



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

A report on
Cwmdar County Primary School

**The Square
Cwmdare
Aberdare
RCT
CF44 8UA**

Date of inspection: June 2024

by

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

This report is also available Welsh.

About Cwmdar County Primary School

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| Name of provider | Cwmdar County Primary School |
| Local authority | Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council |
| Language of the provider | English |
| Type of school | Primary |
| Religious character | None |
| Number of pupils on roll | 261 |
| Pupils of statutory school age | 195 |
| Number in nursery classes | 37 |
| 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%) | 17.4% |
| 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%) | 4.6% |
| Percentage of pupils who speak Welsh at home | 1.5% |
| Percentage of pupils with English as an additional language | 0% |
| Date of headteacher appointment | 16/01/2017 |
| Date of previous Estyn inspection (if applicable) | 14/06/2016 |
| Start date of inspection | 03/06/2024 |

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

a. The term 'additional learning needs' is being used to describe those pupils on the SEN/ALN register of the school.

Overview

Cwmdar County Primary School is a happy and inclusive school where staff and pupils treat each other with care and respect. Throughout the school, nearly all pupils' behaviour is exemplary, they engage positively with their learning and welcome visitors happily. There is a strong culture of safeguarding at the school and, as a result, pupils enjoy their learning experiences and feel safe at school.

The school provides strong support for pupils with additional learning needs (ALN). Learning support assistants work effectively with pupils in small groups, offering valuable individual support for vulnerable pupils. As a result, most pupils make good progress across the school and develop their reading, writing and numeracy skills well. Nearly all pupils have strong speaking skills. They confidently talk about their work and school life in general and contribute effectively during lessons. The school is beginning to develop opportunities for pupils to reflect on their learning during lessons, but opportunities for many pupils to improve their own work and identify their next steps in learning over time, are limited.

Teachers and learning support assistants know pupils well. They form warm and nurturing working relationships that help pupils to feel relaxed and valued. Teachers set clear expectations in lessons, plan a range of stimulating learning experiences that motivate and inspire nearly all pupils successfully. As a result, pupils show positive attitudes towards their learning. However, pupils do not always have enough opportunities to make choices about their learning and to develop fully as independent, creative learners.

Leaders provide clear direction and model professional behaviours effectively. They foster collaboration successfully and support staff to work well as a team. They have regular opportunities for professional development. They have high expectations of themselves and their pupils. As a result, pupils make good progress within a calm, purposeful and happy environment.

Governors support the school effectively and are committed to creating an inclusive environment that nurtures pupils' learning and well-being.

Recommendations

- R1 Increase opportunities for pupils to direct their own learning, developing their independence and creativity
- R2 Provide opportunities for pupils to reflect on and respond to feedback and identify next steps in their learning

What happens next

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

Main evaluation

Learning

Across the school, nearly all pupils, including those with ALN and those from low-income families make good progress from their starting points.

Most pupils develop their speaking and listening skills well. Pupils build their vocabulary and ways of speaking systematically as they move through the school. They listen attentively to the contributions of others and their well-developed speaking and listening skills support them well in their learning across the curriculum. Older pupils develop into confident, articulate speakers and attentive, reflective listeners. For example, they predict and present their findings when investigating whether land ice or water ice melts quicker.

The youngest pupils learn their letter sounds well and gain confidence in identifying them in familiar words quickly. They begin reading independently in a range of contexts, such as labels and simple instructions around the classroom. By the time they reach Year 2, pupils read confidently with good expression and understanding. Most older pupils develop effective reading skills which significantly enhance their learning across the curriculum. They read an increasing range of fiction and nonfiction texts and predict and retell confidently. They use their well-developed skimming and scanning skills to locate relevant information accurately across the curriculum.

