



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

A report on

**Cymer Afan Primary School
Margam Street
Cymmer
Port Talbot
SA13 3EE**

Date of inspection: January 2020

by

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

About Cymer Afan Primary School

Cymer Afan Primary School is in Cymer in Neath Port Talbot local authority. There are 77 pupils on roll, including 14 nursery pupils who attend part-time. There are four mixed-age classes.

The average proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals over the past three years is around 34%. This is well above the average for Wales of 18%. The school has identified around 35% of pupils as having special educational needs. This is considerably higher than the national average of 21%. Nearly all pupils are white British and speak English at home. A very few pupils speak Welsh at home.

Cymer Afan Primary School, along with Glyncoirwg, Croeserw and Pen Afan Primary Schools, is part of the Upper Afan Valley Federation of Schools, which formed in September 2013. The federation was previously one of five schools, but reduced to four primary schools after the closure of Cymer Afan Comprehensive School in July 2019.

The headteacher of the federation took up the post in September 2019; he had been the primary phase leader since 2013. Each primary school has a lead learner who is responsible for the day-to-day running of the school.

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

Most pupils make good progress as they move through the school, often from low starting points. They develop their literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology (ICT) skills well and make very good progress in learning Welsh. They enjoy coming to school and develop positive attitudes to learning. A particularly effective feature of this is the way pupils of all ages assess and improve their work. Pupils have beneficial opportunities to influence what goes on in the school. They are eager to take on responsibilities and to influence change. All staff listen to their views and act on them, and this contributes well to the school's culture of mutual respect.

The lead learner provides high quality effective leadership to the school on a day-to-day basis. She ensures that staff work well as a team with a clear focus on raising standards and improving pupils' wellbeing. There is a calm and nurturing ethos across the school and relationships with parents and the local community are strong.

Since the establishment of the federation of primary schools in September 2019, the headteacher, with the support of staff and governors, has made the wellbeing of pupils the top priority. This is evident in the care support and guidance afforded to pupils across the federation of schools. The federation's leaders are beginning to establish a culture of collaboration and sharing which benefits the wellbeing of staff and pupils. This culture sets a positive tone for the work in each of the federation's schools. However, school leaders have not ensured that standards of teaching and learning experiences are consistently good in all of the schools within the federation. Self-evaluation processes and arrangements to share best practice in teaching and in provision for skills are at an early stage of development.

Inspection area	Judgement
Standards	Good
Wellbeing and attitudes to learning	Good
Teaching and learning experiences	Good
Care, support and guidance	Good
Leadership and management	Adequate and needs improvement

Recommendations

- R1 Improve provision to develop pupils' literacy skills, particularly their early reading skills
- R2 Strengthen the contributions of leaders at all levels, across the federation, particularly to evaluation and improvement work

What happens next

The school will draw up an action plan to show how it is going to address the recommendations. Estyn will review the school's progress.

Main findings

Standards: Good

Most pupils start school with skills and knowledge below the level expected for their age, particularly their speaking skills. During their time at the school, most make good progress in developing their skills across the curriculum. Pupils with special educational needs make strong progress towards their individual targets.

In the foundation phase, most pupils listen attentively and follow instructions well. As they move through the phase, they expand their use of vocabulary well and retell familiar stories following a set sequence successfully. For example, pupils in reception and Year 1 follow a story map to retell the story of 'The Tiger Who Came to Tea'. They record their performance and evaluate it to look for ways to improve. Across the foundation phase, a majority of pupils develop effective reading skills. They understand and talk about simple features of different texts. However, a minority of pupils do not have a secure enough knowledge of letter sounds and blends to help them to decode new words successfully. In Year 1, many write clear descriptions using accurate simple punctuation. For example, they describe a pet dog who visits the setting using carefully selected adjectives. Many pupils in Year 2 are beginning to edit their work purposefully to improve their use of vocabulary and to correct spelling errors. However, a minority of pupils do not always spell words that they use regularly correctly.

In key stage 2, most pupils listen to others well and contribute thoughtfully to class discussions. They use specific language appropriately when identifying how to improve their written work. A few pupils do not always use the correct grammatical form when speaking, but they are beginning to identify and correct this when it appears in their written work. Most pupils' reading skills develop well. Many read with fluency and expression. They take good account of punctuation and use the context of sentences to work out the meaning of unfamiliar words. Pupils who are more able describe the literary techniques that authors use to engage the reader and use inference and deduction well to extract meaning from texts. Most pupils' writing develops well. Pupils become increasingly adept at checking the accuracy of their work and correcting spelling and punctuation errors.

