



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

A report on

Alaw Primary School

**Egypt Street
Trealaw
Tonypandy
RCT
CF40 2UU**

Date of inspection: March 2023

by

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

About Alaw Primary School

Name of provider	Alaw Primary School
Local authority	Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council
Language of the provider	English
Type of school	Primary
Religious character	*
Number of pupils on roll	197
Pupils of statutory school age	151
Number in nursery classes	26
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%)	26.7%
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%)	8.6%
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	01/09/2016
Date of previous Estyn inspection (if applicable)	11/11/2014
Start date of inspection	27/03/2023

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

Alaw Primary School is a nurturing, caring school that adopts a strong, inclusive approach successfully. The school provides effective opportunities for pupils to reflect on important values such as equity and diversity. Many pupils feel safe and know who to speak to if they are worried or need help. Most pupils behave well, show respect and empathy towards one another.

Staff are positive role models and provide beneficial support to manage pupils' emotional well-being. The school has developed the learning environment thoughtfully to support pupils to self-regulate their behaviours. This has been particularly helpful for pupils returning to school since the pandemic. Many pupils with additional learning needs (ALN) are supported well and make suitable progress.

Many pupils make appropriate progress from their starting points. Most pupils make good progress in their reading skills. Many younger pupils make suitable progress in their oracy skills. However, older pupils' progress in their writing, numeracy, digital and Welsh skills is not as strong as it should be. Too often, independent learning tasks for older pupils do not focus well enough on pupils' application of skills and knowledge. As a result, there are missed opportunities for pupils to deepen their understanding or to develop their skills at the appropriate standard. The use of assessment and feedback varies across the school. In the most effective examples, with younger pupils, support staff question and develop pupils learning. However, for many older pupils, feedback does not always allow pupils to understand what they are doing well and how they can improve their learning. The use of day-to-day assessments to inform next steps planning also varies across the school.

Standards in teaching vary across the school. In the most effective lessons, teachers plan purposeful activities where there is challenge for all pupils. For example, many younger pupils develop their digital skills effectively to create basic animations linked to their literacy work. Overall, younger pupils develop a range of skills and make suitable progress. However, a minority of older pupils do not make sufficient progress in a range of skills across the curriculum. In these classes, teachers do not always build on prior learning to allow pupils to progress sufficiently. Overall, curriculum planning lacks opportunities for pupils to develop a depth of knowledge and to apply their skills at a level to which they are capable.

The school's self-evaluation procedures, arrangements to monitor the quality of teaching and learning and to measure the impact of improvement planning are not robust enough. For example, leaders do not use a range of evidence to ensure professional learning has had an impact on standards. As a result, there is often a lack of focus on the important areas for improvement.

Parents and the governing body are supportive of the school and value the information they receive. Governors provide suitable support and ensure the school meets its statutory requirements. There are appropriate policies in place to support safeguarding, healthy eating and lifestyles.

Recommendations

- R1 Implement effective self-evaluation, improvement planning and monitoring processes to accurately prioritise the main areas for improvement
- R2 Improve teaching, assessment and provision for skills, especially for pupils from Years 3 to 6
- R3 Improve the use of feedback so that pupils know what they are doing well and what they need to do to improve

What happens next

The school will draw up an action plan which shows how it is going to address the recommendations. Estyn will work with the local authority to review the school's progress.

Main evaluation

Learning

Most pupils start school with skills below those expected for their age. During their time at the school, many pupils, including vulnerable pupils and those with ALN, make suitable progress in many aspects of their learning.

Many pupils in the nursery class engage in a range of beneficial learning activities and develop their oracy skills with increasing confidence. As pupils move through reception, Year 1 and Year 2, they develop their vocabulary well and often speak clearly and readily about what they are doing. They respond appropriately to questions and include insightful comments. Most older pupils discuss approaches to tasks and activities collaboratively. They come to conclusions, and talk confidently to visitors about their work. However, overall, older pupils' use of a range of different types of talk, for different purposes and audiences is at an early stage of development. For example, the quality of pupils' engagement during group discussions is often superficial and does not go beyond the sharing of information or comments.

