

A report on

St Mary's C in W Voluntary Aided School

**Intermediate Road
Brynmawr
Blaenau Gwent
NP23 4SF**

Date of inspection: April 2026

by

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

About St Mary's C in W Voluntary Aided School

Name of provider	St Mary's C in W Voluntary Aided School
Local authority	Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council
Language of the provider	English
School category according to Welsh-medium provision	None
Type of school	Primary
Religious character	Estyn does not inspect denominational religious education or the religious content of collective worship when it is a school with a religious character. Instead, the governing body is required by law to arrange for denominational religious education and collective worship to be inspected separately.
Number of pupils on roll	239
Pupils of statutory school age	175
Number in nursery classes	26
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%)	11.7%
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%)	3%
Percentage of pupils who speak Welsh at home	0.0%

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Percentage of pupils with English as an additional language	5.7%
Lead partner in Initial teacher education	No
Date of headteacher appointment	06/09/2021
Date of previous Estyn inspection (if applicable)	11/03/2019
Start date of inspection	27/04/2026

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

Senior leaders work well as a team and make a significant contribution to the school's positive ethos. Staff set high expectations for themselves and for pupils' progress. They ensure that pupils feel valued in a safe learning environment and place a high priority on their well-being.

Pupils thoroughly enjoy coming to school each day. They take great pride in their school and feel part of its inclusive community. Pupils are extremely polite and respectful towards adults, visitors and each other. Older pupils act as positive role models, and many take on leadership roles that build their confidence and sense of responsibility.

Adults and pupils enjoy positive working relationships, and most pupils engage very well in their learning and make good progress as they move through the school. Most teachers plan activities that are purposeful, build on prior learning, and provide an appropriate level of challenge to support pupils well in the development of their skills and knowledge. However, there is a tendency for staff to over direct pupils' learning and this limits their opportunities to develop independence. Most teachers provide well planned opportunities for pupils to work collaboratively, enabling them to value the contributions of others.

Most pupils show pride in the Welsh language and culture. Staff model Welsh exceptionally well and pupils develop confidently as Welsh speakers. Teachers incorporate Welsh effectively in many lessons. Across the school, pupils see, hear and speak the Welsh language throughout the school day. This develops their understanding, vocabulary and enthusiasm for learning the language very well.

Staff use questioning effectively to gain a valuable insight into pupils' levels of understanding and to support them to make progress. Many staff question pupils effectively and provide useful verbal feedback while learning is taking place. A minority of staff provide valuable verbal feedback that accurately targets the next steps in pupils' learning. However, across the school, there are not enough opportunities for pupils to respond to feedback. This limits their capacity to learn how to improve their work.

Recommendations

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

- R1 Ensure that all teachers provide pupils with helpful feedback and give them opportunities to respond and improve their work

- R2 Enable all pupils to make choices and influence how they learn to further develop their skills as independent learners

What happens next

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

Main evaluation

St Mary's Church in Wales Voluntary Aided Primary School is a happy caring school where pupils are welcomed, valued, and nurtured. Adults and pupils enjoy positive working relationships, and this impacts positively on pupils' behaviour. Pupils are polite, respectful and considerate towards one another. Nearly all pupils show a strong sense of well-being and a positive attitude towards learning. Most pupils including those with additional learning needs and those from low-income households make good progress in developing their skills, knowledge and understanding from their individual starting points.

Nursery pupils settle quickly to school life because staff establish consistent routines along with clear and appropriate expectations that support early independence. Provision for the youngest pupils offers exciting opportunities for them to explore their learning environment and to practice and develop their skills.

There are appropriate opportunities for pupils to influence what they learn about, and this has a positive impact on their engagement and motivation. Teachers plan and deliver an engaging curriculum that supports the progressive development of pupils' skills, knowledge and understanding.

Most pupils develop strong oracy skills as they progress through the school. The school places a high priority on the development of reading skills. Most younger pupils have a sound understanding of a range of letters and corresponding sounds. Most older pupils read with fluency and expression, using a range of well-established reading skills to help them to understand different texts and access the curriculum successfully.

