



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

**A report on**

**Pontyclun Primary School**

**Palalwyf Avenue  
Pontyclun  
RCT  
CF72 9EG**

**Date of inspection: June 2024**

**by**

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

**This report is also available in Welsh.**

## About Pontyclun Primary School

Name of provider	Pontyclun 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	422
Pupils of statutory school age	374
Number in nursery classes	48
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%)	8.8%
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%)	1.5%
Percentage of pupils who speak Welsh at home	*
Percentage of pupils with English as an additional language	*
Date of headteacher appointment	01/09/2007
Date of previous Estyn inspection (if applicable)	26/04/2016
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](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 headteacher leads a dedicated team of enthusiastic teachers, many of whom bring a wealth of knowledge and experience. School staff understand the impact of well-being on learning and place an appropriate emphasis on meeting pupils' social and emotional needs from a young age. They strive to create strong sense of belonging and the positive working relationships they form with pupils is a strength of the school. Most pupils are keen to come to school, and many parents feel they are included in the life of the school. Governors are suitably involved in ensuring that the school is a safe and happy place to be.

Throughout the school, most pupils' behaviour is good, and pupils often engage positively with their learning. They enjoy opportunities to learn more about how relationships are formed and maintained, about the aspects that make someone's identity and about world religions. They are beginning to explore the history and culture of Wales but there are too few opportunities for pupils to develop their Welsh language skills and, as a result, the progress they make over time is insufficient.

The school is developing its understanding of how pupils make progress aligned to the principles of Curriculum for Wales, but this is at an early stage of development. Across the school, pupils develop positive attitudes to reading and make good progress in developing their literacy skills. They use digital skills well and make the most of opportunities to be active. Many develop good mathematical skills and knowledge but do not use these skills often enough or at an appropriate level in their work across the curriculum.

Teachers include pupils' ideas when planning learning experiences. Older pupils benefit from opportunities to choose how they learn during lessons. From a young age, pupils develop as confident and articulate learners. Many pupils, including those with additional learning needs (ALN) develop well as independent learners. In many classes, teachers use questioning well and provide pupils with appropriate guidance to support their learning during lessons. Staff enable the youngest pupils to be curious and creative in their play-based learning and the oldest pupils develop mature thinking skills. However, in a few lessons, learning experiences do not challenge all pupils to make the progress they should or to develop sufficiently as independent learners.

## Recommendations

- R1 Sharpen the focus of school self-evaluation and improvement planning to improve outcomes for all pupils in a timely manner
- R2 Improve the school's understanding of progression in Curriculum for Wales to ensure all pupils make the progress they should
- R3 Ensure that the school's policies and procedures for addressing the needs of pupils with ALN meet statutory requirements

## 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

By the time they leave the school, most pupils make good progress in developing their knowledge and skills in many areas of the curriculum. Pupils with ALN and those from low-income households often make strong progress.

Nearly all pupils develop their speaking and listening skills well and make good progress. Younger pupils enjoy opportunities to practice new and exciting vocabulary in their play-based learning. They listen carefully to stories and offer their thoughts confidently. Older pupils continue to build their vocabulary extensively and often speak with maturity during lessons, when collaborating in problem-solving activities, and when explaining their work to visitors. Most older pupils listen attentively during lessons and respond appropriately to others. Most pupils greet visitors in Welsh and, with support, many older pupils answer basic questions. However, generally, pupils' grasp of the Welsh language is limited, and most do not make suitable progress in speaking Welsh as they move through the school.

Most pupils develop as confident readers and develop a useful variety of reading skills. As they move through the school, they use an increasing range of strategies to help them make sense of unfamiliar words and use inference skills competently to explore characters in the books they read. By the end of their time in school, many pupils are expressive readers and have developed a love of reading. Pupils are beginning to read simple Welsh texts with increasing accuracy during lessons.

Most pupils develop appropriate writing skills during their time at school. The youngest pupils enjoy developing their early writing skills through mark-making in their indoor and outdoor play. Pupils in Year 1 and Year 2 construct simple but purposeful sentences to pose questions about capybara during their work on South America. Older pupils write well for a range of purposes and audiences, using a range of sentence structures to add interest to their work and including vocabulary chosen to engage the reader. The oldest pupils apply their literacy skills effectively in their work across the curriculum, for example planning and organising their thoughts and opinions in preparation for a debate on whether animals should be part of NASA's space program.

Many pupils develop sound mathematical knowledge as they progress through the school. The youngest pupils order numbers accurately in their play and in Year 1 they demonstrate their understanding of fractions when slicing apples into four quarters. Older pupils apply their knowledge competently when solving mathematical problems linked to their topic work. For example, when investigating the impact of air

travel on the environment they subtract 4-digit numbers to calculate the difference in miles travelled between locally produced and imported foods. However, opportunities for all pupils to apply their numeracy skills at the same level across the curriculum are limited. As a result, pupils do not use their numeracy skills in other areas of learning regularly enough or at the same level as their mathematical skills.

Most pupils develop their digital skills well. For instance, younger pupils use digital art programs skilfully to create images of rainforest animals. Pupils in Year 3 use animation programmes effectively to make short films. Most older pupils confidently control programmable devices to develop and produce a compass for orienteering activities and experiment with artificial intelligence to create posters about diversity.

