

A report on

St Gabriel & Raphael R.C.P. School

**Primrose Street
Tonypandy
RCT
CF40 1BJ**

Date of inspection: June 2026

by

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

About St Gabriel & Raphael R.C.P. School

Name of provider	St Gabriel Raphael R.C.P. 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	Roman Catholic
Number of pupils on roll	153
Pupils of statutory school age	106
Number in nursery classes	25
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%)	18.2%
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%)	4.7%
Percentage of pupils who speak Welsh at home	*
Percentage of pupils with English as an additional language	34.9%
Lead partner in Initial teacher education	Yes
Date of headteacher appointment	01/09/2011

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Date of previous Estyn inspection (if applicable)	01/03/2019
Start date of inspection	15/06/2026

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 Gabriel and Raphael is a welcoming, inclusive and nurturing school where nearly all pupils enjoy learning and most make good progress from their starting points. The school has fostered a positive sense of community in which diversity is celebrated, pupils feel safe and valued, and well-being, belonging and achievement are promoted successfully.

The headteacher provides highly effective leadership and has created a positive culture where pupils, staff and families are supported to thrive. Staff work collaboratively and are committed to improving outcomes and experiences for all pupils. Governors know the school well and provide effective support and challenge to leaders.

A notable strength of the school is the way teachers create imaginative and engaging learning experiences that inspire pupils' curiosity, creativity and enthusiasm for learning. Through a rich range of practical, creative and outdoor activities, pupils make meaningful connections between their learning and the world around them.

The school has established an effective reading culture. The use of engaging texts, opportunities to read for pleasure and innovative approaches, including the use of digital technology, support pupils to develop their reading skills and broaden their understanding of the world. This strong reading culture is supported by a whole-school focus on language and literacy, helping pupils become confident and effective communicators. Pupils develop increasing confidence in their use of Welsh. They respond appropriately to questions and use an expanding range of vocabulary and language patterns. Many pupils develop their mathematical knowledge and skills well. However, they do not have sufficient opportunities to apply and deepen their numeracy skills across a broad range of curriculum contexts.

Teachers and support staff know pupils well. They provide effective support and challenge to meet their individual needs, particularly for those with additional learning needs (ALN). Teachers provide regular feedback that supports pupils' progress well. Opportunities for pupils to identify their own next steps and take ownership of their learning are less well developed.

Recommendations

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

- R1 Continue to embed and increase opportunities for pupils to apply their numeracy skills across the curriculum
- R2 Provide pupils with more opportunities to take ownership of their learning by reflecting on, and responding to, feedback independently to improve their work

What happens next

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

Main evaluation

St Gabriel and Raphael is a vibrant, diverse and inclusive school where most pupils, including those with additional learning needs (ALN), make good progress from their starting points. The school fosters a culture of inclusion, high engagement and a genuine love of learning, which enables pupils to thrive both academically and personally.

The headteacher provides dynamic and creative leadership, underpinned by a clear strategic vision for the school. A clear focus on the well-being and progress of pupils, staff and the wider community ensures that nearly all pupils feel safe and happy, while ensuring high levels of staff engagement, motivation and commitment.

Governors provide robust support and challenge and understand the school's strengths and improvement priorities well. They fulfil their statutory responsibilities effectively, monitor key national priorities and oversee the use of finances and grants appropriately. They hold leaders to account well and contribute purposefully to the school's development.

School leaders have established a culture in which continuous improvement is a shared responsibility. Staff at all levels contribute effectively to self-evaluation and improvement planning. High-quality professional learning enables them to engage in educational enquiry, action research and collaborative practice that support school improvement. This has strengthened leadership capacity across the school and fostered a collective commitment to improvement. As a result, leaders and staff have secured improvements in

important aspects of the school's work, including pupils' progress in mathematics and Welsh.

The school has developed an engaging and relevant curriculum that supports the progressive development of pupils' knowledge, understanding and skills well. Creative, practical and physical learning experiences help pupils make meaningful connections between their learning and the world around them, while developing their independent thinking, collaboration and problem-solving skills. Most pupils develop secure digital skills and use a range of digital tools confidently and responsibly to support and enhance their learning across the curriculum.