Across the school, most pupils make strong progress in reading. Many younger pupils read simple instructions independently using an appropriate range of strategies to read unfamiliar words. They talk enthusiastically about the characters in stories and use early research skills effectively. Many older pupils read with fluency and demonstrate a secure understanding of the complex texts they read. They successfully identify themes and justify their ideas about characters' actions. Across the school, teachers use a range of useful approaches to strengthen the culture of reading.

Pupils' writing generally develops appropriately across the school. Many younger pupils are beginning to write in well-constructed sentences, with clarity and purpose. By the time they reach Year 3, they become more confident writers and use a good range of vocabulary to add interest to their work. A few of the oldest pupils write well. For example, when writing newspaper articles about the Rhondda during the second World War they use a style that engages the reader successfully. Most younger pupils write legibly and often present their work neatly. However, a minority of older pupils do not develop their handwriting well enough or spell familiar words accurately. In general, older pupils do not write in enough depth across the curriculum often enough. As a result, they do not make the progress they could.

Many pupils develop a good range of mathematical skills. Pupils in Year 1 are beginning to identify two-dimensional shapes and solve problems using suitable calculations. Many pupils in Year 2 work out fractions of whole numbers to 20 and develop their understanding of capacity when measuring liquids using standard units. Many older pupils map objects in the four quadrants, add and subtract negative numbers, and calculate area and volume successfully. Younger pupils make meaningful links in their learning, for example building on their knowledge of Venn diagrams to compare character traits in the books they read. Older pupils use number to crack codes when developing numeracy skills. However, pupils from Year

3 to Year 6 do not always apply their skills at the level they are capable of to extend or deepen their learning.

Across the school, pupils enjoy using Welsh in their lessons. Many younger pupils make good progress in using and understanding Welsh, asking and responding to questions with growing confidence. The majority of older pupils develop a wider range of vocabulary and use classroom resources well to support them in using the language. As pupils move through the school, they are less confident in holding simple conversations in Welsh. All pupils are beginning to learn other languages such as French and Spanish. They express an interest and enjoyment in this aspect of their learning and are beginning to make links between these languages.

Across the school, many pupils use digital skills appropriately to support their learning. They use film and publishing programmes successfully to record their work in a variety of ways. Older pupils use coding to create short videos. However, pupils' wider digital skills are more limited, for example in using spreadsheets, databases and programmes to develop their creativity.

Most pupils enjoy opportunities to develop their physical skills. Younger pupils demonstrate high levels of curiosity when exploring outdoors and developing their physical skills. Older pupils enjoy dance, swimming and team sports. Many pupils begin to problem-solve early in their learning. Pupils in Year 3 and 4 work as a team when attempting to construct an outdoor greenhouse, and the oldest pupils combine their research on the work of Alan Turing and their knowledge of coding to create a Morse Code machine. However, older pupils do not have enough opportunities to build on their physical and problem-solving skills or to extend their critical thinking across the curriculum.

Many pupils enjoy opportunities to express their ideas through art. Pupils in Year 2 create exceptional self-portraits and pupils in Year 4 and 5 explore the work of various artists, such as Salvador Dali, when developing a range of techniques. From a young age, pupils develop their understanding of musical composition across the school and enjoy creating and performing their own raps.

Well-being and attitudes to learning

Many pupils enjoy school and feel safe and secure whilst there. The strong school community gives them a sense of belonging where many pupils feel respected, valued and included in school decisions.

Nearly all pupils behave well in lessons and at break times and move around the school calmly. They are polite and respectful to each other and visitors. They trust the adults in the school and know who to ask for help if they need to. Many pupils are aware of a range of strategies to help regulate their emotions. They demonstrate kindness and care and actively support one another, both during lessons and breaktimes. For example, pupils support those with ALN to engage in play and participate in group activities.

