Dros ddysgwyr, dros Gymru
For learners, for Wales

A report on

Maerdy Community Primary School

Graigwen
Maerdy
Ferndale
RCT
CF43 4TW

Date of inspection: September 2026

by

Estyn, His Majesty's Inspectorate for Education

and Training in Wales

This report is also available in Welsh

About Maerdy Community Primary School

Name of provider	Maerdy Community Primary School
Local authority	Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council
Language of the provider	English
School category according to Welsh-medium provision	English- medium
Type of school	Primary
Religious character	*
Number of pupils on roll	295
Pupils of statutory school age	227
Number in nursery classes	47
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%)	47.70%
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%)	12.80%
Percentage of pupils who speak Welsh at home	0.00%
Percentage of pupils with English as an additional language	0.00%
Lead partner in Initial teacher education	No
Date of headteacher appointment	01/11/2021

Date of previous Estyn inspection (if applicable)	22/07/2019
Start date of inspection	21/09/2026

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

Maerdy Primary is a warm and caring school, where pupils feel safe and secure. Pupils demonstrate excellent behaviour, engage positively in their lessons and most make solid progress over time.

School leaders know their community well and make sure that pupils understand the history and legacy of the area. Staff teach pupils to appreciate their local area and to be ambitious for themselves and their community. They create strong relationships with pupils and have high expectations for what pupils can learn and achieve.

Lessons are interesting and help pupils to develop their skills appropriately during their time in school. Most pupils make strong progress in developing their speaking and listening skills and this is a strength of the school's work. They make sound progress in writing, and, over time, most pupils learn to read texts accurately. However, too few pupils read for pleasure, and older pupils do not have the necessary skills to read and understand difficult or unfamiliar words. Pupils make strong progress in developing their maths and numeracy skills over time. They make solid progress in acquiring digital and Welsh language communication skills.

The school's support for pupils with additional learning needs (ALN) is highly effective. In mainstream classes, pupils' needs are identified at an early stage, and pupils receive high-quality support that helps them to make good progress from their individual starting points. Pupils in the learning support classes receive highly individualised approaches to learning that support their development and overall progress well.

Leaders have a good understanding of which areas of the school's work need to improve and make beneficial improvements where necessary. Despite the school's efforts to encourage and support pupils' regular attendance at school, rates remain low. Governors play an active part in the life of the school and provide strong support and levels of challenge to school leaders.

Recommendations

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

R1 To improve attendance

R2 To establish a positive culture for reading

What happens next

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

Main evaluation

Main Evaluation

Maerdy Primary School provides a warm, nurturing and inclusive environment for pupils to learn and achieve. Most pupils feel safe, valued, respected and treated fairly by staff and their peers. Throughout the school, nearly all pupils demonstrate exemplary behaviour. They are cheerful and positive about their learning experiences and engage very well in lessons. Most pupils, including those with additional learning needs (ALN) and those in the Learning Support Classes (LSCs) make at least appropriate progress over time.

Spotlight: Fostering a sense of community through establishing a clear vision.

The headteacher has an inspiring vision for the school, its pupils and the local community. This is based on developing a strong sense of belonging and pride, as well as a deep appreciation of the community's rich cultural and historic heritage. Staff teach pupils to support one another and to develop high aspirations for themselves and the future development of their community. This vision powerfully engages staff, parents and governors, who work in partnership towards achieving it and to ensure that it is considered in all aspects of the school's life and work.

Staff demonstrate high expectations of all pupils. This applies to behaviour, attitudes to learning and achievement. Staff show great confidence in the pupils and communicate that they expect great things of them in the future. Every pupil is expected to engage with and profit from the planned learning activities.

Teachers move learning forward at an appropriate pace and regularly check pupils' understanding, either individually or through whole class 'pit stops'. These checks help pupils to progress with their learning and allow staff to remove any barriers quickly. The strategies used to ensure pupil progress in the LSCs are particularly effective.

