



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 R.C. Primary School

**Queens Hill
Newport
NP20 5HJ**

Date of inspection: May 2023

by

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

About St Mary's R.C. Primary School

Name of provider	St Mary's R.C. Primary School
Local authority	Newport City Council
Language of the provider	English
Type of school	Primary
Religious character	Catholic
Number of pupils on roll	414
Pupils of statutory school age	356
Number in nursery classes	0
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%)	15.1%
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%)	10.4%
Percentage of pupils who speak Welsh at home	0.0%
Percentage of pupils with English as an additional language	11.0%
Date of headteacher appointment	01/09/2017
Date of previous Estyn inspection (if applicable)	18/11/2014
Start date of inspection	09/05/2023

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

This is a diverse, inclusive school where everyone matters. Adults care deeply about the pupils, each other and the wider school community. As a result, there is a strong ethos of mutual respect and partnership working, that benefits the pupils and supports them to achieve their best. Pupils describe St Mary's as their 'safe space'. They enjoy their time at school very much, and because of the notable quality of classroom provision, they achieve very well.

The curriculum is exciting and engaging. It includes valuable opportunities for pupils to take part in the creative arts, enjoy developing their physical skills and learn about their culture and heritage, both locally and across the wider world. There is strong provision for pupils to develop their English and mathematical skills progressively and systematically and, as a result, nearly all make at least the progress they should. However, the provision for pupils to develop their skills in learning the Welsh language, along with a further international language, is underdeveloped.

Teaching and classroom practice is generally of a high quality across the school. However, on a few occasions, teachers over-direct pupils' learning and do not provide enough opportunities for pupils to think for themselves.

Those pupils whose circumstances may make them vulnerable to underachievement, for example due to poverty or other additional needs, such as learning the English language, generally make at least the progress they should. This is because they receive well-tailored support and guidance, in addition to strong classroom provision.

The staff team work together particularly well to bring about improvements wherever they identify that pupils could do even better. The headteacher and senior leadership team have a relentless focus on everyone's well-being. Together, they have built a safe, nurturing environment that develops every individual and encourages them to achieve their best. As a result, pupils and staff are proud to belong to the community at St Mary's.

Recommendations

R1 Utilise the strong practice in the school to ensure that all teaching encourages pupils to think for themselves

R2 Strengthen the provision for Welsh and develop provision for pupils to learn an international language

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 creating a culture to encourage staff and leaders to secure effective school improvement, for dissemination on Estyn's website.

Main evaluation

Learning

Most pupils enter the school with speaking and listening skills that are at and above those expected for their age. They communicate clearly and listen appropriately. However, a very few pupils find communication difficult when they start at the school.

Nearly all pupils make strong progress so that, by Year 6, nearly all are confident and articulate communicators. They speak confidently, using a wide-ranging vocabulary. Where appropriate, they use technical and subject specific vocabulary well, or use poetic descriptions to 'paint a picture'. They adjust their tone of voice to suit the audience. Most listen well to their teachers and their peers.

Most pupils in the foundation learning classes get off to a rapid start in learning the sounds that letters represent. By the end of the reception class, many use their phonic knowledge effectively to read and write simple words accurately.

Most pupils build on the solid start they make in developing their phonic knowledge to become fluent readers who enjoy books and stories and use reference books efficiently for information. By Year 6, nearly all pupils read at least to the level expected for their age and many read at a higher level. They have well-developed reading skills. For example, by Year 6, pupils empathise with the characters in their class novel, reflect on the humour in a poem or skim a factual text to locate key information quickly.

Over their time at the school, most pupils develop their writing skills extremely well. By Year 6, many are competent, mature writers, working equally well in fiction and non-fiction genres. They use their expansive vocabulary highly effectively. Most punctuate their work correctly and spell accurately. They use their writing skills effectively across a range of subjects.

