



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

A report on

St Mary's C.I.W. Aided School

**School Lane
Overton
LL13 0ES**

Date of inspection: March 2023

by

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

About St Mary's C.I.W. Aided School

Name of provider	St Mary's C.I.W. Aided School
Local authority	Wrexham County Borough Council
Language of the provider	English
Type of school	Primary
Religious character	Church in Wales Aided
Number of pupils on roll	162
Pupils of statutory school age	135
Number in nursery classes	14
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 23.0%)	6.9%
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 16.1%)	23.7%
Percentage of pupils who speak Welsh at home	0.0%
Percentage of pupils with English as an additional language	0.0%
Date of headteacher appointment	01/09/2017
Date of previous Estyn inspection (if applicable)	
Start date of inspection	20/03/2023
The school was led by the Deputy Headteacher during the inspection.	

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.

Overview

St Mary's Church in Wales School is an inclusive and caring community where pupils work and play together confidently. Staff focus well on pupils' well-being, and this allows pupils to thrive in the school's inclusive environment. Pupils say that they feel safe, secure, and happy in school. They know that adults in the school care for them and that they can turn to them when they face challenges or have difficulties.

Staff have worked hard to create a calm and nurturing ethos, which contributes to effective learning. Most pupils behave well and show very positive attitudes to learning. They form strong relationships with adults and one another and show respect and courtesy for all members of the school community. Most pupils focus well in lessons and demonstrate interest in their learning. As a result, most pupils make good progress as they move through the school and achieve well.

Pupils enjoy their time at St Mary's very much. This is because their teachers plan interesting activities for them, which makes learning exciting and fun. They listen carefully to what pupils want to learn and weave their ideas into well-planned sequences of lessons that build systematically on pupils' knowledge and understanding. This ensures that most pupils display high levels of interest and engagement in their work. Classrooms and outdoor spaces are productive, active learning environments where pupils enjoy plenty of opportunities to work collaboratively in pairs and small groups. Pupils receive purposeful opportunities to practise their literacy, numeracy, and digital skills well through rich tasks and learning experiences. The provision for Welsh is less well developed. In addition, pupils' ability to recognise what they are doing well and what they need to do to improve their work is limited.

The acting headteacher and governors provide efficient and supportive leadership. Staff work well together and as a team they share responsibilities sensibly. As a result, there is an effective whole-school ethos and sense of teamwork where staff feel valued for their contribution. The school is good at identifying the areas of its work that are most effective and those aspects that need to be improved. This enables leaders to set clear ambitions for the direction of the school.

Recommendations

- R1 Strengthen provision for the development of pupils' Welsh language skills
- R2 Provide opportunities for pupils to make decisions about how they organise and present their work, and to decide for themselves how they respond to learning tasks
- R3 Ensure that the quality of teachers' feedback is focused on the next steps in pupils' learning effectively

What happens next

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

Main evaluation

Learning

Most pupils make good progress in their learning during their time at the school. The pandemic has slowed this progress for a minority of pupils, particularly in the development of their Welsh language skills. Pupils with additional learning needs (ALN) progress well from their individual starting points and achieve well against their personal targets.

Most pupils develop their language and communication skills well. From an early age, most pupils listen with increasing interest and sustained concentration for extended periods. By the time they leave the Reception class, many speak confidently when playing with peers and talking to adults using a wide range of vocabulary. As they move through the school, most pupils become increasingly articulate. By Year 6, many discuss their work confidently explaining what and how they are learning.

From an early age, many pupils develop a love of books. They recognise familiar words and join in with engaging stories. By Year 2, many pupils develop good phonic skills and are happy to tackle unfamiliar words with a variety of strategies. By Year 6, many pupils are fluent readers. They select the main points from texts and identify how information and evidence are used to support them. They apply their reading skills effectively to support their learning in different learning areas, for example when undertaking research into the experiences of children who were evacuated to the area during the Second World War.

From an early age, many pupils show enthusiasm for writing and, by the time they leave Reception class, many pupils form letters, and write their names and simple sentences enthusiastically. By Year 2, many pupils begin to write short stories showing an increasing vocabulary and developing understanding of capital letters and full stops. As they progress through the school, pupils develop a good understanding of the characteristics of different genres. By Year 6, many pupils write at length for a wide range of purposes across the curriculum. They choose words carefully to enhance their writing for the reader, for example when writing about the D-Day invasion.