Most pupils make very good progress in developing their Welsh language skills as they move through the school. In the nursery class, pupils respond correctly to simple commands in Welsh. Most pupils in reception and Year 1 ask and answer simple questions. In Year 2, they begin to use connectives in their responses, for example when they express a preference or dislike for different foods and indicate which is healthier to eat. In key stage 2, most pupils use a wide range of language patterns and sustain conversations confidently. During Welsh assemblies, nearly all pupils join in enthusiastically with familiar songs and prayers.

Most pupils develop their numeracy skills effectively as they move through the school. By the end of Year 1, most have good basic number skills and use these well to tackle simple problems, such as adding money in a cafe. Most pupils in Years 2 and 3 understand basic algebra and use these skills to solve simple codes. Most pupils in Year 6 apply their numeracy skills to a range of problems and in different contexts. For example, most pupils construct and interpret a line graph to compare the annual temperature in the Arctic, Antarctic and Wales.

As they move through the school, many pupils make suitable progress in improving their skills in information and communication technology (ICT). Pupils in lower foundation phase use ICT to help them improve their skills in literacy and numeracy. For example, they video themselves reading books and then share these at home with an adult. In upper foundation phase, pupils use the HWB platform confidently to store and share their work and create bar graphs about the food eaten by astronauts. They use the internet appropriately for independent research and produce information sheets combining text and pictures. By the end of key stage 2, pupils use a variety of applications and use ICT to work collaboratively and reflect on their learning. For example, they create, deliver and film their presentations to the class. They use these recordings successfully to reflect on the skills they have used and suggest areas for improvement.

Wellbeing and attitudes to learning: Good

All pupils like coming to school and feel safe there. Older pupils readily support younger ones with their work and during play times, and all pupils are proud to engage in assemblies and the wider life of the school.

Nearly all pupils understand the importance of a healthy lifestyle and enjoy participating fully in a range of activities to develop their physical fitness, such as online aerobic sessions and daily running exercises. Pupils in the foundation phase brush their teeth independently after lunch and most have an understanding of the difference between healthy and unhealthy food and drinks. Through the work of the digital wizards, nearly all pupils know how to keep safe when using the internet.

Most pupils engage fully in activities linked to their personal and social development, such as 'checking in' at the beginning of the school day. They contribute sensitively to discussions during wellbeing sessions and are happy to share their thoughts, while respecting the views of others.

Many pupils in all classes engage actively in the work of the school. The school council is well established, and it identifies effectively areas for improvement through undertaking learning walks. It works alongside and supports the wider community. For example, council members organised the collection of clothing for homeless people in the area and linked with the local community organiser, who led an assembly related to the issues raised. The Criw Cwmraeg lead weekly assemblies to promote the Welsh language and culture and the eco committee take an active role in promoting recycling and reducing the use of plastics. Younger pupils make regular suggestions about what and how they would like to learn. For example, pupils in reception and Year 1 have a budget to spend on classroom resources. Older pupils reflect on their own work and that of others well, but their contribution to the content of what they learn in lessons is largely teacher led.

Nearly all pupils behave well during lessons and around the school. They show respect for one another, and work and play together well. Nearly all are polite and courteous and interact with school visitors in a confident and friendly manner.

Nearly all pupils have positive attitudes to learning and work confidently and effectively in a range of contexts. Most pupils in all classes work independently and complete tasks successfully, with many older ones concentrating for extended

periods that enable them to complete longer pieces of written work, for example writing a biography of Winston Churchill. When faced with challenging problem solving activities, many pupils sustain concentration and work together as a team cooperatively and effectively for some time. For example, Year 2 pupils worked well together in a challenging outdoor construction activity building a large sign spelling out 'The Great Fire of London'.

Pupils' attendance compares favourably with that of those in similar schools, placing the school consistently in the top 25% of similar schools for the last three years.

Teaching and learning experiences: Good

Overall, teachers provide pupils with a varied and balanced curriculum that meets the needs of those of all ages and abilities appropriately. They use published schemes of work suitably to support them with ideas for curriculum topics and learning activities. They plan collaboratively across the federation and this helps them to ensure that pupils receive a broadly equitable range of learning experiences. Teachers modify their planning when required to ensure that pupils have sufficient depth and range in their learning.

In the foundation phase, adults provide useful opportunities for pupils to contribute to their learning. For example, when starting a new topic on food, younger pupils ask interesting questions to investigate, such as, 'Do they wear special clothes in a supermarket and where does the money go when the till is full?' In key stage 2, pupils discuss what they already know and what they would like to find out, but they do not always have enough opportunities to lead the direction of their learning.

The school provides many beneficial visits to places of interest that link well to pupils' topics, help them to develop their life skills and support their appreciation of the natural environment of Wales. For example, during a residential visit to Margam Park, older pupils investigated how water shapes the land by studying the Nant Phillip river. They measure the depth and width of the river, and problem-solve successfully how to build an effective outdoor shelter.