Across the school, most pupils develop a range of strong mathematical skills and consistently apply their number skills successfully in relevant learning activities. For instance, pupils in Year 4 confidently convert fractions to decimals and construct accurate bar charts to display the world's tallest buildings. By the time pupils reach Year 6, most carry out a range of challenging calculations confidently and accurately, for example calculating the volume of different shapes to determine how many boxes will fit into a removal van.

Across the school, most pupils develop a good understanding of how to work with number, data, shape and measure in a range of contexts. They apply their numeracy skills very well and in a variety of authentic learning experiences. For example, Year 6 pupils design their own Anderson shelter, and calculate its volume and area to check if their family could all fit inside.

Most younger pupils can identify the properties of three-dimensional shapes accurately and recognise them around the school grounds. Most have a good understanding of number bonds to 100 and this supports them to solve simple mathematical problems.

Most pupils in the younger classes get off to a good start in learning the Welsh language. By Year 2, most can respond to straightforward questions in Welsh. However, as they move through the school, their progress in acquiring the Welsh language is inconsistent and overall is too slow. By Year 6, most pupils can use the past and present tense, but they often struggle to extend their responses to questions, for example using 'achos' or 'ond'. Most pupils write simple sentences in Welsh with support.

Most pupils make strong progress in developing their skills in information technology. They are confident in using digital devices across a range of applications. For example, younger pupils use an online tool competently to make a branching database. Year 4 pupils combine and edit still images to produce 'stop-motion' animations on the life of a local miner during Victorian times, and Year 6 pupils use data loggers when testing the best material to use as a blackout blind during the Blitz. However, pupils do not use spreadsheets regularly.

Most pupils across the school develop their physical and creative skills well. For example, most learn to play a musical instrument to a basic level, and nearly all develop their balance, co-ordination, and spatial awareness well, along with their fitness, as they take part in a range of sports and physical activities.

Well-being and attitudes to learning

The school is a calm, nurturing environment where pupils feel safe and happy. Relationships between staff and pupils are very strong and conducive to learning and well-being. Pupils have confidence that staff will listen and address any worries or issues swiftly and efficiently.

Behaviour throughout the school is exemplary. Pupils show mutual respect towards one another as well as adults, during lessons and around the school. All pupils show great enthusiasm in being a member of the school community and, when given the opportunity, they represent the school with pride.

Nearly all pupils display high levels of well-being. Throughout the school day, pupils reflect positively and maturely whenever they have the opportunity. For example, all pupils engage sensitively and thoughtfully in class daily meditation at the start of the school day. This paves the way for pupils to be ready to learn and engage fully in all of the learning experiences that the school day provides.

Most pupils have an appropriate understanding of the importance of making healthy choices relating to diet and physical activity. Many pupils engage well with a range of extra-curricular activities that promote their physical well-being, such as Bollywood dancing and explorers' club.

Many pupils, including those with additional learning needs and those eligible for free school meals, develop their leadership and life skills well through an extensive range of pupil voice groups, including charitable groups and the enterprise and finance committees. One group, for example, provides worthwhile care packages for the homeless and donates to a local foodbank. This helps pupils to foster empathy towards others, play an active role in the community and develop their understanding of what it means to be a good citizen.

Through the effective work of the school's digital learning group, most pupils know how to keep themselves safe online. For example, they know that they need to report inappropriate online behaviour to an adult and not to share passwords with others. They show effective responsibility through ensuring that all digital devices are charged and ready for pupils to use in lessons.

Most pupils approach new challenges confidently and are aware of the school's high expectations of effort, behaviour and learning to achieve success. They demonstrate very positive attitudes towards their work and engage fully in their lessons. Most pupils discuss their topic work enthusiastically. For example, when studying the topic 'The skies above my eyes', pupils in Year 4 are animated as they explain how they map and plot the migration routes of different birds, following a visit to the Newport Wetlands Nature Reserve.

Most pupils demonstrate perseverance and resilience in their learning. They are not afraid to make mistakes and talk readily about how to improve their work using feedback from adults and their peers. Most pupils collaborate single-mindedly in pairs and groups, sustaining their concentration over an extended period of time. They share their thoughts and ideas freely and are considerate and reflective when listening to other pupils' views.