The development of pupils' Welsh language skills has been hampered by recent missed learning opportunities. Many pupils in the nursery and Reception classes respond appropriately to class instructions by the teacher and, by Year 2, many pupils use simple greetings and respond appropriately to questions about the weather, for example. As they move through the school, many pupils use previously learned vocabulary and phrases appropriately when sharing personal information and to express their likes and dislikes. However, overall, pupils do not make strong enough progress in developing their skills or have confidence in speaking Welsh in other areas of the curriculum and around the school.

From an early age, pupils build a useful range of mathematical skills and enjoy maths challenges, undertaking counting games and matching activities enthusiastically. By Year 2, many use their numeracy skills well in other areas of learning, for example

using scales and timers accurately when making bread. They use their measuring and data handling skills well when comparing the size of sunflowers they planted. As they progress through the school, most pupils work well with the four rules of number and use their developing numeracy skills well to solve problems, for example when estimating and measuring the approximate height of trees in the forest area. By Year 6, many pupils use a wide range of methods competently to calculate in their heads and on paper when solving problems. They describe their thinking and reasoning well, for example when comparing fractions, decimals and percentages.

Many pupils apply their digital skills well in a range of creative contexts to support their wider learning. By Year 2, many use tablet computers confidently to practise their literacy and numeracy skills. They record and share their learning, for example when building birdfeeders in the outdoor area or when carrying out an experiment to find the best dunking biscuit. Many pupils in Years 3 to 6 use their digital skills well to support independent research, for example when learning about the Celts. They use QR codes confidently to share their findings. By Year 6, many pupils use a broad range of applications and programs including databases and virtual reality viewers to investigate how the heart works, for example.

From an early age, pupils enjoy using their creative and artistic skills, for example when creating their own versions of 'Leaf Man' in the forest area. By Year 2, many demonstrate good fine motor skills, using scissors, glue and paint brushes confidently. They use a variety of media including clay imaginatively, for example when creating dragons' eyes. By Year 6, most pupils use their creative skills well, for example when devising creative dance routines based on their work on 'The Blitz' to share with their parents. Many pupils participate enthusiastically and energetically in a wide range of physical activity. This has a positive effect on their confidence, their ability to work together, and their fitness and well-being.

Well-being and attitudes to learning

Nearly all pupils enjoy coming to school and are confident in the school environment. They say that they feel safe in school and free from issues of bullying. They feel well supported by staff, know where to turn if they need support and are confident that staff will listen and deal appropriately with any concerns.

Most pupils behave well in lessons and move around the school sensibly. They are polite and courteous to each other and visitors. Most pupils collaborate well and show respect and care for the ideas of others when working in pairs and groups. Most play co-operatively, and take turns and support each other well when playing games and socialising at break times.

Most pupils show very positive attitudes to their learning. They talk enthusiastically about their work and engage positively with the class topics. From an early age, pupils settle in lessons quickly, concentrate well and avoid distractions as they complete their tasks. They persevere well with tasks and activities, often seeking alternative solutions when a first attempt fails. They listen carefully to what their friends and teachers say and respond to their ideas considerately.

Nearly all pupils take part in planning their termly topics. This results in pupils displaying high levels of interest and engagement in their work. When given the

opportunity, many carry out tasks with limited support. By Year 6, many pupils show an increasing ability to plan together and to express an opinion about what they are learning. However, in a few classes on occasion, pupils are over-reliant on adult direction and do not make enough decisions about how they organise and present their work.

Pupils, from an early age, are encouraged to reflect on their learning. Many respond well to feedback from adults and their peers to improve their work and develop their skills further. Older pupils make increasing use of self and peer assessment and are keen to make changes to their work. This improves their self-confidence and supports their progress as they move through the school.

