



Arolygiaeth Ei Mawrhydi dros Addysg a Hyfforddiant yng Nghymru
Her Majesty's Inspectorate for Education and Training in Wales

A report on

**Heolgerrig Community School
Heolgerrig Road
Heolgerrig
CF48 1SB**

Date of inspection: November 2017

by

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

About Heolgerrig Community School

Heolgerrig Primary School is in the village of Heolgerrig close to Merthyr Tydfil. Most pupils come from the local community. The rolling average of pupils eligible for free school meals over the last three years is around 7%. This is much lower than the average for the local authority and Wales.

There are currently 225 pupils on roll, including 24 full-time nursery pupils. There are eight classes, including the nursery. The school admits pupils to the nursery from the age of three.

The school identifies that around 21% of pupils have additional learning needs, which is in line with the national average for primary schools. A very few pupils have a statement of special educational needs. Nearly all pupils speak English at home. A very few pupils speak English as an additional language.

The school's last inspection was in 2012. The headteacher, who was formerly the deputy headteacher, was appointed in 2015. A new deputy headteacher was also appointed in 2015.

Further information is available from the Welsh Government My Local School website at the link below.
<http://mylocalschool.wales.gov.uk/Schools/SchoolSearch?lang=en>

Summary

The school has made rapid improvements since its last inspection as a result of strong leadership and teaching of good quality. School leaders work purposefully and effectively, for example to ensure that improvements to the provision are consistent and lead to improved pupils' outcomes. The curriculum is vibrant and teachers provide many valuable opportunities for pupils to learn about things that interest them. Adults know and care for their pupils well. As a result, nearly all pupils enjoy their learning and make good progress. Most pupils behave well and attend regularly. By the time they leave in Year 6, nearly all pupils achieve good standards in English, especially in reading and oracy. Nearly all are competent in mathematics and use information and communication technology (ICT) confidently.

| Inspection area | Judgement |
|--|------------------|
| Standards | Good |
| Wellbeing and attitudes to learning | Good |
| Teaching and learning experiences | Good |
| Care, support and guidance | Good |
| Leadership and management | Good |

Recommendations

- R1 Improve pupils' standards in writing in English
- R2 Ensure that leaders' monitoring focuses sharply on pupils' standards and outcomes
- R3 Make better use of the current expertise within the school to ensure that learning in all classes proceeds at a good pace
- R4 Ensure consistency of practice in promoting good behaviour

What happens next

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

Estyn will invite the school to prepare a case study on its work in relation to the improvements since the last inspection for dissemination on Estyn's website.

Main findings

Standards: Good

Many pupils enter the school with standards that are above the average for their age, especially in oracy. They make good progress over time and nearly all leave with standards at or above the expected level. The very few pupils eligible for free school meals make sound progress, and pupils with additional needs make strong progress against their individual targets. The rate of pupils' progress has increased notably over recent time. As a result, the standards that they achieve by Year 6 have improved markedly since the last inspection.

Nearly all pupils develop their reading skills well. In the foundation phase, many learn to read the different sounds that letters make accurately, and they recognise familiar words quickly. They are eager to discuss their favourite books and stories, and read a suitable range of texts aloud with expression. By Year 6, nearly all pupils are assured, independent readers. Many read aloud confidently and with meaningful intonation. They can infer and deduce information from a wide range of age-appropriate texts and give well thought through opinions about what they have read.

Most pupils are articulate, confident speakers. They enjoy talking about topics that interest them, and use their oral skills to contribute to the smooth running of school, for example in appealing for other pupils' votes as part of the annual election procedure for the school council. However, a few pupils find it difficult to listen patiently, for instance when waiting for their turn to speak.

