



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

**A report on**

**Churchstoke C.P. School**

**Churchstoke  
Montgomery  
Powys  
SY15 6AA**

**Date of inspection: March 2024**

**by**

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

## About Churchstoke C.P. School

Name of provider	Churchstoke C.P. School
Local authority	Powys County Council
Language of the provider	English
Type of school	Primary
Religious character	None
Number of pupils on roll	47
Pupils of statutory school age	39
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 23.7%)	27.9%
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 13.2%)	38.5%
Percentage of pupils who speak Welsh at home	0.0%
Percentage of pupils with English as an additional language	
Date of headteacher appointment	01/09/2023
Date of previous Estyn inspection (if applicable)	01/04/2015
Start date of inspection	18/03/2024

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](https://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

The school provides a welcoming community where strong relationships between pupils, staff and parents generate a relaxed and friendly atmosphere for learning. The consistent sensitivity and respect shown by staff towards pupils is reflected in pupils' kindness towards their peers and in the good standard of behaviour evident across the school. Staff know their pupils well and tailor provision successfully to ensure that pupil's individual needs are met effectively.

Teachers provide a stimulating variety of learning experiences that enable pupils to develop a broad range of skills and to build their knowledge and understanding appropriately over time. They make worthwhile use of engaging visits and visitors to enrich pupils' learning beneficially. However, the school's curriculum lacks overall coherence and too many learning experiences are not matched well enough to the needs and interests of all pupils. As a result, pupils are not always motivated or challenged to make the progress they could. Staff develop pupils' reading, numeracy, digital and Welsh language skills effectively. However, pupils do not write at length often enough to develop the range and quality of their written work fully.

Leaders have established a clear vision for developing the school. This is well understood by staff who share a commitment to making improvement and to their own professional development. Leaders make use of suitable first-hand evidence to evaluate the school's work. However, they do not focus closely enough on how well the school's curriculum and teaching enable all pupils to make progress. Governors provide strong and insightful support that contributes purposefully to the school's strategic direction. They have collaborated well with the headteacher to secure notable improvements in the school's provision since his appointment. For example, they have improved procedures to safeguard pupils and strengthened relationships with parents and the community successfully.

## Recommendations

- R1 Sharpen self-evaluation processes to focus more keenly on the quality of teaching and the learning experiences staff provide
- R2 Strengthen the school's curriculum to ensure that it engages and challenges all pupils effectively
- R3 Improve the frequency and quality of pupils' extended writing

## What happens next

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

## Main evaluation

### Learning

During their time in school, most pupils, including those with additional learning needs (ALN), make appropriate progress from their individual starting points. Pupils who are eligible for free school meals develop a broad range of skills and make suitable progress in line with their peers.

During their time in school, most pupils develop as confident speakers and attentive listeners. Most younger pupils make good progress in their speech and talk with each other and adults purposefully, for instance to ask questions or to reflect on their learning in class. By Year 2, many express their opinions clearly and show respect for the views of others. Most older pupils listen closely to one another and offer their ideas thoughtfully, for instance by making helpful suggestions when collaborating with their peers on a problem-solving task.

Many pupils show enthusiasm for reading. Most of the youngest pupils quickly begin developing a firm understanding of letter sounds. They recognise the initial sounds of words and use paint and pencils to practise forming letters and matching pictures to sounds correctly. By Year 2, most pupils read simple texts with fluency and accuracy and enjoy sharing books with their older reading buddies. Many older pupils develop a range of effective strategies to become increasingly independent readers. They show a sound understanding of the structure of texts and many read with suitable expression, using punctuation appropriately to convey the meaning of what they read clearly. By Year 6, most pupils read a variety of suitably challenging texts in print and online confidently.