Although attendance and punctuality have improved compared to last year, pupils eligible for free school meals continue to have a lower rate of attendance compared with other pupils. However, there is a marginal improvement with the robust systems now in place. Despite the school's efforts and strategies, a very few pupils are persistently late or do not attend school regularly enough.

Teaching and learning experiences

Teachers provide a wide range of valuable opportunities that support nearly all pupils to enjoy their learning and make at least the progress they should. Well-planned, engaging topics support pupils to learn in depth about things that interest them. The curriculum enables all pupils to develop their knowledge, skills and understanding systematically and enthusiastically as they move through the school.

Teachers plan a cohesive, engaging topic framework that suits their diverse school community, their context as a faith school, and their learners' needs. The curriculum reflects the culture of modern Wales, and its past heritage. It includes opportunities for pupils to consider the world of work and possible future employment options.

There is strong provision for literacy and numeracy, including a comprehensive phonics programme for the youngest pupils, that has successfully accelerated their progress in reading and writing since the pandemic. Leaders have adopted a mathematics scheme that supports pupils to use and apply their numeracy skills well as they acquire new mathematical learning. In addition, the school allocates additional staffing appropriately for mathematics, to support pupils at risk of falling behind to catch up with their peers. These combined strategies have been highly effective in raising standards in mathematics and numeracy. Generally, there is worthwhile provision for pupils to develop their digital skills progressively. However, the provision for pupils to use and explore spreadsheets as they move through the school is currently underdeveloped.

There is appropriate provision for pupils to learn the Welsh language. Teachers who are confident Welsh speakers model the Welsh language well. However, this provision is not yet consistent across the school, following the interruptions to learning Welsh as a result of the pandemic. The school does not currently offer the provision to learn an international language as part of the curriculum.

There is a strong focus on the expressive arts, and every child learns to play a musical instrument. Topic work includes well-thought-through opportunities for music, art and dance, for example incorporating Samba drumming and dance in a topic about Carnival. Topics make imaginative use of the locality and its history. For example, when learning about the Newport Rising, pupils listened to the Charge of the Light Brigade, and used it as a stimulus for their own compositions.

Despite the barriers caused by significant building work on the school site, leaders have worked to ensure that pupils receive an innovative range of physical experiences. For example, the PE curriculum now includes school-funded visits to the local velodrome, tennis club and squash courts, in addition to swimming, and regular PE and games lessons within the constraints of the limited school site. Across the curriculum, staff make appropriate use of the limited outdoor spaces, given the challenges the site presents.

Pupils have begun to evaluate their learning and enjoyment at the end of topics, but their contribution to planning what and how they learn is currently at an early stage of development.

In classrooms across the school, teaching proceeds at a brisk pace. Adults ensure that no time is wasted, for example in transitions between activities. Classrooms are well-organised, respectful learning environments where everyone is expected to do their best. Adults know their pupils extremely well. They target their questions carefully to support their pupils' understanding and to challenge them, for example to make links with other learning. On a few occasions, however, across the school, teachers over-direct pupils' learning. Where this happens, pupils have too few opportunities to think for themselves, for example about how to select materials or organise their work. In a few classes, worksheets further constrain the opportunities for pupils, especially those who are more able, to write at length or to make choices about how to present their work.

Assessment procedures are helpful to pupils in improving their work, and to leaders in identifying progress and addressing any underachievement. Pupils find teachers' immediate verbal feedback useful, but older pupils also appreciate that teachers take time to provide helpful written guidance in their books, where this is appropriate.