Most pupils know how to keep themselves safe online. Older pupils know how to keep their personal information, such as passwords, safe and not to talk to strangers online.

Most younger pupils develop their physical skills well and make good use of the outside play opportunities during lessons and breaktimes. Many older pupils recognise the benefits of exercise to keep healthy and use the trim trail to keep fit. Many pupils enjoy attending the after school clubs on offer to them including cooking, art and football.

Most pupils are enthusiastic learners and settle quickly to lessons. They show interest in their work and are keen to talk about their learning and experiences. Many pupils concentrate for suitable lengths of time and persevere when completing tasks. They work well in pairs and small groups and collaborate effectively with their peers.

Many pupils use an online platform to record their work and respond to feedback. Older pupils are beginning to take greater responsibility for their progress. However, this work is at an early stage and pupils do not always fully understand how to improve their work or identify their own next steps in learning.

Most pupils understand their rights and the rights of others. Older children talk about their rights knowledgeably and suggest ways to apply them in school. Most pupils are developing as ethically informed citizens, for example when discussing inequalities of pay between adults and children in their historical studies of local mining.

Pupils with leadership roles are enthusiastic and take their roles seriously. They enjoy supporting school events, participating in school assemblies and sharing ideas for lessons. However, pupil voice groups meet infrequently and their influence on the wider life of the school is limited.

Teaching and learning experiences

Across the school, staff develop positive and respectful working relationships with pupils. They have high expectations of pupils' behaviour. These relationships and expectations support many pupils to engage positively with the learning experiences provided.

The school has developed a vision for its curriculum that focuses on the knowledge and skills that staff feel pupils will need for their future lives. Across the school, teachers plan learning through themes suggested by their pupils. They are beginning to develop opportunities for pupils to make meaningful connections between their learning and real-life contexts.

The quality of teaching varies across the school. In around half of lessons, where teaching is effective, teachers apply a worthwhile range of approaches to support pupils' learning. They build on prior learning and use questioning effectively to develop pupils' thinking and to check for understanding. They adapt the learning to meet pupils' individual needs. Where teaching is less effective, teachers do not plan with clear learning intentions and do not check for pupils' understanding often enough. As a result, pupils are less sure of teachers' expectations and do not fully understand how to approach their learning. A few teachers do not have high enough expectations of their pupils and do not challenge pupils appropriately to enable them to make the progress they could, especially during independent learning tasks. For example, older pupils independently research information to produce leaflets and

posters but focus heavily on drawing pictures rather than developing their writing skills to inform and persuade the reader.

Teachers are beginning to plan opportunities for pupils to apply the skills they learn to other aspects of their learning. The school's recent focus on oracy, for example, has had a positive impact on developing pupils' communication across the school. Teachers successfully plan for the development of pupils' reading skills. However, teachers do not provide sufficient opportunities for older pupils to apply their skills, particularly their writing skills, often enough and at an appropriate level, across the curriculum. Overall, the planning of independent tasks does not sufficiently extend or support pupil progress and too often becomes low-level holding activities that do not add to pupils' learning effectively.

Teachers are beginning to develop their knowledge of progression within the areas of learning and experience, linked to Curriculum for Wales. However, the school's overall use of information to plan for progression in literacy and numeracy varies. For example, teachers demonstrate an understanding of how to teach reading and this is having a positive impact. However, planning for the progression of pupils' writing and numeracy skills is less effective.

Teachers are trialling whole school strategies to improve the feedback they give to pupils about their learning. Younger pupils benefit from the continuous support and verbal interaction they receive to make small but important next steps in their learning. Teachers are beginning to develop opportunities to discuss learning with older pupils to enable them to better understand the purpose of their learning and to take greater responsibility for their progress. Where this is successful, teachers have a clear understanding of the aims of the lessons and the skills to be developed. However, this work is at an early stage. Learning intentions are not always clear and pupils do not always fully understand how to improve their work or identify their own next steps in learning.