Teachers develop pupils' literacy skills successfully across the curriculum. They teach specific language skills well and provide beneficial opportunities for them to practise these skills in extended pieces of writing. For example, in upper key stage 2, pupils research, plan and write detailed biographies of Winston Churchill after developing their note taking skills. Guided reading sessions promote a love of reading and help pupils to understand the features of different texts. However, reading activities do not always provide regular opportunities for younger pupils to develop their knowledge of phonics well enough.

Teachers develop pupils' numeracy and ICT skills effectively, and design good opportunities for them to apply these across the curriculum. For example, in response to the class book 'The Enormous Turnip', pupils in foundation phase weigh vegetables accurately and find the heaviest. In Year 6, pupils use electronic spreadsheets to create and apply a formula to investigate the costs of different sports kits.

Across most classes, foundation phase principles are very well established. Pupils have good opportunities to move freely between high quality tasks and, as a result, develop as independent, enthusiastic and confident learners. They have purposeful opportunities to access the outdoor learning environment.

The school promotes pupils' understanding of Welsh language, culture and traditions effectively. For example, many pupils visit Afan Forest Park, where they learn about Welsh artists, poets and the history of the local area. Teachers plan purposefully for developing the Welsh language. They provide opportunities for pupils to lead assemblies in Welsh and arrange coffee mornings for them and their parents to learn and practise the language together. This provision has a positive impact on pupils' ability and confidence to speak Welsh around the school.

All staff develop extremely positive and supportive working relationships with pupils and have effective strategies to manage their behaviour. Learning moves with appropriate pace and activities provide a good level of challenge for pupils of all abilities. Adults question pupils skilfully to extend their knowledge and understanding successfully.

Most teachers provide pupils with purposeful feedback during activities that helps them to improve their work. They identify good features and areas that require further attention. In the foundation phase, they take time to talk about and review work and presentations that pupils have uploaded independently. In key stage 2, teachers have high expectations of how pupils will improve their own work through editing and redrafting.

From reception, adults encourage pupils to reflect on their work and to self-assess how well they have completed it using age appropriate systems. As pupils move through the school, they develop useful skills to look at their own work and that of others critically to identify areas for improvement. Older pupils value the high quality feedback from their classmates, and this helps them to be more reflective about their own work. As a result, by the time they leave the school, many pupils are confident and capable learners.

Care, support and guidance: Good

The school has a warm and inclusive, family friendly ethos. Its culture promotes positive relationships and shared values of hard work, honesty and fairness. Staff manage pupils' behaviour highly effectively and allow them good opportunities to discuss and contribute to their class charters.

There are appropriate arrangements to promote healthy eating and drinking and to develop pupils' understanding of a healthy lifestyle. For example, staff encourage pupils to take part in the daily mile and aerobics sessions. A programme of talks and visits informs pupils effectively about a wide range of physical, social and emotional wellbeing issues, such as basic hygiene and relationships education. Practitioners provide pupils with consistent and regular messages about staying safe online.

Staff encourage the pupils to play an active role in the life and work of the school through well-established groups, such as the school council, eco committee and Criw Cymraeg. Visits to the local café, a supermarket and the fire station in Maesteg

develop the pupils' understanding of the local community successfully. Pupils also visit the nearby forest centre at Afan Argoed to support their wider understanding of Wales, its culture and heritage, during Welsh Week.

The school has suitable links to counselling and mental health support services to help meet the needs of its more vulnerable pupils. Daily check in sessions and effective wellbeing activities, such as circle time, support this work well for all pupils. Staff have a very good understanding of the pupils in their care and support them appropriately and sensitively to build their confidence and self-esteem, working closely with their parents. Relationships with parents are strong and the school keeps them well informed about their child's progress and school events.

Pupils have worthwhile opportunities to develop their understanding of spiritual, moral, social and cultural issues. Assemblies and performances, led by staff, pupils and the local pastor, help to promote pupils' understanding of a wide range of issues. They provide good opportunities for pupils to celebrate their achievements in school and the community and to promote the Welsh language and culture successfully.

The school's arrangements for safeguarding pupils meet requirements and give no cause for concern.

Staff track the progress of pupils effectively and senior leaders and teachers meet regularly to discuss the needs of individual learners and to ensure that interventions are successful. However, leaders do not always use data effectively to identify broader issues within the school, for example pupils' standards and progress in early reading skills.

The additional learning needs co-ordinator works very effectively alongside other members of staff to identify learners in need of support. Staff use a suitable range of tools to assess pupils' language acquisition, progress in literacy and numeracy, attendance and wellbeing. They plan very effective teaching provision and interventions, which result in positive outcomes for most pupils.