Most pupils write effectively. In the foundation phase, most develop an effective pencil grip and form their letters competently. They can spell common words correctly and make good use of their phonic knowledge to write unfamiliar words. By Year 2, most pupils can write simple stories and poems using suitable language and vocabulary. As they move through the school, more able pupils develop their writing skills exceptionally well. For example, in Year 6, following a study of Shakespeare's sonnets, more able pupils use the structure and rhyme patterns to write their own effective sonnets in contemporary language. Many pupils use a neat, joined handwriting script. However too often, less able pupils do not structure their sentences well enough. They forget to use the correct punctuation, for example capital letters to begin sentences. Across the school, most pupils write appropriately in a good range of fiction and non-fiction genres, both in English lessons and in other subjects across the curriculum.

Most pupils are competent mathematicians. Throughout the school, they make good progress in developing their calculation skills to use the four rules of number appropriately. By the end of the foundation phase, most pupils can measure accurately and tell the time. They interpret information correctly from simple graphs and charts. By the end of Year 6, most pupils use and apply their skills well to solve problems and they can explain their reasoning. However, many pupils' mental arithmetic skills are slow, for example when recalling their times tables facts. Most pupils use their numeracy skills appropriately in other areas of learning, for instance when constructing graphs as part of their science work.

Most pupils develop good skills in ICT. In the foundation phase, many pupils program small electronic toys skilfully, for example to ensure that the robot spider reaches its web. Most use tablet computers confidently across a wide range of applications. By key stage 2, most pupils have developed valuable digital skills which support their learning and life skills effectively. For example, pupils in Year 5 make good use of their knowledge of formulae in spreadsheets to plan a holiday on a fixed budget.

Pupils' Welsh skills are developing well. Younger pupils in the foundation phase sing songs and rhymes in Welsh and use simple phrases to describe toys in circle time activities. Across the school, more able pupils read familiar Welsh books accurately, with good pronunciation and understanding. Pupils in Year 6 ask and answer a range of questions accurately. They talk confidently about the games and hobbies they enjoy, and extend their sentences appropriately, for example by using 'ond' or 'achos'.

Wellbeing and attitudes to learning: Good

Nearly all pupils feel safe and secure in school. Most know which staff they can turn to if they are worried or upset. Most pupils understand the need to keep safe online. Most understand why they should adopt a healthy lifestyle, and they can give relevant examples of a healthy diet and useful exercises to keep themselves fit. Nearly all pupils participate well in lessons and engage positively in a wide range of extra-curricular clubs and activities, for example the gardening club and the STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) club.

Pupils move sensibly around the school site. For instance, well-ordered groups move quietly through the spacious atrium between different activities. Most settle well in the different learning areas and, as a result, they are ready to learn at the start of lessons.

Most pupils enjoy school and are eager to learn. Most have positive attitudes to learning, behave well, concentrate and engage actively in their learning. They collaborate well, for example to solve problems, and many pupils persevere with their work even when they find things difficult. However, on occasions, a few over-enthusiastic pupils need reminders not to interrupt when other pupils are talking. A few forget the importance of good manners, for example saying please and thank you to others at appropriate times. Most pupils behave well during whole-school events such as assembly, playtime and lunchtime.

Pupils are confident learners. They interact well with new people and adults. The pupils in the school council and eco committee take an active role in making decisions. These have a very positive influence on the school and provide the pupils with a sense of responsibility. They work closely with the local council, for example, to gain additional security railings around the school site. This helps them to become ethical and informed citizens, who understand their rights and responsibilities.

Attendance rates at the school are good and have improved notably since the last inspection. Most pupils arrive promptly at the start of the school day.

Teaching and learning experiences: Good

The curriculum provides a comprehensive range of learning experiences and, as a result, pupils become confident and well-informed learners. For example, there are plentiful opportunities for pupils to take part in the creative arts. During the inspection, Year 6 pupils took part in the Shakespeare Festival at the Aberdare Coliseum Theatre, staging scenes from Macbeth, which they have studied in class. All pupils in Year 5 currently learn to play the trombone, and have the opportunity to continue their learning after school at a local youth orchestra. Pupils in the foundation phase have worthwhile opportunities to learn outdoors. For instance, pupils in Year 1 enjoy creating their own spider food for Spiderella from ingredients found outside, and then writing instructions for others to follow their recipe.

