

A report on

Gwaunfarren Primary School

**Alexandra Avenue
Merthyr Tydfil
CF47 9AF**

Date of inspection: March 2026

by

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

About Gwaunfarren Primary School

Name of provider	Gwaunfarren Primary School
Local authority	Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council
Language of the provider	English
School category according to Welsh-medium provision	None
Type of school	Primary
Religious character	None
Number of pupils on roll	280
Pupils of statutory school age	212
Number in nursery classes	36
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%)	21.0%
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%)	5.7%
Percentage of pupils who speak Welsh at home	0.0%
Percentage of pupils with English as an additional language	3.8%
Lead partner in Initial teacher education	No
Date of headteacher appointment	05/09/2022

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Date of previous Estyn inspection (if applicable)	14/05/2018
Start date of inspection	09/03/2026

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

Gwaunfarren Primary School provides a welcoming and inclusive environment where pupils feel safe, valued and respected. Strong relationships between staff and pupils create a caring ethos, and staff know pupils well, supporting their well-being successfully. Pupils have a positive attitude to learning, behave respectfully and contribute to calm, purposeful classrooms. They are kind to one another and develop a strong sense of belonging.

Leadership is strong, with clear expectations and effective teamwork supporting pupils' engagement. Nearly all pupils, including those with additional learning needs and those from low-income households, make strong progress from their starting points. Teaching is generally consistent and purposeful. However, there is a tendency to over direct pupils on what and how they learn and this limits their independence.

The school provides a language-rich environment that supports pupils to develop their communication skills well. Most pupils make strong progress in spoken English and grow in confidence in Welsh. Reading is a strength, and pupils become fluent, expressive readers. Writing develops well across the school, and in mathematics most pupils build secure number skills and apply these appropriately.

Most staff use questioning techniques to gain a valuable insight into pupils' levels of understanding and to support pupils to make progress. However, teachers' feedback does not always support pupils progress well enough and enable them to improve their work or identify the next steps in their learning.

The curriculum is broad and engaging and celebrates the area's unique heritage, as well as developing pupils' understanding of diversity both within Wales and the wider world. Classroom environments are calm and welcoming throughout the school. Opportunities for pupils to learn purposefully in the outdoor areas are underdeveloped.

Leaders and governors work effectively together, using self-evaluation and professional learning to support ongoing improvement and maintain a clear focus on pupils' progress and well-being.

Recommendations

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

- R1 Develop pupils' independence by giving them more opportunities to influence how and what they learn
- R2 Ensure that all teachers provide pupils with helpful feedback and opportunities to improve their work accordingly
- R3 Provide opportunities for pupils to engage in purposeful outdoor learning

What happens next

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

Main evaluation

Gwaunfarren Primary School is a warm, happy and inclusive learning environment with a welcoming ethos. Staff and pupils show respect for one another, and pupils feel safe. Staff offer high levels of care, support and guidance. They know their pupils well and are sensitive to their needs.

Strong leadership, supportive working relationships and high expectations ensure pupils thrive throughout their time at school and foster high engagement and motivation. Pupils demonstrate positive attitudes towards learning, sustaining concentration and behaving respectfully. This contributes to calm and purposeful classrooms. Pupils of all ages demonstrate kindness towards one another and are mindful of how their words and actions can affect other people. Pupils are proud to be part of Gwaunfarren Primary School and have a strong sense of belonging.

Nearly all pupils, including those with additional learning needs (ALN) and those from low-income households, make strong progress from their starting points. A well-considered, individualised approach supports the personal development of most ALN pupils well, helping them to engage positively with their learning and school life.

The school is a language rich environment where staff model both the English and, increasingly, the Welsh, languages positively. A strong focus on oracy helps most pupils to develop their English spoken language well as they move through the school. They develop a purposeful range of vocabulary that they use confidently and accurately. Similarly in Welsh, most pupils develop their oracy skills well, showing enthusiasm for learning and using the language.