Practitioners in the different classes use their teaching skills and expertise to integrate different curriculum areas seamlessly. For example, in the reception classes, pupils celebrate the recent coronation enthusiastically, composing an appropriately jubilant royal welcome fanfare using body percussion and musical instruments. Outside, they train eagerly to equip them to become royal guards, for example riding the royal (hobby) horses and throwing a royal (foam) javelin. They work with their classmates to plan the best route to the castle for a programmable electronic toy, write letters to welcome the new king, and use their measuring skills carefully to construct models of royal residences from junk materials. This high-

quality provision enables pupils to enjoy their learning very much and use and apply their skills in other contexts.

Care, support and guidance

The school is a caring, nurturing, diverse community where individual pupils feel valued and safe. There is a calm start to the day, that begins with staff greeting every pupil by name and checking their well-being, followed by a dedicated meditation time. The highly inclusive ethos secures progress and achievement for all. The school has effective arrangements to promote kindness and respect. This is reflected in nearly all pupils' exemplary behaviour, the courtesy they show others, and their positive attitudes towards their learning.

Teachers and support staff know each individual pupil very well. They respond promptly and with sensitivity to the pupils' emotional and social needs. This contributes significantly to their happiness and well-being. The school's safeguarding arrangements are thorough and robust. This strong culture of safeguarding permeates all aspects of the school's work.

The school provides worthwhile opportunities for pupils to celebrate and share their own cultural experiences and life stories, as well as learn about the culture and heritage of Wales. For example, Year 4 pupils recently worked with a professional storyteller and illustrator to publish the book 'My Congolese dress and other stories' that shares the life experiences of the school community. Such projects, events and visits are effective in developing pupils' understanding of equality and the diversity and richness of their own and other communities.

Provision for pupils with additional learning needs (ALN) is strong. It is carefully planned and supports pupils' needs well. Regular pupil progress meetings between senior leaders and teachers identify pupils' additional educational, social, emotional needs at an early stage and provide for them effectively. Skilled staff offer a range of purposeful intervention programmes that enable identified pupils to make rapid progress to catch up with their peers. For example, focused literacy interventions have helped younger pupils to make considerable gains in reading in very short periods of time.

There are purposeful individual development plans for pupils, that include opportunities to review progress regularly and involve professionals, parents and pupils. The school's procedures for tracking and monitoring these pupils' progress are thorough and robust. As a result, nearly all pupils with additional needs make strong progress against their targets.

Pupils with social and emotional challenges are supported particularly well through a comprehensive range of classroom approaches and strategies. In addition, useful partnerships with specialist agencies, including health professionals and a local specialist provision, successfully support staff to understand and provide effectively for the few pupils with more challenging needs.

There is worthwhile provision for pupils to engage with an extensive range of extra-curricular activities. For example, various sporting clubs develop pupils' fitness levels, and computer coding and craft clubs provide pupils with opportunities to problem-

solve, work collaboratively with others and be creative and inventive. These clubs enrich pupils' learning well and support the strengthening of relationships between pupils across the school.

The school's commitment to music and the arts is impressive. For example, all pupils have the opportunity to learn to play a musical instrument, through a worthwhile partnership with the local music service. There are opportunities for pupils across the school to participate in performances and events throughout the year. This develops their self-confidence well. For example, pupils confidently share their learning with their parents and other pupils during class assemblies, performing and singing enthusiastically.

There are a rich and varied range of trips and visits to stimulate pupils' learning. For example, a visit to Newport Museum to study Roman artefacts and mosaics ignites pupils' interest in their topic on the Romans. In addition, teachers provide well-considered support for pupils' physical, mental health and well-being. Staff introduce pupils to a range of strategies to help them to become more active and manage their emotions, including yoga and positive mindset techniques. Many of these experiences support pupils to become more adventurous and resilient. For example, the school provides a wide range of physical activities at local amenities such as squash courts and the velodrome, because their own on-site facilities are limited.

The school's culture and strong relationship with the local church promote pupils' spiritual, moral and ethical development well, and it is respectful of all faiths and cultures. Classes and the school Senedd groups raise money for local charities and find creative ways to support those in need. For example, they recently set up a fair-trade café to raise funds to support refugees from the Ukraine.