Overall, the quality of teaching is good. Teachers plan thoughtful topics that engage the interest of nearly all pupils. Exciting activities help pupils to learn and to make good progress. Teachers ask a purposeful range of questions to encourage pupils to think more deeply about their learning. For example, pupils in the reception class consider carefully the size of pumpkin needed to make the best head for their scarecrow, Tattybogle, using appropriate mathematical language. Learning support assistants work with less able pupils effectively, for example to deliver interventions to help these pupils to reach the expected levels.

Working relationships between adults and pupils are strong. Teachers generally manage pupils' behaviour effectively in lessons and, as a result, nearly all pupils concentrate well on tasks. In a few lessons, the pace is too slow and the tasks do not engage a few pupils actively enough. In these instances, pupils lose concentration and their interest wanes.

Teachers provide useful feedback to pupils, which helps them to improve their work. They provide further opportunities for pupils to practise specific skills, which teachers identify effectively using specific markers. Many pupils respond promptly to teachers' comments and written feedback, which helps them to improve their work. Teachers assess pupils' work accurately and make good use of this information to plan for the next steps in pupils' learning.

There is comprehensive and progressive provision for pupils to learn the Welsh language, and there are valuable opportunities to learn about the culture and heritage of Wales. For example, Year 3 pupils recently visited Caerphilly Castle as part of their topic work. They compare and contrast different Welsh artists' images of the castle in order to inform their own art work. Displays around the school celebrate Welsh scientists effectively, and teachers promote Welsh authors well. The school has developed a Criw Cymraeg who meet each week. They decide on a phrase of the week and encourage pupils to use this in the playground. Many teachers and a few teaching assistants use the Welsh language appropriately throughout the day, for example when giving praise or instructions to pupils.

There are cohesive, well-planned opportunities for all pupils to develop their literacy, numeracy and digital skills, through specific lessons and opportunities to apply the skills in other areas of learning. For example, pupils in the foundation phase learn to read and write their sounds effectively through regular short, well-focused phonics sessions. The curriculum includes worthwhile opportunities for nearly all pupils to

enjoy a good range of children's literature and classic novels, as part of their topic work. In addition, all pupils make good use of the school library to foster a love of books and reading. This provision has been highly effective in supporting the improvements to pupils' reading and writing skills.

Care, support and guidance: Good

Leaders track all pupils' progress robustly. They use information on pupils' performance to provide valuable support and challenge for any pupils at risk of falling behind, for example through intervention programmes. Teachers also make good use of this information to ensure that all pupils in their class make at least the progress they should.

There is very good provision for pupils with additional needs. The co-ordinator identifies these pupils early in their school life. The school involves parents in identifying a suitable support plan, in partnership with specialist agencies wherever appropriate. Adults make effective use of a wide variety of tailored intervention programmes, for example to support pupils' social and emotional skills, or for older pupils who may find the transition to secondary school daunting.

Teachers and leaders foster a very positive relationship with parents, who value the warm welcome they receive at school. There is a worthwhile programme for reception parents to help them to support their children with literacy and numeracy skills. In addition, parents throughout the school value a recent workshop to support them in developing their children's thinking and reasoning skills.

Effective partnerships ensure that pupils have the knowledge and understanding to develop healthy lifestyle choices. For example, through work with a children's charity, pupils have a good understanding of the importance of healthy relationships and keeping safe. As a result, the school has introduced peer mediators, who help pupils to resolve any minor squabbles among themselves and to play well together. The school makes appropriate provision for healthy eating and drinking.

The school's safeguarding procedures meet requirements and give no cause for concern. There are good arrangements to monitor and resolve the very occasional incidents of bullying that occur. Recently, the school has reinvigorated its approaches to promoting good behaviour. For example, pupils in the foundation phase respond well to praise through the recognition board. However, the use of the system of rewards and sanctions is not yet consistent across all classes.

There are worthwhile opportunities for pupils to reflect on their learning and wellbeing. For example, during assemblies, adults and pupils discuss the school's value of the month and relate it to pupils' friendships and the best use of the 'buddy bench'. Well-chosen topics stimulate pupils' curiosity and encourage them to question the world around them. There are many valuable opportunities for pupils to develop their cultural awareness through music and performance, including taking part in a wide variety of productions, assemblies and concerts. These help to promote high levels of self-esteem and confidence among pupils.