Many pupils across the school have a positive attitude towards writing. Most of the youngest pupils show enthusiasm when experimenting with mark making and demonstrate appropriate control when writing letters and words. Many younger pupils begin to extend their writing skills suitably, for instance to compose short sentences with appropriate punctuation. By Year 2, a majority of pupils produce more extended pieces of writing, for instance to retell a familiar story or to provide instructions for looking after an alien. However, as pupils move through the school, they do not write at length frequently enough or for a broad enough range of purposes to develop their skills effectively. As a result, the quality of older pupils' writing, in particular, is lower than they might reasonably achieve. While a minority of pupils spell and punctuate their work accurately, the standard of pupils' handwriting and presentation is too variable.

Most pupils develop a good understanding of an appropriate range of mathematical and numerical concepts. Many of the youngest pupils develop a secure knowledge of numbers to 20 and begin to count accurately in twos and fives. By Year 2, many pupils use practical and written methods to subtract numbers and show good recall of simple multiplication facts. Most older pupils develop their numeracy skills appropriately, for example, to measure angles with a protractor accurately and to multiply decimal numbers when calculating sums of money. By Year 6, many pupils use their knowledge to solve simple problems, such as to find the area and perimeter of different shapes. However, pupils do not always apply their mathematical

knowledge to their work across the curriculum in contexts that challenge and extend their skills fully.

Most younger pupils quickly begin to learn a variety of Welsh words such as to describe the weather and to respond to simple greetings effectively. They enjoy singing familiar songs in Welsh that reinforce their vocabulary and confidence successfully. Many older pupils develop their knowledge of familiar patterns to construct simple dialogues but are less confident to use their spoken Welsh in everyday situations or to respond to a wider variety of questions about themselves.

Most pupils make effective progress in developing their digital skills. They use a range of digital tools to support their wider learning confidently. For example, younger pupils create pictograms to present the results of a class survey and code a programmable toy to control its movement successfully. Most older pupils deploy a broad range of digital skills competently. For example, they make imaginative use of images they record to create engaging animations and construct databases to manage data about mountains as part of their comparative study of Wales and Patagonia. Older pupils make effective use of online research and digital platforms to gather relevant information and to develop their reading skills.

Throughout the school, most pupils have good physical skills. Most younger pupils coordinate their movements effectively, for instance to control the pace and direction of their actions in response to instructions. Older pupils perform a series of body strengthening exercises with suitable control and agility.

Many pupils develop their expressive and creative skills appropriately. For example, younger pupils use salt dough to create models of their favourite animals and older pupils use appropriate techniques and materials to produce landscape paintings in the style of Vincent van Gogh's 'Starry Night'. Many pupils make good progress in developing their problem-solving skills. For example, younger pupils exercise their curiosity by experimenting to find out what surface a toy car travels further on, whilst older pupils plan and carry out an inquiry to discover what material makes the best electrical conductor.

### **Well-being and attitudes to learning**

Most pupils form positive working relationships with staff. They feel safe in school and are confident that staff will help them with any difficulties or worries they experience. Most pupils are relaxed in class and readily volunteer their ideas when responding to questions from staff, for instance to suggest what they want to include in a letter to thank a vet for visiting their class.

Most pupils behave well. They show a good awareness of the school's rules, 'ready, respectful, safe' and show consideration towards staff and each other in lessons and around the school. They understand what behaviours are expected of them and recognise that it is important to follow the rules for everybody to feel comfortable in school. Most pupils attend school daily and arrive on time.

Pupils of all ages form friendly and supportive relationships with one another. For instance, younger and older pupils help and involve each other when creating an imaginary civilisation in the sand pit at break time. Younger pupils enjoy working

alongside their older peers, such as when asking them questions for a survey they are completing to find out which are the most popular pets at home.

Pupils generally show positive attitudes towards learning. For example, the youngest pupils follow simple instructions readily and settle to tasks appropriately. Where the focus for learning captures their interest and enthusiasm, most pupils apply themselves with sustained effort and concentration. They co-operate with their peers effectively and persevere to make progress. In a minority of instances where pupils are less engaged, their interest wanes and pupils do not make the progress they could. Older pupils reflect on their learning appropriately. They respond to helpful feedback from staff and make constructive comments about their peers' work.

