

A report on
St Marks Church in Wales VA School

**St Issells Avenue
Merlins Bridge
Haverfordwest
Pembrokeshire
SA61 1JX**

Date of inspection: June 2026

by

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

This report is also available in Welsh

About St Marks Church in Wales VA School

Name of provider	St Marks Church in Wales VA School
Local authority	Pembrokeshire County Council
Language of the provider	English
School category according to Welsh-medium provision	
Type of school	Primary
Religious character	Church in Wales Voluntary Aided
Number of pupils on roll	114
Pupils of statutory school age	90
Number in nursery classes	11
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%)	38.8%
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%)	20.0%
Percentage of pupils who speak Welsh at home	5.6%
Percentage of pupils with English as an additional language	0.0%
Lead partner in Initial teacher education	No
Date of headteacher appointment	01/09/2025

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Date of previous Estyn inspection (if applicable)	
Start date of inspection	29/06/2026

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 Mark's Church in Wales Voluntary Aided Primary School provides a caring and inclusive environment where positive relationships are central to its work. Staff know pupils and their families well, and parents value the care, support and commitment shown to their children. Since her appointment, the headteacher has built strong relationships with the school community and established a shared focus on meeting the needs of all pupils. She has a strong vision for pupils to be the best they can be and has identified a clear route for the school to move forward.

Most pupils behave well, enjoy learning and work respectfully with staff and each other. The challenging behaviour of a few pupils is generally managed well by staff. Pupils benefit from a broad range of experiences that help them develop confidence, creativity and an understanding of their local community and Wales. Opportunities for pupils to learn about diversity and healthy relationships are limited. Many pupils make good progress in speaking, reading, mathematics, digital skills and Welsh. Staff support pupils with additional learning needs well, helping them make good progress towards their individual targets.

Overall, teachers meet pupils' needs successfully and use questioning and feedback effectively to help pupils improve their learning. However, learning is sometimes directed too much by adults and does not always move at a brisk enough pace. This limits opportunities for pupils to develop their independence, think for themselves and apply their skills confidently in new situations.

The school has spacious buildings and extensive grounds, but staff do not always make the best use of the indoor and outdoor learning environments to support learning, particularly for younger pupils.

Leaders have introduced effective systems to track pupils' progress and provide additional support where needed. They work closely with governors, who know the school well and provide appropriate support and challenge. Although attendance has improved slightly, too many pupils still miss school or arrive late.

Recommendations

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

- R1 Improve attendance and punctuality
- R2 Ensure that teaching consistently promotes pupils' independent learning and thinking.
- R3 Improve learning experiences and the use of the indoor and outdoor learning environments for younger pupils
- R4 Strengthen the curriculum to ensure there are purposeful opportunities for pupils to learn about diversity and relationships

What happens next

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

Main evaluation

St Mark's Church in Wales Voluntary Aided Primary School places positive relationships at the heart of its work. Staff know pupils and their families well and create a welcoming and inclusive environment where everyone feels valued. Since her appointment, the headteacher has taken a measured and sensitive approach to leading the school. She has invested time in understanding its community before reviewing the school's vision and identifying priorities for improvement. This has helped establish a shared commitment among staff, governors and families to meeting the needs of all pupils. Parents value the care shown by staff and appreciate the support they receive as their children settle into school life. These strong relationships enable staff to respond quickly to pupils' needs and contribute positively to their well-being and readiness to learn.

Staff encourage pupils to develop their social, moral, spiritual and cultural understanding through a range of meaningful experiences. Consequently, pupils show care and empathy towards others and demonstrate respect for differences. By the time they reach Year 6, many pupils collaborate successfully with their peers and work independently when opportunities allow. Most pupils behave well in lessons, engage positively in learning and work respectfully with staff and one another. A few pupils exhibit challenging behaviour at times, but this is generally managed well by staff. Pupils have suitable opportunities to contribute to the life and work of the school through a range of groups, although their role in leading these groups is not sufficiently developed.