Leadership and management: Good

The senior leadership team has led the school through a period of rapid change that has had a very positive impact on all aspects of the school's work. In a relatively short period of time, leaders have improved important areas, including the standards that pupils achieve and their attendance levels. The headteacher's vision for the school focuses firmly on improving outcomes for pupils. She has communicated this well to the wider school community. All staff share a common commitment to the school's vision and values. The headteacher and the deputy headteacher are strong, professional role models and have high expectations of pupils, teachers and learning support assistants.

The headteacher and deputy headteacher have a good understanding of the school's strengths and areas for development. They implement comprehensive monitoring and evaluation processes that draw effectively on a wide range of first-hand evidence. These include scrutiny of pupils' work, seeking the views of pupils, parents and governors, and making regular observations of teaching and learning. These observations are helpful to teachers in improving their classroom practice, but they do not focus sharply enough on learning and the standards that pupils achieve in lessons. As a result, judgements made on the quality of teaching do not always relate closely enough to pupils' outcomes and the quality of their learning. Leaders use the information from monitoring activities purposefully to plan school improvement priorities. The school addresses national priorities well. For example, plans to implement the digital competency framework are developing successfully and this is having a positive impact on pupils' ICT skills.

Teachers and teaching assistants work well together to drive forward school improvement priorities successfully. For example, leaders have implemented many different strategies to raise the profile of reading. These include using fathers and grandfathers as positive role-models for boys, and involving pupils in the choice of reading materials available in schools. In addition, they use the local library to engage pupils in theme days linked to the curriculum. Adults provide catch-up reading interventions for pupils falling behind with their reading skills. As a result of this multi-faceted approach, the standards of reading across the school have improved notably. Furthermore, pupils have more positive attitudes to books and reading.

Teachers and learning support assistants benefit from a purposeful range of professional development opportunities. These include engaging with other schools to work on a common focus, and attending courses and events to improve the skills needed to carry out their roles. Training links well to school priorities. Senior leaders manage the performance of staff effectively and provide clear feedback on what they do well and what they need to improve. All teachers at the school have opportunities to observe each other in their classrooms and to share good practice. As a result, approaches to teaching and learning throughout the school are increasingly consistent. The headteacher has recognised the need to develop the skills of newly-appointed senior leaders and teachers who lead subject areas in order to share leadership responsibilities more widely. For example, subject reviews carried out recently have helped teachers to have a better understanding of the strengths and shortcomings within their areas of responsibility.

The governing body provides strong support for the school. Governors know the school's strengths and areas for improvement well. They visit school regularly to gather first-hand evidence, for example through reading with pupils and listening to learners. Members of the governing body have a wide range of skills and expertise, for example in understanding performance data. They use these skills effectively to challenge the school's leaders to improve the school in important areas, such as in pupils' writing skills. Individual governors use their skills to provide support to the school, for instance by running a credit union to help pupils to learn the value of regular savings.

There are efficient arrangements to manage the school's finances and resources.. Leaders use grant funding effectively to support targeted pupils, for example through the provision of suitable interventions, and to purchase resources that benefit all pupils, such as tablet computers and equipment for the school playground.

Copies of the report

Copies of this report are available from the school and from the Estyn website (www.estyn.gov.wales)

Estyn evaluates a provider's effectiveness using a four-point judgement scale:

| | |
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| Excellent | Very strong, sustained performance and practice |
| Good | Strong features, although minor aspects may require improvement |
| Adequate and needs improvement | Strengths outweigh weaknesses, but important aspects require improvement |
| Unsatisfactory and needs urgent improvement | Important weaknesses outweigh strengths |

The report was produced in accordance with Section 28 of the Education Act 2005.

Every possible care has been taken to ensure that the information in this document is accurate at the time of going to press. Any enquiries or comments regarding this document/publication should be addressed to:

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