Many pupils make good use of opportunities to develop their leadership skills through a range of roles and pupil voice committees, for example the student and eco councils. While undertaking these roles, many pupils present themselves with confidence and can explain where their work has made a difference to school life. For example, the student council identified areas within the school in need of transforming from a 'grotspot' into a 'hotspot'. They are proud of their role in developing the reading area into a tranquil, peaceful and comfortable den. They have also been instrumental in improving the outdoor environment, for example in clearing the leaves and identifying the need to improve the perimeter fence.

Pupils demonstrate a broad understanding of cultural diversity, for example by learning about different religions. They have a clear understanding of the concept of fairness, equality and tolerance. They demonstrate an appropriate understanding of some of the ethical issues facing the world, such as the need to protect the environment. They are proud of their efforts in support of national and local charities such as the Wrexham food bank and the Downs Syndrome charity. These initiatives have a positive effect on their awareness of the needs of others in their community and the wider world, and help them to develop as ethical and responsible citizens.

Nearly all pupils have a good understanding of how to stay safe when online. For example, they know not to share their passwords. Many pupils understand the importance of looking after their own well-being. Nearly all pupils know the importance of keeping healthy and fit. They talk knowledgeably about healthy food choices for snacks and the need to drink water regularly. They appreciate the importance of taking regular exercise, involving themselves actively in a range of activities during the school day.

Teaching and learning experiences

Staff develop close working relationships with pupils, which foster a positive and supportive learning environment for learning. They know their pupils well, encourage them to participate and praise their efforts while they are working and interacting with their peers frequently. This has a positive effect on pupils' progress and well-being.

The school has a clear, shared vision for learning that reflects the principles and culture of the Curriculum for Wales. Staff are working well to develop a curriculum that meets the needs of all pupils. The school's vision reflects the context of the school and staff plan effectively for pupils to learn about their local area. For example, younger pupils visit a local bakery to make bread and older pupils visit

Tatton Park to learn about the experiences of children who were evacuated to the area during the Second World War. Teachers work together productively to plan interesting cross-curricular topics that are relevant to pupils' interests and engage them well. They are beginning to develop a shared understanding of progression across the curriculum. Teachers ensure that pupils contribute their ideas and suggestions in the planning process, which provides pupils with a sense of ownership in their learning.

Teachers provide valuable opportunities for pupils to learn about the language, culture and heritage of Wales. These include learning about Welsh myths and legends in a workshop with the former Childrens' Laureate for Wales, which inspired pupils to write their own stories and retell in the form of a comic strip. Most teachers use basic Welsh vocabulary appropriately in the classroom, for example to give instructions to their pupils. They provide regular 'Helpwr Heddiw' sessions to develop pupils' vocabulary and sentence patterns and use strategies such as a 'Seren yr Wythnos' award to encourage pupils to use more Welsh during the week. Generally, however, staff do not make the most of opportunities to model the language or encourage the pupils to speak, ask and answer questions in Welsh outside formal Welsh sessions. As a result, pupils' knowledge and understanding of Welsh vocabulary are at a basic level, which hampers their confidence to speak the language in other areas of the curriculum.

Staff provide regular opportunities for pupils to benefit from working in the school's extensive and stimulating outdoor environment, including the forest school. This contributes significantly to the well-being of pupils of all ages and provides valuable opportunities for them to enhance their skills. For example, younger pupils use natural materials creatively to design and make their own version of 'Leaf Man', and to develop basic woodworking skills when making frames. Older pupils work collaboratively to create their own rope swings.

Teachers identify valuable opportunities for pupils to build on their previous learning and acquire the necessary skills to learn effectively. They promote a positive culture of reading and provide regular opportunities for pupils to read silently for pleasure. They encourage younger pupils to choose their own books, challenging older pupils to read 100 books before they leave the school. Staff use guided reading groups sessions well to enhance pupils' reading skills effectively and encourage pupils to use tablets computers to support the development of their literacy and mathematical skills. They ensure that pupils have many opportunities to develop and practise these skills from an early age and to build on these skills progressively as they move through the school, for example when learning about Jewish artefacts and their significance within Judaism. Teachers provide relevant and engaging opportunities for pupils to apply their numeracy skills using natural resources in the forest school to make symmetrical rangoli patterns to celebrate Diwali, for example.