LSC staff use individualised approaches to engage pupils in their learning successfully. They provide clear, accessible feedback and carefully monitor pupils' progress against personalised targets, whilst accurately identifying their next steps in learning. Staff in all

classes adapt learning activities well to meet the needs of pupils with additional learning needs, enabling everyone to participate. They build strong relationships with the pupils and know their individual needs well. Teaching support staff throughout the school, including those in the LSCs, are skilled, highly motivated and well trained. They support learning very well and make a significant contribution to pupils' progress. Teachers provide pupils with good opportunities to influence what they learn, helping them to engage with learning across the curriculum. The oldest pupils do not always have enough opportunities to plan, create and evaluate their own lines of enquiry.

The curriculum provides pupils with a good breadth and depth across all areas of learning. It supports pupils to make good progress with their learning and wellbeing. It is well adapted to the needs of the pupils and the context of the school. Teachers develop pupils' literacy and numeracy skills systematically, building on their learning and planning clear next steps. The curriculum provides pupils with appropriate opportunities to develop their spiritual awareness and develops their understanding of moral issues very well. Staff set clear expectations and consistently praise positive behaviour and address poor behaviour. The curriculum promotes pupils' social and cultural development very well. As a result, it provides pupils with a strong appreciation of their cultural heritage. Overall, teaching and the curriculum help to ensure that most pupils are adaptable in their learning, appreciate the contribution of others and are prepared well for the next stage in their learning journey.

Spotlight: Strong progress in developing pupils' oracy skills.

From relatively low starting points, many of the youngest pupils make rapid progress in developing their speaking and listening skills. They quickly develop an infectious desire to communicate that is motivated by the strong working relationships they develop with staff. Many older pupils listen well to one another; they use an increasingly sophisticated vocabulary to justify their opinions and explain their thinking. By the time they reach Year 6, many use oracy skills very effectively to enhance their learning across the breadth of the curriculum. Teachers provide good opportunities for pupils to work collaboratively in meaningful ways. A particular strength is the way that LSC teachers use a broad range of techniques to ensure pupils develop effective communication skills, these include the use of speech, signing and visual communication tools.

Many of the youngest pupils developing their writing skills appropriately. As they progress through the school, they use different forms of writing well and in purposeful contexts. Most older pupils write with power and passion, using techniques such as metaphor, simile and personification very effectively.

Most of the youngest pupils make a sound start in developing their pre-reading skills. As they move through the school, they become competent readers across the breadth of the

curriculum, but do not display a particular enjoyment of reading. Most older pupils read effectively, but many do not use strategies other than sounding out letters to read unfamiliar words. Many are not sufficiently reflective in their reading. School leaders recognise these issues and have prioritised plans to improve pupils' skills and to create a culture of reading in the school.

School leaders promote the Welsh language appropriately. Most pupils are positive about speaking the Welsh language and they make suitable progress over time. Many younger pupils use appropriate digital skills. Over time, they apply a suitable breadth of digital skills in appropriate contexts across the curriculum.

Across the school, most pupils make strong progress with their mathematical skills. The school has recently focused on improving opportunities for pupils to apply their numeracy skills in purposeful contexts and this work has had a positive impact on pupil outcomes. By the time they reach Year 6, many pupils are confident, competent mathematicians, who apply their skills at a similar level in other areas of learning.

The school provides highly successful support for pupils who are identified with ALN. School leaders work very effectively with parents and external agencies to identify pupils' additional needs at an early stage, such as developing productive partnerships with pre-school settings and conducting home visits to families. Staff understand the needs of pupils very well and provide high-quality provision to meet these. The Learning Support Classes provide highly successful support for pupils with complex learning needs. Staff in these classes build excellent relationships with their pupils and provide exceptional and bespoke learning provision that meets the needs of pupils well.

Leaders know the school, its community and their families very well. They use a valuable range of information to identify areas of the school that need to be improved and share the responsibility for school improvement beneficially. This has led to improvements in several key areas that have been sustained over time. One example of this is the way that leaders collaborate to create a bespoke curriculum that supports the school's vision for pupils and the wider community effectively. School leaders implement successful approaches to address the impact of poverty on pupils' educational attainment and well-being, which result in positive outcomes for pupils. Leaders promote pupils' regular attendance at school consistently. However, too many pupils do not attend school regularly enough and the attendance rates of pupils who are impacted by poverty remain too low.

Governors demonstrate a strong commitment to the school and its community. They have a deep understanding of the school's needs and share their expertise to provide beneficial support to pupils and their families. Governors provide valuable levels of support and challenge to school leaders that assists school improvement successfully.

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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