Most younger pupils make good progress in the developing their writing skills. They form letters correctly and, quickly begin to write for a useful range of purposes. For example, Year 2 pupils write a well-expressed letter when applying to be an astronaut. Most older pupils present their work well and use appropriate punctuation, using their writing across the curriculum purposefully. For example, Year 6 pupils use persuasive language effectively to advertise their innovative and sustainable city designs.

The youngest pupils learn basic vocabulary in Welsh well and respond to simple instructions appropriately. They begin to use simple sentence structures confidently, such as when telling the 'doctor' in Year 1 which body part is hurting during role-play. Most older pupils build on previously learnt vocabulary well and begin to extend sentence patterns. By the time they are in Year 6, most pupils are confident and competent in speaking Welsh. For example, they use the past tense and connectives to extend their sentences when answering questions about the weather and holidays.

Most younger pupils develop a sound understanding of number well. By Year 1, many pupils are confident in adding and doubling two-digit numbers. Year 2 pupils

develop a good understanding of basic fractions through practical activities. By the time they reach Year 6, pupils have a strong knowledge of mathematics across a broad range of topics. Pupils throughout the school apply their skills across the curriculum appropriately. For example, Year 2 pupils create block graphs to show their favourite Victorian games and Year 6 pupils create a model of a town using cuboids that they have constructed from nets.

Most pupils throughout the school make strong progress in using a broad range of digital skills. The youngest pupils quickly become confident at using these skills for a variety of purposes such as controlling programmable toys and creating simple graphs. Older pupils use their digital skills effectively to enhance their learning. They are adept at using email, creating animations, and developing coding.

Most pupils' creative skills develop appropriately throughout the school. They create music and art work linked to their topic themes and they plan and design purposefully. For example, Year 2 pupils design imaginative bird feeders. However, they do not have enough opportunities to experiment, innovate and use their imagination when exploring the expressive arts.

Pupils make sound progress in developing their thinking skills. For example, the youngest pupils use sentence patterns, such as 'I think that...' when predicting by touch what is in a bag. Nearly all pupils are developing particularly well in reasoning. They can explain their thinking articulately and logically to solve problems. They are less confident at planning, experimenting, and evaluating independently.

Pupils develop a broad range of physical skills as they progress through the school. Younger pupils develop their gross motor skills well, learning to balance and control their bodies effectively. For example, pupils ride bikes and scooters confidently in the outdoor area. Older pupils continue to develop their skills, effectively, particularly in team games such as cricket, netball and football.

Well-being and attitudes to learning

Pupils' well-being and their attitudes to learning are strong. All staff create warm and nurturing working relationships with pupils. As a result, pupils feel happy and valued.

Pupils are confident and express views clearly about their learning and their school. Many pupils from Year 2 to Year 6 contribute enthusiastically to school improvement through the schools' Senedd. Pupils feel that they are listened to and that they have a positive impact on the life of the school. For example, they organise events to raise money for the school to buy play equipment. Pupils of all ages are involved in shaping the curriculum, contributing information, questions and ideas to learning plans.

Nearly all pupils are enthusiastic learners. They show interest in their learning experiences and are proud of their work. They focus well and are engaged when working independently. They collaborate effectively during paired and group work, sharing ideas, clarifying understanding and offering relevant contributions to discussions.

Pupils are consistently respectful and polite. All pupils show high levels of support and care for one another, and their behaviour during lessons, breaktimes and around the school is exemplary.

Most pupils understand the importance of a healthy lifestyle, including the importance of physical activity and the impact of diet on the body. They develop a good understanding of how to stay safe online. They recognise the need to keep personal information safe and to use trusted websites when browsing.

Throughout the school, pupils develop well as ethical, informed citizens who demonstrate a good awareness of children's rights, equality, diversity and sustainability. The school's work on human rights ensures that most pupils develop a secure understanding of their own rights as a child and those of others. Pupils become capable, confident learners but they do not have sufficient opportunities to take responsibility for their own learning and decision-making.