Teachers have good subject knowledge and use a variety of effective teaching methods to stimulate and encourage pupils to learn. They have high expectations of pupils and manage pupils' behaviour well, ensuring that most are engaged and remain on task during lessons. Support staff work alongside teachers skilfully and contribute effectively to pupils' learning. In most classes, teachers use questioning techniques well to move pupils' learning on and support understanding according to the needs of pupils, ensuring that most pupils are appropriately challenged. In a few

classes, where teaching is less effective, teachers tend to guide activities too much, which limits opportunities for pupils to decide for themselves how they organise and present their own work effectively.

Staff use assessments well to track pupil progress in key areas such as literacy and numeracy. They use this information effectively to inform planning and identify pupils in need of additional support or intervention. Teachers provide clear instructions that support pupils to know what they need to do to be successful. They share and adapt success criteria effectively during lessons, for example when reviewing the quality of a travel brochure, providing pupils with valuable opportunities to work with learning partners to review tasks. However, overall, the quality of feedback is variable and, as a result, pupils do not always know clearly enough what they need to do to improve.

Care, support and guidance

The school is a caring community, where staff and pupils show a high level of respect for each other. Staff know the pupils, their backgrounds and the local community very well. The positive relationships that exist between pupils and adults are a compelling feature of the school, providing strong foundations and a sense of belonging that is valued greatly by all pupils and adults. Staff place a high priority on pupils' well-being. They ensure that the school provides a nurturing environment in which pupils feel safe, happy, and cared for. They ensure that pupils have time to talk if they are anxious or unhappy and, consequently, pupils feel comfortable in talking about any personal concerns they may have.

The school has an inclusive ethos and offers effective provision to support pupils with ALN. Staff monitor pupils' progress effectively and have worked well to introduce the national additional needs reform. Arrangements for identifying and responding to the needs of specific pupils are rigorous. The additional learning needs co-ordinator has worked well with staff to create useful one-page profiles for pupils with ALN, in addition to good quality individual development plans. Support staff provide quality support programmes to develop pupils' emotional well-being, and their literacy and numeracy skills. Teachers involve pupils, parents and the views of outside agencies to plan interventions and evaluate the impact of this work. This ensures that pupils gain confidence and show renewed enthusiasm towards learning as well as showing a marked improvement in social skills as they work towards their personal targets.

The school's environment and collective worship promote pupils' moral and ethical development successfully. The school has strong links with the local church and pupils often participate in events and services throughout the year. Staff provide regular planned opportunities for pupils to find out about the characteristics of different religions, and to reflect on fundamental questions and on their own beliefs and values. There is a strong focus on developing pupils' awareness of children's rights. As a result, nearly all pupils have a clear understanding of fairness, equality and inclusion within their daily lives. Staff encourage pupils to consider other people's views sensitively, and to acknowledge and respect diversity and the importance of values such as forgiveness, tolerance and caring. They encourage pupils to use the school's extensive outdoor space, including the memorial garden for a former pupil, to play and reflect.

Leaders build strong relationships with parents. Parents and carers feel well consulted about the work of the school and how it can be improved in the future. They appreciate how approachable leaders and staff are and value the regular communication they receive about school events on social media. There are regular and worthwhile opportunities for parents to share in and support their child's learning journey, for example through regular digital communication and by exploring the learning environment with their children.

Staff provide valuable opportunities for pupils to develop their creative and imaginative skills. For example, they collaborate effectively with a dance specialist to support the development of pupils' creative and performance skills. Staff provide interesting experiences in the forest school for pupils to develop their creative skills using natural materials.

The school ensures that pupils are given worthwhile opportunities to become members of various pupil voice committees. Staff ensure that these groups meet regularly and provide pupils with valuable opportunities to make decisions about how to improve their school. All teachers regularly seek pupil opinions on class topics and how to develop their learning environment. As a result, pupils feel empowered and show a strong sense of purpose and value in the actions they take to make the school a safe environment and a better place for all.