Most pupils throughout the school develop well-established reading skills to access the curriculum successfully. They are confident, competent readers who show positive attitudes towards reading. Most younger pupils have a secure phonic awareness and learn to blend words effectively. By the time they reach Year 6, most pupils read confidently in different contexts and analyse content in detail. They read a range of novels with accuracy, fluency and expression.

There is a carefully planned approach to the development of pupils' writing across a range of genres. Most pupils throughout the school acquire the necessary writing skills to support their work across the curriculum successfully. The youngest pupils enjoy developing their early writing skills through mark-making and practising basic letter formation. As they move through the younger classes, they build on these early experiences by writing accurate words and sentences. Nearly all older pupils write at

length, both creatively and factually, for various authentic purposes using language imaginatively.

Leaders and teachers have considered the mathematics curriculum and teaching approaches carefully. Most pupils make good progress in developing a suitable range of mathematical skills, particularly number and calculation, and apply these at an appropriate level. Teachers plan purposeful opportunities for pupils to use their numeracy skills to deepen their understanding across the curriculum with increasing sophistication as they move through the school.

Classroom environments are calm and welcoming throughout the school. They are well-organised and stimulating and staff use displays effectively to support learning and celebrate pupils' work. However, opportunities for pupils to learn purposefully in the outdoor areas are underdeveloped.

Across the school, there is a clear consistency in teaching methods and staff work together effectively to ensure that learning is progressive within and across year groups. Most teachers plan activities that are purposeful, build on prior learning, and provide an appropriate level of challenge to support pupils to make progress in the development of their skills and knowledge. However, there is a tendency for teachers to over direct pupils on what and how they learn and this limits their independence.

Spotlight: From community to curriculum - aligning learning with pupils' heritage, identity and locality

Staff have worked together successfully to design a broad and stimulating curriculum that celebrates the area's unique heritage, as well as developing pupils' understanding of diversity both within Wales and the wider world. This approach helps pupils to develop into principled citizens who are proud of their history, culture and the Welsh language. Learning builds on pupils' prior knowledge, skills and understanding systematically and there is a strong emphasis on authentic learning experiences. This ensures that nearly all pupils approach their learning with enthusiasm and develop their knowledge and understanding successfully.

Through creative curricular experiences, staff give pupils regular opportunities to reflect on and consider important features of citizenship such as respect and identity. Pupils learn about children's rights and explore aspects such as equality well. They develop empathy and a strong sense of fairness.

Most teachers provide purposeful opportunities for pupils to work collaboratively, enabling them to value the contributions of others. In general staff use questioning techniques to gain a valuable insight into pupils' levels of understanding and to support

pupils to make progress. In a minority of cases where this is most effective, teachers provide valuable verbal feedback that accurately targets the next steps in pupils' learning. However, there are too few opportunities for pupils to respond to feedback. Pupils do not always know how to improve their work or identify the next steps in their learning independently.

There is a clear leadership structure with an effective balance of defined roles and shared responsibilities. The school's approach to self-evaluation is well-considered. Leaders enable staff to lead on school priorities and contribute meaningfully to monitoring and self-evaluation. This helps to ensure that all staff are clear on the school's improvement priorities and their role in supporting these. They share a joint ambition to achieve the best possible outcomes for pupils at the school. All staff access informative professional learning that supports them in their roles and links to the school's current improvement priorities purposefully.

The governing body brings together people from a broad range of backgrounds and with a wide skillset that they use effectively to support and develop the work of the school. Governors are well informed and play a suitable role in self-evaluation, developing their understanding of the school successfully through first-hand experiences. They know the school and its community particularly well and provide a high level of support and appropriate challenge to leaders. Together, leaders and governors encourage good attendance successfully.

Senior leaders, staff and governors share a thorough understanding of the school's strategic direction, underpinned by the principle that everything they do should improve provision, well-being and progress for pupils. They use resources carefully to ensure that there are no financial barriers to pupils engaging in educational experiences. Leaders' dedication to education motivates staff and creates a committed teaching team.

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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