Pupils value the feedback they receive from staff that helps them to make progress in their learning. Many pupils are beginning to use self- and peer-assessment to identify how to improve their work. However, opportunities for many pupils to improve their work independently following feedback are limited.

Teaching and learning experiences

The school has designed its curriculum to align closely with pupils' needs and interests. Leaders and teachers ensure all pupils, including those from low income households have access to the full range of activities planned. Learning support assistants are allocated thoughtfully across the school, are effective in their roles and work skilfully with pupils to support their progress.

The school's curriculum provides a suitable breadth and depth of learning experiences that develop pupils' interest, knowledge and understanding well. As a result, pupils readily retain and explain what they have learnt. However, teachers do not enable pupils to direct their own learning, explore, investigate, and innovate often enough. The curriculum builds on pupils' existing knowledge, understanding, skills and experiences systematically and coherently. Teachers plan learning experiences that support pupils to develop their critical thinking appropriately. For example, older pupils look at a range of evidence and use logic to draw a conclusion when discussing environmental issues. However, teachers do not provide enough opportunities for older pupils to develop as independent learners, equipped to explore, investigate and innovate.

Teachers provide worthwhile opportunities for pupils to use their literacy skills and suitable opportunities for pupils to use their numeracy skills across the curriculum. The curriculum develops pupils' digital skills well. As a result, these skills are a powerful tool for the pupils in their learning. For example, Year 3 pupils animate the frog life cycle and create tunes using a music programme during a science lesson.

Teachers plan a range of interesting learning experiences that motivate pupils, for example making good use of visitors and trips to enhance pupils' learning and to develop their understanding of the culture and heritage of Wales. To enhance their topic work pupils' benefit from a visit to Big Pit to experience what life was like

working on the coal face in Wales and visiting the National History Museum to study different aspects of Welsh life through the ages.

The school integrates the teaching of Welsh into its curriculum well and this impacts positively on pupils oracy skills as they progress throughout the school.

Across the school, nearly all staff create stimulating and attractive learning environments. Classroom displays celebrate pupils' work whilst also providing useful scaffolding to prompt pupils' learning. Staff use a range of high-quality resources to support pupils' learning and experiences successfully. The school is developing purposeful outdoor learning opportunities across the school. For example, older pupils use the playground to create coordinate grids in maths lessons and younger pupils use the school field as a stimulus for their writing work.

Most teachers provide effective verbal feedback during lessons that encourage pupils to engage well and focus on improving aspects of their work. However, there are limited opportunities for pupils to reflect on their learning, improve their own work and identify their next steps.

Teachers have a clear understanding of pupils' individual starting points. They use the information gathered through observations and assessment to plan pupils' next steps in learning appropriately. Staff use a suitable range of assessments to monitor pupils' progress and identify those who may need additional support, particularly in their reading and mathematical skills.

The school shares useful information about pupils' progress and future targets with parents.

Care, support and guidance

Cwmdar County Primary School is a friendly and caring school that supports pupils' academic and social development effectively. Staff create an inclusive atmosphere that helps pupils and families to feel welcome and nurtured. As a result, all members of the school's community show high levels of respect for one another and work well together as a team.

The school's provision for pupils with ALN is effective. As a result, most pupils with ALN make sound progress over time. The ALN co-ordinator ensures that there are purposeful arrangements to enable early identification of pupils who would benefit from additional support. Staff use this information to provide suitable programmes to support pupils' emotional and well-being needs as well as the development of their literacy and numeracy skills. Staff, parents and pupils meet to review progress regularly and to plan the next steps in the learning. Highly skilled learning support assistants provide effective support for developing pupils' literacy, numeracy, and social and emotional skills.

The school's support for vulnerable pupils has a positive impact on their emotional wellbeing and personal development. Staff use a range of strategies, including communication from parents well to identify pupils in need of emotional support. They use support programmes such as play-based therapy effectively to improve pupils'

well-being and learning. Staff know pupils extremely well and are adept at recognising and meeting their emotional needs.