The school has appropriate arrangements to promote healthy eating and drinking. Teachers provide pupils with worthwhile opportunities to learn about making healthy lifestyle choices. Regular visits from the local community police liaison officer ensure that pupils are aware of the dangers of drug and substance. Staff provide valuable opportunities for pupils to benefit from a range of physical activities such as creative dance and gymnastics as well as team sports including hockey, football and netball. These effective arrangements motivate pupils to keep fit and deepen their understanding of healthy living.

The safeguarding culture is robust, and all staff understand their roles and responsibilities in contributing to pupils' safety and well-being. There is effective provision to support pupils to keep themselves safe when working online. The school has sound strategies in place to promote good pupil attendance including daily monitoring, regular communication with parents and follow-up work supported by the local authority.

Leadership and management

Leaders have established a clear vision with an emphasis on developing a happy and welcoming community where pupils and staff 'Dream, Aspire, and Achieve Together through Love and Faith'. Leaders embrace this vision firmly and convey it effectively to all staff, pupils, governors and parents. The acting headteacher's sensitive and efficient leadership has a positive impact in all areas of the school. He models professional values and behaviour that contributes positively to effective collaboration and results in a strong team ethos. He is well supported by the acting deputy headteacher, and all staff promote the school's agreed vision and values successfully. They are energetic practitioners who share ambitions to do their very best for their pupils.

Leaders have created an effective culture of collective responsibility for self-evaluation and school improvement. All staff collect a wide range of information about their pupils and their work. They use feedback from learning walks, book scrutiny and talking to learners to inform their outcomes effectively. This enables them to make secure judgements about the school's strengths and areas for further development.

Leaders ensure that all staff have a clear understanding of national priorities, including the principles of the Curriculum for Wales and ALN reform. They successfully share knowledge, ideas and skills with colleagues from the local cluster of schools to gain a greater insight into what they can do to improve their school. As a result, they identify priorities for improvement accurately and ensure that local and national priorities are addressed effectively. Following the pandemic, leaders have identified the need to raise standards in Welsh and to improve effectiveness in pupil learning. Short-term and longer-term goals are realistic and focus predominately on pupil outcomes.

Leaders monitor pupil progress effectively. Together with staff, they hold regular meetings to discuss the progress of all pupils, including those with ALN. They use tracking information efficiently, which successfully helps them to identify pupils who would benefit from additional support. This ensures that leaders can respond quickly to areas that would benefit from additional funding. For example, following the pandemic it was felt that younger pupils needed additional support to improve pupils' speech and language skills. Additional support programme methods were successfully introduced and are having a positive impact, including on improving pupils' reading skills.

Leaders develop strong effective links with parents and there is a combined commitment to supporting pupils' learning and well-being. Parents are purposefully consulted about the work of the school and feel that they are respected members of the school community.

Leaders create a positive culture and ethos to promote and support the professional learning of all staff. This links clearly to the school's improvement priorities and the professional needs of the staff. Leaders keep a detailed account of the professional learning activities attended by staff, and the impact of these is measured accurately on pupils' progress. For example, staff participation in a reading for pleasure programme has had a positive effect on pupils' love of reading. Whole-school links with partner schools have provided beneficial opportunities for staff to become involved in developing their own knowledge of the Curriculum for Wales. Staff have been actively involved in developing literacy, numeracy and digital progression with the local high school, with the focus to improve transition arrangements for their pupils.

Governors are an active part of school life; they are proud of the community they serve and work well to support leaders and staff. They have a secure understanding of their responsibilities and support the school's work and influence its direction purposefully, for example by playing an active role in supporting staff to develop their expressive and creative arts work. Governors have a clear understanding of the school's current priorities and why they are important. They are involved in monitoring curriculum development and meet with class teachers in a timely manner

to discuss pupils' progress. They are fully committed to supporting the school and are developing a clear understanding of the progress the school is making.

The school manages its finances efficiently and deploys them sensibly in line with the priorities in the school development plan. They make purposeful use of additional grant funding, including the pupil development grant, which is used wisely to provide focused support to help and encourage pupils' learning and well-being. Staff use the school's resources effectively to provide an engaging learning environment that supports teaching and learning and strengthens pupils' physical and emotional well-being. They make regular use of the extensive school grounds, which include a well-developed forest area, to provide stimulating and creative opportunities for outdoor learning.

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

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.

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

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