Overall, staff know their pupils well and adapt learning successfully to meet a wide range of needs. Teachers and learning support assistants adapt provision effectively for pupils with additional learning needs (ALN), helping them make secure progress towards their individual learning and well-being targets. Most staff use questioning effectively to check pupils' understanding and encourage them to explain their thinking. Many teachers provide feedback that helps pupils understand their strengths as learners and identify how to improve their work. In the older classes, teachers respond promptly to pupils and adapt learning accordingly. This enables pupils to make strong progress and develop increasing confidence in their learning. Staff have suitably high expectations for pupils' learning and behaviour. Although there are strengths in teaching in all classes, in many instances, teaching lacks pace and is overly directed by staff. This impedes pupils' ability to develop effective independent learning and thinking skills.

The school benefits from spacious accommodation and extensive grounds, but teachers do not make full use of the outdoor environment to enrich learning, particularly for younger pupils. Similarly, the indoor learning environment for these pupils does not consistently support high-quality independent learning.

The school has a suitably broad curriculum that reflects the interests and needs of most pupils. Teachers make effective use of visits and community links to deepen pupils' understanding of their locality and Wales. These experiences strengthen pupils' sense of belonging and help them appreciate their local and national heritage. Teachers also provide worthwhile opportunities for pupils to develop creative skills through art, music, dance and drama. There are insufficient opportunities for pupils to develop their understanding of the diversity of Wales, the wider world and the nature of relationships.

Many pupils develop their oracy and reading skills well over time. By Year 6, many speak confidently and articulately and read fluently and accurately. Many pupils make suitable progress in writing. Teachers help pupils understand the features of different text types and provide regular opportunities to apply these skills. Learning activities do not always provide authentic reasons for pupils to write or apply their skills independently and because of this, pupils do not consistently transfer their learning confidently to meaningful contexts.

Teachers provide practical experiences that help younger pupils develop secure number skills. They plan learning that enables older pupils to apply their mathematical understanding appropriately across the curriculum. By Year 6, a few pupils explain their mathematical thinking confidently and tackle increasingly demanding problems successfully. When teachers provide worthwhile opportunities for pupils to think independently, many persevere, test different approaches and solve problems successfully. Overall, opportunities for pupils to apply their numeracy skills across the curriculum are limited. Teachers provide many relevant opportunities for pupils to develop and apply their digital skills. Consequently, older pupils use technology confidently across a range of contexts to support and enhance their learning.

Welsh is used purposefully throughout the school day, providing regular opportunities for pupils to develop their language skills in meaningful contexts. From an early age, many pupils use Welsh through songs, rhymes and greetings. As they move through the school, most develop an increasing understanding of familiar language patterns, pronounce words accurately and understand the language they use. By Year 6, many pupils confidently hold simple conversations about everyday topics using familiar language patterns.

The headteacher works effectively with staff and governors to identify priorities for improvement and develop leadership across the school. Leaders track pupils' progress carefully in reading, writing and mathematics and share this information effectively with teachers and support staff. Staff use this information well to identify pupils' next steps and provide additional support where required. Leaders are developing effective arrangements to evaluate the school's work. Monitoring activities are beginning to provide

leaders with a clearer understanding of the quality of teaching and learning. The headteacher is developing leadership responsibilities across the school, although this work is at an early stage.

Leaders ensure that all staff take responsibility for supporting pupils affected by poverty and use grant funding, including the pupil development grant, purposefully to reduce inequality and improve pupils' well-being. They provide suitable opportunities for staff to develop professionally through in-house training and have rightly identified greater collaboration with colleagues from other schools as the next stage of professional learning.

Leaders monitor attendance well and implement appropriate strategies to improve pupils' engagement. Attendance has improved slightly over the last year, but attendance and punctuality continue to require improvement.

The school's governors have a suitable knowledge of its work. They provide effective challenge and valuable support to leaders and ask pertinent questions about the school's work. Many governors gather first-hand evidence and use this information appropriately to hold leaders to account. Leaders and governors manage the school's finances carefully and make considered decisions that benefit pupils. Together, they have established suitable foundations for continued improvement by maintaining a clear focus on pupils' learning, well-being and inclusion.

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/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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