The school is developing a purposeful and progressive approach to writing. Most teachers provide pupils with suitable opportunities to apply their writing skills across the curriculum. Many younger pupils write in full sentences for different purposes and most older pupils produce extended, more detailed pieces of work for a suitable range of purposes. However, pupils do not always use punctuation and grammar accurately in their written work.

Spotlight: Authentic Welsh Learning

Pupils benefit from and enjoy frequent opportunities to learn about the culture and heritage of their locality and Wales. Staff model the Welsh language exceptionally well and take full advantage of all relevant opportunities to incorporate Welsh into their teaching. This immersive approach supports most pupils to develop confidently, enthusiastically and competently as Welsh speakers during their time at school.

Most teachers have good mathematical knowledge and plan engaging activities that support most pupils to make good progress. Many pupils apply their numeracy skills appropriately across the curriculum. Most pupils use digital technology regularly across a range of subjects. They develop their digital skills appropriately as they progress through the school.

Across the school, teaching is generally effective and supports pupils' progress well. Staff use questioning appropriately, drawing on a range of question types and pupils' responses to adapt learning effectively. A minority of teachers provide valuable verbal feedback that accurately targets the next steps in pupils' learning. However, overall, there are too few opportunities for pupils to respond to feedback. This means that pupils do not develop the skills to improve their work or identify their next steps in their learning as well as they could. In a few instances, staff provide too much direction and guidance, and this limits opportunities for pupils to develop as independent learners.

The learning environment is purposeful, engaging and well resourced. Displays are used to celebrate pupils' work and to support learning successfully. Classrooms are well organised and resourced. The school makes very effective use of its extensive outdoor space which offers a highly stimulating environment which supports and engages pupils in their learning.

Pupils have appropriate opportunities to influence the life of the school. Older pupils act as positive role models, and many take on leadership roles that build their confidence and sense of responsibility. For example, the Spirituality Group helps to lead work that focuses on the school's values. This caring ethos contributes positively to pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. At the start of their topics, pupils make suitable suggestions about what they would like to learn, and a range of pupil voice groups are developing their roles well in the school. The Criw Cymraeg lead effective weekly assemblies promoting the Welsh language, introducing new sentence patterns and sharing stories with a Welsh theme.

Staff identify pupils' additional learning needs promptly, and leaders ensure that targeted provision is implemented effectively through discussions with parents and external agencies. This leads to the provision of timely support. Staff implement a wide range of effective strategies that support and meet pupils' needs well. This early and tailored approach contributes positively towards pupils' progress, confidence, and emotional well-being.

The headteacher provides effective leadership. The school's work is characterised by high expectations, distributed leadership, reflective self-evaluation and strong relationships. There is a clear leadership structure with an effective balance of defined roles and shared

responsibilities. Similarly, staff across the school have a clear understanding of their roles and responsibilities.

Senior leaders' model and promote professional values and behaviours effectively. They work well as a team, and this makes a significant contribution to the positive ethos of the school. This collaboration includes a wealth of opportunities for productive professional learning, and the sharing of good practice between leaders, teachers and support staff, which have a positive impact on the teaching and learning across the school.

The school's monitoring and self-evaluation processes are effective and identify important priorities accurately. Over time, the school's strategic and collaborative approach to self-evaluation has ensured a strong track record in bringing about improvements that have a positive impact on pupils' learning and well-being. For example, the school's recent work to improve Welsh and outdoor learning is beneficial. Leaders and governors draw on a wide range of evidence to monitor the school's effectiveness. Governors contribute actively to the life and work of the school. They provide suitable support and challenge, take appropriate account of staff and pupils' views giving them an accurate understanding of strengths and areas for improvement.

Governors ensure that resources are allocated efficiently to support school improvement priorities and promote effective teaching and learning. Leaders use grant funding purposefully to provide targeted programmes that strengthen pupils' literacy, numeracy and emotional resilience.

Communication with families is open and effective and staff work closely with parents. Leaders are visible at key times during the school day, and parents trust that the school is doing the best for all pupils and considers their views. Overall, staff and governors build trust with all families and provide a broad range of effective interventions to support pupils across the school.

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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