Most pupils understand the importance of treating everyone equally and have an appreciation of the needs of others. They are considerate towards their peers and show respect for differing viewpoints. The youngest pupils show empathy when reflecting on how their class pair of toy Yetis are fortunate to benefit from having a friend to keep them happy.

Many pupils enjoy taking on responsibilities. For example, older pupils respond positively to the opportunity to act as monitors in class and to lead assemblies. They look after resources carefully and work collaboratively to prepare and deliver presentations to the rest of the school on topical issues and themes they have chosen. Pupils are proud to represent their peers through the school's leadership groups. For example, members of the Criw Cymraeg describe confidently how they help to promote the use of Welsh through games at play time. Overall, the organisation and activity of pupil leadership groups is inconsistent, and this hinders their ability to contribute fully to improving the school.

Most pupils recognise the importance of keeping healthy and fit and enjoy the physical activity they engage in at school. They have an appropriate understanding of what it is good for them to eat and drink and what foods should be consumed as a treat. Most pupils have a suitable awareness of online risks and know what simple actions they can take to keep themselves safe and to share any concerns they may have.

Most pupils show a good understanding of sustainability. For example, they explain how activities such as recycling and litter picking benefit the environment and are proud of the positive impact they have through their composting activity and by minimising energy usage in school.

### **Teaching and learning experiences**

Staff know their pupils well and develop strong, supportive relationships within a nurturing learning environment. They treat all pupils equally and with respect. Staff manage pupils' behaviour sensitively in classes and around the school and provide highly effective support that helps pupils to be ready to learn and to make progress in lessons.

The school is at a relatively early stage in developing its curriculum and is working towards matching the principles of Curriculum for Wales. Teachers organise learning around whole school topics that provide pupils with a variety of stimulating activities.

They use 'launch days' at the beginning of each term to spark pupils' imagination and to motivate their interest successfully. The school enriches pupils' learning experiences with a worthwhile variety of visits and visitors. For example, younger pupils benefit from the opportunity to learn about the work of a visiting vet and to ask questions as part of their topic on animals.

Teachers develop pupils' speaking and listening, reading, and digital skills in a progressive manner effectively. However, they do not provide sufficient opportunity for pupils to develop their writing skills fully or to apply these, and their numeracy skills, more widely in their learning. Teachers have begun to work collaboratively with schools in the cluster to enhance their understanding of the areas of learning and experience and to develop an effective approach to curriculum planning. Overall, however, the school's curriculum lacks coherence and teachers do not plan systematically to ensure that the learning experiences they provide engage all pupils purposefully. As a result, pupils miss opportunities to consolidate their learning in relevant contexts that extend their knowledge and experience effectively.

All staff promote the Welsh language well. They are good role models for spoken Welsh and use a broad variety of appropriate instructions and everyday vocabulary naturally in lessons. Staff provide encouraging praise for pupils that supports them to feel more confident in developing their Welsh language skills. Teachers plan effectively to develop pupils' understanding of Welsh history and culture. For example, older pupils research the history of Cardiff Castle and learn about the emigration of Welsh settlers to South America. The school provides valuable opportunities for pupils to engage purposefully with their local community. For example, teachers make effective use of strong ties with the local church to enrich pupils' understanding of Christian faith and tradition. They organise visits to a local care home that enable pupils to build relationships with older members of the community and to enhance their reading and communication skills.

Teachers make appropriate provision to develop pupils' understanding of diversity. For example, older pupils discuss the effects of racism and create poems and posters that champion the need to treat everyone equally and with respect. Staff develop pupils' understanding of how to keep safe online effectively, for instance through whole-school assemblies and circle time sessions.

In many lessons, teachers make useful links to pupils' prior learning that support their progress beneficially. Staff have secure knowledge of the concepts and skills they teach and respond to pupils' questions confidently. Where teaching is most effective, teachers make engaging use of resources and relevant contexts that capture pupils' enthusiasm in lessons. For example, they use a dramatic film to stimulate pupils' interest when learning about the village that was flooded to create Llyn Vyrnwy. As a result, most pupils work with focus, enjoy their learning and make good progress. However, in a minority of lessons, teaching does not engage pupils sufficiently and tasks offer too little challenge to motivate all pupils to make good progress. For example, an over-reliance on worksheets hinders opportunities for pupils to learn independently and to think for themselves.