Teachers set appropriate targets for individual pupils, which they use well to inform planning. They use thoughtful approaches, including the 'Superstar Books', which allow teachers and support staff to work together effectively to support pupils and to view progress. They evaluate progress on a regular basis to refine and improve provision and to reflect on what has worked well for individual pupils.

Staff liaise well with parents to carry out regular reviews of pupils' individual plans. They provide them with useful additional support to help their children at home and use digital communication effectively to share and celebrate pupils' progress towards their individual targets.

The school has strong links with a variety of external agencies to support teachers and pupils. For example, drop in sessions with the educational psychology service allow teachers and support staff to develop their expertise in dealing with vulnerable pupils. The additional learning needs co-ordinator liaises effectively with the local flying start provision, which enables practitioners to support pupils as they move into school.

Annual reports meet requirements and foundation phase reports provide useful information to help parents to support their child's learning at home. The school has effective systems for promoting good attendance.

Leadership and management: Adequate and needs improvement

The lead learner provides strong and effective leadership to the school on a day-to-day basis. She has high expectations of staff and pupils and leads effectively by example. She has high aspirations for pupils and this contributes to the positive learning culture throughout the school. There is a clear focus on improving teaching and learning across the school and the lead learner ensures that practitioners carry out agreed strategies for improvement consistently.

Since taking up overall leadership of the federation in September 2019, the headteacher has worked successfully to develop a shared vision for ensuring the wellbeing and nurture of pupils across the federation. This vision includes a commitment to meeting the physical, social and emotional needs of pupils. This work is effective and ensures that all the schools benefit from a calm atmosphere where pupils behave well and engage with their learning positively.

The vision to promote collaboration between the schools is developing well and is becoming influential in a number of ways. These include shared planning, consistent approaches to safeguarding pupils and common approaches to financial management. The developing culture of sharing is beneficial for staff and pupils. For example, it ensures that pupils receive a similar range of learning experiences and leads financial efficiencies so that events such as educational visits are viable and affordable.

In addition to the headteacher, there is a senior member of staff in each school. These members of staff undertake the role of lead learners. They take day-to-day responsibility for the leadership of school sites in the absence of the headteacher. In addition, they lead and monitor curriculum planning for pairs of year groups across the federation. This is beneficial in promoting shared working and building a team ethos. However, as a result of their focus on leading specific age groups across the federation, in too many cases lead learners do not have a strong enough understanding of the quality of provision or the standards and progress of pupils in their own schools. In a few instances, lead learners have made valuable contributions to the professional skills of colleagues, for example by ensuring consistent use of the foundation phase profile when pupils join each school and by raising the profile of the Welsh language across the federation.

School leaders gather considerable amounts of pupil progress information in an electronic tracking system. The headteacher uses this and other information, for example evidence from learning walks, to identify a few appropriate areas for improvement across the federation. These include the need to improve pupils' Welsh language skills. However, the headteacher and lead learners do not always consider other first-hand evidence well enough, such as the range and quality of work in pupils' books and in lessons when evaluating provision and standards. Consequently, leaders do not always identify important shortcomings in pupils' skill development or opportunities to improve teaching and learning experiences well enough. Over time, leaders have not drawn well enough on examples of highly

effective teaching and learning that exist within the federation to improve professional practice and raise standards. Overall, the federation does not have a clear strategy to improve teaching in all schools. This limits the standards that pupils achieve.

There is effective co-ordination of provision for pupils with special educational needs. Each school has an effective leader for special educational needs provision. They have developed a strong culture of sharing practice, resources and practical advice. This benefits teachers and support staff well and ensures that pupils with special educational needs make good progress. Professional learning opportunities for teaching assistants are beneficial. They ensure that these members of staff have the skills to support pupils to progress through a range of useful intervention strategies. This is particularly valuable in enhancing nurture provision for pupils.

Governors aspire to provide high standard of education in the Upper Afan Valley. They provide appropriate support and challenge to the federation's leaders, for example in relation to the allocation of funding from budget to each of the schools. They know the federation's priorities for improvement and have suitable processes in place to monitor progress towards these goals. For example, governors look at pupils' work and take part in learning walks. They contribute appropriately to the developing culture of shared working, for example by supporting the federation to develop shared policies and processes for safeguarding.

School leaders allocate funding appropriately to support school improvement. They make suitable use additional funding from the pupil development grant to fund staff and intervention programmes to improve pupils' wellbeing and basic skills.

Evidence base of the report

Before an inspection, inspectors:

- analyse the outcomes from the parent 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 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' wellbeing, 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

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:

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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