Teachers and support staff make effective use of indoor and outdoor learning environments to promote pupils' independence and engagement. In the youngest classes, staff adapt provision skilfully in response to pupils' interests and needs, providing meaningful experiences that develop a broad range of skills. Across the school, resources, prompts and working wall displays support pupils to access their learning independently and develop confidence as learners.

The school is highly inclusive. This commitment is reflected in the school's effective support for pupils with additional learning needs. Staff have a secure understanding of pupils' individual needs and use robust tracking, targeted interventions and a graduated approach to provide well-matched support. Through positive partnerships with families and external agencies, the school supports most pupils with additional needs to engage positively in learning, develop confidence and participate fully in school life.

Leaders and staff value and successfully promote diversity, equity and a strong sense of belonging. Teachers plan a range of opportunities for reflection, collective worship and discussion which contributes positively to pupils' behaviour, relationships and understanding of shared values and diversity.

Spotlight: Fostering a love of learning

Staff create imaginative and enriching learning experiences that inspire curiosity and a love of learning. Informed by pupil voice and meaningful cross-curricular themes, these opportunities encourage pupils to think deeply and engage enthusiastically in their learning. This approach helps pupils of all ages to develop and demonstrate highly positive attitudes to learning and thrive within a nurturing school community.

The quality of teaching and teaching assistant support is a strength of the school. Most staff are skilled, reflective and innovative practitioners and have high expectations for pupils' learning and behaviour. They maintain a purposeful pace to learning, use

questioning skilfully to assess pupils' understanding and adapt their teaching responsively to meet individual needs, with appropriate levels of challenge.

In the youngest classes, staff use observations skilfully to assess pupils' progress. They adapt learning experiences promptly to meet pupils' individual needs and to support their next steps. Teachers provide older pupils with regular feedback that helps them reflect on their learning and improve their work. However, pupils do not always have sufficient opportunities to identify their own next steps and take ownership of their learning.

Recognising the school's diverse linguistic context, leaders have established a coherent approach to developing pupils' speaking, reading and writing skills. Teachers use effective strategies, such as sharing rich, high-quality books and stories that help pupils to explore new vocabulary and develop valuable word-level skills. Through meaningful discussions, pupils acquire language rapidly and communicate with increasing confidence, helping most to make good progress in oracy from their starting points.

Spotlight: Creating confident and enthusiastic readers

The school has established a highly effective reading culture, where reading is valued and promoted consistently. Teachers provide a rich range of high-quality texts alongside skilled teaching and engaging reading experiences that are integrated purposefully into thematic learning. These experiences deepen pupils' understanding across areas of learning while developing their comprehension skills, extending their vocabulary and fostering a love of reading. This approach supports many pupils to become confident and enthusiastic readers who recognise the importance of reading in supporting their learning and broadening their understanding of the world.

Teachers provide purposeful opportunities for pupils to develop and apply their literacy skills across the curriculum. Younger pupils develop early writing skills through engaging real-life experiences, while many older pupils write confidently for a range of purposes and audiences. Across the school, many pupils draw effectively on vocabulary and language patterns encountered in their reading to enrich their writing. Many pupils develop Welsh language skills successfully, communicating with growing confidence and using Welsh spontaneously in a range of situations. Through consistent adult modelling and regular opportunities to practise and apply their skills, pupils become confident communicators who use Welsh language effectively in a range of contexts.

The school continues to develop a coherent approach to teaching mathematics, rooted in practical learning and the secure development of pupils' mathematical understanding. This approach helps many pupils to develop secure number skills and make good progress in mathematics. While opportunities for pupils to apply and deepen their numeracy skills across the curriculum are increasing, these are not yet embedded consistently.

Additional information

The school's arrangements for safeguarding pupils 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.

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Publications Section

Estyn

Anchor Court, Keen Road

Cardiff

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

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