Teachers use effective questioning techniques to check pupils' understanding and to extend their thinking. For example, they encourage younger pupils to explain their reasoning when sorting animals into groups. Teachers provide beneficial verbal and

written feedback that helps pupils know what they have done well and how to improve their work. Older pupils are beginning to self-assess their work and to reflect on their progress. Teachers meet regularly to review individual pupils' progress. They use these meetings to agree information to be shared with parents so that they are suitably informed about pupils' attainment and progress. They celebrate pupils' work and achievements proudly.

### **Care, support and guidance**

The school is a nurturing and welcoming community where staff and pupils relate well together and show respect and kindness towards one another. Staff provide frequent opportunities for pupils across the age range to learn and play together. For example, pupils take part in games together at break and lunch, and older pupils operate as regular reading buddies for their younger peers. These activities help older pupils to act as positive role models and to contribute purposefully to the friendly family atmosphere evident in the school.

The school provides worthwhile opportunities for pupils to support local and national charities through fundraising activities and to participate in enterprise activities. For example, pupils hold an annual Christmas fayre and organised a sponsored 'Wheelathon' event using bikes and scooters to complete laps of a track in the school grounds. These opportunities enable pupils to support chosen causes and to raise funds that provide resources for use in school.

The school has beneficial partnerships within the local community, such as with a local care home and nearby supermarket. Teachers use these links to provide opportunities for pupils to perform for the community and to build relationships between different generations in the village.

Teachers plan suitable opportunities for pupils to learn about the history and heritage of their local area and the wider world. For example, older pupils learn about similarities and differences between the landscape, culture and traditions of people in Wales and Patagonia. Staff arrange visits to local sites of historic interest and residential visits further afield that provide beneficial opportunities for pupils to experience a range of exciting and adventurous outdoor activities in an unfamiliar environment.

The school makes appropriate provision to promote pupils' moral development effectively. For example, teachers provide useful sessions in class and in whole school assemblies that build pupils' understanding of right and wrong and foster values of teamwork and cooperation. As a result, nearly all pupils treat others with respect and show a consistent caring attitude towards all members of the school community.

Teachers plan appropriately for pupils' spiritual development. For example, they build pupils' knowledge of different faiths through learning about rituals and practices linked to religious festivals such as Diwali and Ramadan. The local minister visits the school frequently to lead acts of worship and to deepen pupils' understanding of Christian beliefs.



Staff identify and address pupils' additional learning needs (ALN) effectively. They work well together as a team to build a detailed picture of individual pupils' needs. Staff make valuable use of expertise from specialist agencies to build capacity in the school and to adapt provision successfully so that most pupils with ALN make sound progress from their individual starting points. They work constructively with parents and external partners to review pupils' progress and to develop a shared understanding of individual ongoing needs. The school's ALN co-ordinator manages these arrangements efficiently and supports staff to develop the skills and understanding to meet pupils' needs well.

Staff use a variety of strategies to support pupils to focus and make progress with their learning in class. Teaching assistants run a series of worthwhile interventions for individuals and small groups that enhance pupils' well-being and help them to narrow gaps in their learning. They provide responsive support for pupils in the moment that helps them to deal with difficulties appropriately. The consistent, caring and sensitive support provided by teaching assistants is highly valued by pupils.

Staff provide a good range of opportunities for pupils to be physically active in lessons and to participate in sporting competitions. These enable pupils to pursue their interests and to develop their skills and talents alongside their peers and in the wider local arena. Many pupils speak positively about the increased range of sporting opportunities which motivate them to stay healthy, to work as part of a team and to challenge themselves physically. Staff provide suitable opportunities for pupils to learn about healthy eating and to gain practical experience in preparing and cooking a range of foods.