The school is well resourced and many areas of the school, including the outdoors areas are used well to support pupils to develop as independent learners. For example, younger pupils enjoy investigating how things work. They play with flour and water and ask questions about the changes they see happening. Pupils in Year 3 and 4 build a greenhouse to enhance their outdoor space and generate ideas to create imaginary worlds for the characters in books they read.

The school develops pupils' awareness of their local history and the culture of Wales appropriately. Younger pupils learn about traditions, and as they move through the school, pupils discover the stories, art and music that have passed down through history. Teachers provide purposeful opportunities for pupils to use the Welsh language to respond to basic commands throughout the school day. Many younger pupils have the opportunity to develop and extend this knowledge through games. However, many older pupils do not have enough opportunities to extend and build on their Welsh language skills. As a result, their ability to ask and answer questions beyond basic language patterns is limited.

The school's provision for developing pupils' understanding of relationships and diversity is developing well. Younger pupils think about their place in the community, begin to learn about each other and form friendships. Older pupils think about what it

means to belong and consider the impact of many forms of discrimination on people throughout history and today. The school's focus on human rights enables pupils to develop respect for people and places. Across the school, pupils learn about sustainability and suggest ways they can protect the environment. In the most effective examples, these rich learning experiences enable pupils to explore concepts in more detail and provide valuable opportunities for them to lead their own learning. Teachers provide valuable opportunities for pupils to work with visitors to support their learning. For example, pupils plan questions to interview local Member of Parliament about their job, roles and responsibilities.

Care, support and guidance

The school is a nurturing, inclusive community that ensures pupils feel happy and cared for. All staff promote the importance of good behaviour and respect effectively. They have strong relationships with the pupils and as a result, nearly all pupils are polite and respectful. Pupils and the wider community are very proud of the school.

The school has effective systems in place to identify and meet the needs of pupils with ALN. Staff monitor the progress of these pupils regularly. The leader responsible for ALN works effectively with a range of external agencies. As a result, most pupils receive the support they need and make progress towards their individual targets.

Provision to support pupils' mental health and well-being is effective. This work supports pupils to understand the benefits of relaxing, playing and reflecting. There are well-resourced reflective spaces within classrooms and dedicated areas, which are used effectively to support pupils' self-regulation. Staff plan beneficial additional support for pupils' emotional needs. They work with external partners to provide bespoke support for families and this support has a positive impact on pupils' well-being. This is a strength of the school.

Staff involve parents in the life of the school successfully. Many parents receive daily communication and appreciate opportunities to view their child's work using an online platform. Pupils are fully involved in this process, and this provides parents with a good starting point to discuss learning with their child when at home. Parents have regular opportunities to discuss their child's well-being and progress with teachers.

The school promotes spiritual and moral development well. Teachers provide an interesting range of opportunities for pupils to understand the importance of inclusion and diversity. Staff encourage pupils to listen and empathise with the views of others. This helps pupils understand the needs and rights of others as members of a diverse world. For example, whilst learning about the civil rights movement in America pupils were able to make sensitive comparisons to today's civil rights movements in the UK.

The school provides worthwhile opportunities for pupils to develop their understanding and appreciation of their culture and heritage. Teachers plan purposeful activities linked to Welsh traditions, including Eisteddfodau to celebrate events. They make valuable use of parents and the community to make comparisons with other cultures and traditions and this work helps develop pupils' empathy, tolerance and appreciation for different faiths and cultures.

Staff provide a range of beneficial extra-curricular clubs such as football and cooking. This helps pupils gain an understanding of keeping fit and eating a healthy diet. Pupils are encouraged to bring water and healthy snacks into school and are developing their understanding of healthy eating and drinking.

The school provides a good range of opportunities for pupils to be involved in the life of the school and to take part in decision-making, for example by participating in the school parliament and other pupils voice groups. Many pupils enjoy following the suggested ideas of the school, such as the 'swap shop'. However, opportunities for pupils to suggest and act upon their own ideas for change are limited.

