupils' progress and leaders use it beneficially to inform improvement priorities.

Teachers are good language role models, and nearly all pupils develop as confident and effective speakers and listeners as they move through the school. Younger pupils use technical vocabulary when identifying imperative verbs and older pupils have a comprehensive vocabulary which they use to explain and discuss their learning effectively. The school has developed a strong culture of reading. Over time, most pupils develop into confident readers who use their skills competently in their learning and demonstrate a clear understanding of the texts they read. There is a comprehensive approach to the teaching of writing. Most pupils make good progress in this area and apply their skills across the curriculum effectively. Throughout the school most pupils take pride in their learning and their presentation is exemplary. When given the opportunity, older pupils write at length, editing and extending their writing to make improvements resulting in engaging writing which holds the readers' attention.

Teachers model pronunciation of Welsh vocabulary and language patterns impressively well. From an early age, most pupils begin to use Welsh language in rhymes, songs and greetings. As pupils move through the school, most pronounce words accurately when using the Welsh language. They respond well to instructions given in Welsh and have a good understanding of the familiar Welsh phrases they hear and use.

The school has introduced a consistent approach to teaching mathematics. Teachers plan a series of relevant mathematics activities that meet the needs of pupils successfully. They encourage pupils to identify their own errors and find alternative strategies when calculations are not accurate. The oldest pupils collaborate well to discuss their approaches and explain methodology. They are happy to return to their work to check their answers and amend their approaches, if necessary. This ensures that most pupils develop a secure understanding of number and they use this knowledge well. Most pupils

apply and use their skills in their work across the curriculum effectively. They enjoy solving problems and show resilience and determination to arrive at a solution.

Teachers plan a range of regular, interesting opportunities for pupils to learn digital skills and apply them across the curriculum. Most pupils are enthusiastic and highly engaged in their digital work. They use digital devices confidently and with increasing effectiveness as they move through the school. Across the school, most pupils have a secure understanding of how to keep themselves safe online.

Through curricular experiences and assemblies, staff give pupils regular opportunities to reflect on and consider important features of citizenship, such as friendship. They learn about important values and explore aspects such as kindness. Through regular engagement in these practices, pupils become thoughtful and have a strong sense of fairness and are courteous and thoughtful.

The school places a worthwhile emphasis on addressing national priorities such as Curriculum for Wales and the Welsh language. Leaders plan well for staff’s professional learning, connecting it to the school’s improvement priorities. This has a positive influence on the school’s work. A robust monitoring and evaluation cycle involving all staff ensures a good track record of securing improvement, including strong pupil progress. Leaders link monitoring, including the use of the school’s assessment information, to the school’s priorities carefully. This provides leaders and governors, with an accurate picture of the school’s strengths and areas for development.

Additional information

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

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