The school places a clear emphasis on ensuring the safety and well-being of all staff and pupils. Staff understand their responsibility for pupil safety well and discharge their duties diligently. They use effective processes to monitor the attendance and punctuality of all pupils. They promote high expectations for pupils' attendance and work constructively with partners to arrange helpful support when needed.

Teachers provide appropriate opportunities to develop pupils' understanding of their own and others' rights and to appreciate the diverse experience of children and families. They use pertinent stories to prompt thoughtful discussion and engage pupils in activities that support them to reflect on their understanding of discrimination and fairness.

## **Leadership and management**

Since his recent appointment, the acting headteacher has worked with energy and determination to set a clear strategic direction for the school. He has strengthened relationships with pupils and parents and successfully galvanised broad support among staff and governors. He gives strong emphasis to celebrating the school's place at the heart of the community and to promoting its place within the village.

Senior leaders have distributed leadership responsibilities appropriately so that teachers and governors have a clear role in supporting the school's future development. Most members of staff are committed to positive change and are beginning to collaborate more closely to secure improvement as a team. For

instance, teaching staff meet regularly to discuss priorities, review actions and plan for further development.

Leaders and staff make suitable use of first-hand activities to gather evidence about the school's performance. For example, they look at pupils' work and meet with pupils to evaluate their skills and to listen to their views about their experience of learning. They use this information to inform their assessment of the school's strengths and areas for development and to determine priorities for improvement appropriately. However, leaders' self-evaluation activity does not focus keenly enough on the quality of learning experiences teachers provide and the impact of these on pupils' progress. For example, the school has not prioritised the need to develop a more coherent approach to the design and delivery of its curriculum sufficiently.

Leaders give appropriate focus to national priorities such as the development of pupils' Welsh language skills and the requirements of ALN reform. Leaders and staff have successfully managed improvements in both of these areas that impact positively on pupils' progress and the outcomes they achieve.

Leaders make effective use of professional learning to improve the knowledge and skills of the staff team. For example, teaching assistants make beneficial use of training they have completed to plan and lead focused sessions that teach pupils helpful strategies to manage their feelings and develop their confidence and self-esteem. Teachers make worthwhile use of opportunities to enhance their practice. For example, they apply recently acquired knowledge of digital technology to plan engaging tasks that support pupils to learn collaboratively and to find creative solutions to a problem. Teachers show a strong commitment to their own professional development, for instance by furthering their knowledge through postgraduate study. Staff work with colleagues in other local schools to develop a clearer understanding of effective progress in the development of pupils' skills. This work is at a relatively early stage of development and staff have not had the opportunity to visit similar schools to consider how the curriculum may be planned more effectively.

Governors provide strong support for the school. They are knowledgeable about most of the school's strengths and areas for development and adopt a proactive approach to managing challenges such as financial constraint. Governors participate in self-evaluation activity purposefully and provide constructive challenge to leaders that helps secure improvement. For example, they work with the headteacher to audit the school's safeguarding arrangements and ensure that the school meets its statutory responsibilities fully. Leaders and governors identify necessary improvement and take timely action when needed. As a result, the school has established a robust safeguarding culture, and communicates clear practices and expectations that are followed consistently. Governors ensure that the school has appropriate arrangements to promote healthy eating and drinking.

Leaders monitor and manage the school's finances prudently. They ensure that expenditure aligns with the school's development priorities and work in partnership with the local authority to plan a sustainable budget. Leaders use the school's pupil development grant funding appropriately, for instance to support the cost of learning interventions that help to develop pupils' reading and numeracy skills.

The acting headteacher has strengthened relationships with parents effectively. For example, the school has introduced a digital communication channel that provides parents with greater insight into their child's time in school. Staff recently hosted an open day for prospective new pupils and parents and has developed a new website so that useful information such as revised policies are readily accessible. The Friends of the School provide valuable support through social events that raise funds for the school and provide opportunities for members of the wider community to meet. These activities strengthen the school's role in the community and enhance the resources and opportunities the school offers.

## 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](http://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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