Staff use a suitable range of learning experiences, including visits, to enrich pupils' understanding of their Welsh identity. For example, visits to St Fagan's Museum of Welsh Life enhance pupils' knowledge of Welsh history. The school provides suitable opportunities for pupils to perform and to participate in creative and sporting activities. For example, pupils take part in Christmas shows, an Eisteddfod and this impacts positively on their confidence.

Staff promote and effectively model the schools' shared values such as respect, empathy and kindness. This contributes beneficially towards pupils' moral and social development. This is reflected in the pupils' excellent behaviour, and their ability to distinguish between right and wrong from an early age. Teachers provide pupils with suitable opportunities to learn about a range of faiths and cultures. Worthwhile assemblies and class activities support pupils to reflect on their own beliefs and to develop their understanding of spirituality.

The school's pupil leadership groups are active in the life of the school. For example, the Eco Committee support the school's work, effectively leading assemblies to promote reducing, re-using and re-cycling waste.

The school helps pupils to understand issues relating to equality, diversity and inclusion well, and provides good opportunities for pupils to learn about the needs and rights of others, including the United Nations Convention on Rights of The Child. Many pupils recognise that all children have the right to be treated with dignity and fairness, to be protected, to develop to their full potential and to participate in all aspects of school life.

Leaders embed a culture of purposeful safeguarding, and all staff understand and implement their responsibilities effectively. As a result, the school's arrangements for safeguarding pupils meet requirements and are not a cause for concern. The school has robust procedures for monitoring and tracking attendance, which has a positive effect on the attendance of pupils across the school.

Leadership and management

The headteacher is passionate and knowledgeable about how the school can make a difference in the local community. She has a clear vision which is shared by all staff and governors, ensuring that Cwmdar County Primary School is a happy and inclusive school.

Leaders use a wide range of informative monitoring processes to evaluate the work of the school, identifying its strengths and areas for development accurately.

Senior leaders provide worthwhile opportunities for staff to develop their leadership skills successfully. There is a clear leadership structure with an effective balance of defined roles and shared team work. All members of the senior leadership team have a good understanding of the work of others and support staff well.

Similarly, staff across the school have a clear understanding of their roles and responsibilities. They share a joint ambition to achieve the best possible outcomes for pupils at the school.

Leaders model and promote professional values and behaviours effectively. They work well as a team and this contributes positively to the overall ethos of the school. They set high expectations for themselves, their colleagues and pupils. They model effective collaboration and promote a cooperative approach to all they do. This collaboration includes a wealth of opportunities for productive professional learning, and the sharing of good practice between leaders, teachers and support staff which impacts positively on pupil progress.

Senior Leaders provide valuable support to help members of staff make improvements to their practice. For example, they use a mentoring and coaching model to support staff which has improved standards of teaching and learning.

The school uses specific grant funding effectively to ensure beneficial support for identified pupils. For example, leaders use the pupil development grant well to provide a range of intervention strategies to support pupils to improve their literacy and numeracy skills and to subsidise trips to remove barriers to learning caused by poverty.

The governing body brings together people from a broad range of backgrounds with a wide skill set that leaders use effectively to inform the work of the school. For example, the link governor for ALN works closely with the additional learning needs coordinator and has arranged visits to other schools which has supported leaders to develop their understanding of ALN reform.

Governors are highly supportive of the school and are committed to supporting staff and pupils' well-being. They have a good understanding of their statutory responsibilities, for example in relation to their role in embedding a positive safeguarding culture. They ensure that the school has a clear policy to promote healthy eating and drinking.

Governors have a sound knowledge of the work of the school and its impact in ensuring positive outcomes for all pupils. Many engage in monitoring and self-evaluation activities, for example, taking part in book looks, listening to learners and learning walks. They have a clear understanding of the school's strengths and are beginning to identify areas for development and challenge leaders appropriately.

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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This document has been translated by Trosol (English to Welsh).