The school has a strong culture of safeguarding. There is a well-understood system to report any concerns about pupils' welfare. The school maintains a safe environment for the pupils including effective systems for site security and access arrangement for visitors. The arrangements to keep pupils safe meet requirements and give no cause for concern.

The school promotes the importance of attending school regularly and engages with families to support those pupils most at risk of poor attendance successfully.

Leadership and management

The headteacher has a clear vision for the school that reflects strong values linked to inclusion, equity and diversity. She works closely with all staff to ensure that the well-being of pupils is at the heart of the school's work. Leaders and governors promote a positive safeguarding culture that ensures all staff support and care for pupils.

Leaders develop positive relationships with families and actively encourage parents and carers to participate in school life. The school uses digital technology well to communicate and engage with parents. This has a positive impact on how parents and carers are able to help their child's learning at home.

Leaders use a range of strategies to gather information about the school's provision and the progress pupils make. In a few instances, this work has been effective and led to improvement. For example, leaders identified the need to improve pupils' literacy skills. This resulted in focused work to develop pupils' oracy and reading skills which is beginning to have a positive impact on pupils' learning. However, overall, evaluation and improvement processes are not strong enough. There are limited opportunities for leaders to gather first-hand evidence to identify the school's strengths and areas to develop, particularly in teaching and assessment. As a result, leaders' school improvement planning does not prioritise well enough the areas most in need of development. Staff are not always clear of the specific actions they need to take to improve the quality of teaching and learning. Leaders have developed a useful monitoring cycle to manage the completion of tasks, linked with its improvement priorities, within given timescales. However, leaders do not focus well enough on the impact this work has on pupils' learning and this limits the opportunities to adapt approaches where necessary.

School leaders work effectively in accordance with the recently introduced national requirements with ALN to develop and implement useful, personalised plans to support the needs of individual pupils. Leaders are beginning to support staff to

develop their understanding of the different areas of learning and experience within the new curriculum. However, overall, teachers do not have a well-developed understanding of how to plan for and support pupils' progress, especially from Year 3 to Year 6.

Leaders promote the use of the Welsh language across the school, in lessons and less formal situations. In a few examples, teachers make valuable use of its local context and heritage to provide meaningful learning experiences that help develop pupils' awareness of their local community and Welsh heritage.

Staff roles and responsibilities are deployed suitably. The school has appropriate arrangements in place to manage the performance of staff. In a few instances this has supported the school to make appropriate progress towards improvement goals. However, performance management and wider professional learning arrangements do not focus sharply enough on improving the individual practice of teachers. Leaders provide helpful opportunities for staff to come together regularly in 'co-learning sessions' to reflect upon their own practice, and to engage in wider reading and professional discussion linked to national and regional priorities. However, leaders do not always ensure professional learning focuses well enough on specific aspects of teaching and they rarely evaluate the impact of these activities on improving pupils' learning.

Governors show strong support for the school. They understand their role as a critical friend and fulfil their statutory duties to keep learners safe and ensure the school has suitable arrangements to promote pupils' healthy eating and drinking. They keep the school's finances under regular review. Leaders provide useful reports to governors linked to school activities, improvement plans and staff training. This helps them to develop suitable knowledge of the school's work. Before the COVID-19 pandemic, governors gathered first-hand evidence by conducting learning walks but these have been slow to resume. While governors have broad awareness of a few of the school's improvement priorities, they do not have a strong enough understanding of how well the school is progressing against these, the quality of teaching in the school, or the learning and progress pupils are making.

The headteacher's and governors' financial management of the school is effective. Leaders plan suitably for the use of the pupil development grant to employ staff to implement interventions to support disadvantaged learners.

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:

Publications Section

Estyn

Anchor Court, Keen Road

Cardiff

CF24 5JW or by email to publications@estyn.gov.wales

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