Leadership and management

St Mary's R.C. School has a clear vision for the education and well-being of all learners and realises this successfully. The vision, created by all stakeholders, identifies high aspirations for pupils, their families, and its community. It gives purpose to the school's work and underpins the high expectations that exist for pupils' welfare and progress.

The headteacher provides highly effective, thoughtful leadership. She has established a robust culture of trust, teamwork, and a drive for improvement across the school. Along with the very able senior leadership team, she facilitates a continuous focus on building and maintaining positive relationships, underpinned by a strong understanding of the needs of the pupils and community. All leaders and staff work diligently to meet these needs, with the firm belief that all pupils should receive high-quality classroom provision that enables them to achieve as well as they could. This work is supported by a strong, shared safeguarding culture across the school.

Leaders distribute roles and responsibilities effectively and the staffing structure meets the school's needs well. There are worthwhile arrangements to build leadership capacity and distribute this across the school. For example, support staff are trusted with key responsibilities to support pupils' well-being and basic skills.

Consequently, the school has a real depth of leadership at all levels and is developing successfully as a learning organisation.

The school has mature systems for evaluating the quality of its work and the progress achieved by pupils. A strength of the school's approach is that all staff are involved in monitoring activities, and this enables them to feel part of the school improvement process. These robust procedures result in notable improvements in pupils' outcomes. For example, after identifying mathematics as an area ripe for improvement, leaders introduced a new, carefully selected mathematics programme that better addressed pupils' needs. All staff received bespoke professional learning to support them in implementing the new approach and materials. As a result, since implementation, this initiative has led to most pupils making significant progress in their maths and numeracy skills.

Teachers and leaders work together to correctly identify areas of the school's work that are successful and those aspects that need to be improved. The school's development plan sets out clearly the strategic direction for school improvement work, and the expected outcomes. It identifies staff responsible for implementing priorities and the specific actions they will take.

Leaders link professional learning well to staff performance management targets. They ensure that staff access a wide range of professional learning opportunities. This includes encouraging teachers to engage in individual action research focused on improvements to the provision and meeting the needs of pupils in their classes. For instance, to encourage pupils to improve their writing skills, one teacher trialled the use of editing stations, strategically placed around the classroom. Pupils visit the stations independently, check their writing and improve their work. All staff recognise the need to evaluate trials thoroughly in terms of pupil outcomes, prior to wider implementation.

The school addresses local and national priorities well. Leaders have embraced the current additional learning needs reform, and work to develop the school's curriculum alongside improving teaching is well organised and reflective. Year group teams of teachers and support staff collaborate successfully to plan learning experiences that develop pupils' literacy, numeracy and digital skills progressively. There are appropriate plans to develop pupils' Welsh language skills further, following the adverse impact of COVID-19. Leaders are fully aware of the impact of poverty on pupil progress and ensure that the most vulnerable pupils receive timely support through specific learning and well-being interventions.

School leaders manage finances prudently and allocate funds to support improvement successfully. They use the pupil development grant well to fund skilled staff who implement a valuable whole school approach to well-being. This supports the development of pupils' social and emotional skills, for example, and provides access to a range of experiences that might otherwise not be available to the targeted pupils.

Leaders and staff enjoy close professional partnerships with parents. Communication between home and school is strong, leaders are highly visible and approachable at key moments during the school day. Leaders welcome the views of parents. For example, they provide curriculum overviews that keep parents informed about what

their children are learning. The school invites parents to comment and indicate how they might also enrich the children's experiences, for example by visiting school or sharing their knowledge and experiences of the world of work.

The governing body is well informed and efficient. Governors have a valuable range of professional expertise and contribute well to school life and to its place within the community. They understand the school's improvement priorities and the reasons that underpin them. They support leaders to implement and monitor improvement work well, for instance by taking part in learning walks, agreeing to allocate funding for valuable projects and by visiting the school to see new developments at first hand. Governors make appropriate arrangements for healthy eating and drinking. They are fully committed to supporting the school staff and leaders' well-being.

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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