Pupils are beginning to develop their artistic skills and expression well. They enjoy experimenting with a range of media to create effective art, inspired by the techniques of local and global artists. Younger pupils paint self-portraits and mimic the style of Welsh artists when creating images of the locality. The oldest pupils develop their evaluative language during art appreciation sessions linked to their work on recycling and sustainability. There are fewer opportunities for pupils to develop other expressive skills, such as music and dance.

Most pupils develop their physical skills well through a variety of experiences and activities. The youngest pupils climb through hoops and travel across wooden beams, demonstrating good balance, agility and control. Older pupils learn to pass and receive during team sports and skilfully control equipment during lunchtime games.

Most pupils develop their thinking skills appropriately and transfer these skills to their learning and problem-solving. Younger pupils complete challenges in their play. They make predictions before experimenting, for example, when learning about floating and sinking. Older pupils work effectively in teams to design water filters, analysing the effectiveness of their designs and reflecting on how to improve them. As they move through the school, most pupils explain their thinking processes, giving reasons for their opinions, for example, when responding to a query from the school's governors about the impact of the current site restrictions.

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

The dedicated staff at the school make pupils' well-being a daily focus. The positive relationships they build with them are a strong feature of the school. As a result, pupils feel safe and know that there is always someone available to help them when needed. They develop secure values and a sound sense of responsibility.

Most pupils are respectful towards staff, friends, and visitors to the school. They listen attentively to others and act with kindness. Older pupils interact positively with others at play and lunchtime. They find ways to make breaktimes relaxing and fun, helping when other pupils need support with their well-being and relationships. Many pupils develop strategies for self-regulation through a beneficial range of experiences and draw on these when needed, improving their well-being, relationships, and participation.

Pupils have a growing awareness of their roles as responsible citizens who actively influence their own lives and the lives of others in their community and beyond. They learn about the challenges others face and understand the importance of providing support and advocating where possible. For example, they raise awareness in the local community during Dementia Action Awareness Week.

Pupils, including those with additional learning needs, are beginning to influence the life of the school. They enthusiastically take on leadership responsibilities and contribute their ideas and opinions about school life through group representatives. Digital leaders find creative ways to ensure pupils understand the importance of safe virtual relationships, for example by producing a safety video published online. The 'Criw Cymraeg' encourage Welsh activities, for example through daily classroom games. Pupils across the school contribute their ideas about what they learn, and older pupils are beginning to offer their ideas about how they learn, for example making choices about how they collect and represent information on making the world a better place to live.

Most pupils know why making healthy choices is important and understand the impact of eating a balanced diet, staying hydrating and getting enough sleep. Older pupils develop a good awareness of the effects of substance misuse and learn how to respond in an emergency. Many pupils enjoy opportunities to participate in a range of physical activities and make the most of the time they spend outdoors.

Many pupils engage well with their learning and are often proud of their achievements. They are keen to come to school and this has a positive impact on their attendance and punctuality. During lessons, pupils generally sustain concentration and interest. Most listen well, ask and answer questions appropriately and willingly talk about their learning. They work effectively in pairs and small groups, contributing to tasks and sharing their ideas. Many of the oldest pupils recall prior learning effectively and often link their learning to their own experience successfully.

The youngest pupils are often highly engaged in learning. From a young age they begin to develop effectively as independent learners, enthused by opportunities to be curious and creative. They continue to develop their independent learning skills in Year 1 and 2, becoming increasingly motivated and resilient. They readily select the resources they need for their learning and happily talk about their learning experiences. As they move through the school, many pupils build successfully on their independent learning skills. They clearly explain their work and recognise its purpose. They develop a useful understanding of how the skills and knowledge they learn now will help them in their future lives. During lessons, they offer suggestions and ideas and draw on their knowledge and experiences. For example, pupils in Year 5 develop their thinking, creativity and problem-solving well when responding to a query from the school's governors about the impact of the new school building. They analyse and discuss the situation, considering all the information available to them to offer possible solutions. However, in a few classes, pupils are less engaged in their learning. In these classes, learning experiences are often over-directed and do not enable pupils to develop suitably as independent learners.

## Teaching and learning experiences

During a time of disruption, staff have made best use of temporary accommodation to maintain an inviting learning environment indoors and, for younger pupils, outdoors. Pupils from Nursery to Year 2 benefit from their learning experiences in these well-planned areas, engaging in activities that enable them to be curious, creative and imaginative in their play-based learning. The youngest pupils enjoy developing their hand-eye co-ordination in water and sand play and their creativity in construction activities. Teachers and teaching assistants make good use of opportunities for pupils to visualise their learning through practical activities, supporting pupils in Years 1 and 2, for example, to visualise and begin to understand fractions in physical activities on the school yard.

Where teaching is most effective, the pace of lessons enables pupils to make good progress in their learning and supports them to develop as strong independent learners. Teachers use open questioning purposefully, address misconceptions and adjust their teaching to support pupils appropriately. They share clear expectations, which supports pupils' understanding of what to do and create worthwhile opportunities for pupils to share their thoughts and ideas. They provide useful and immediate feedback during lessons that enables pupils to understand their next steps in learning and allow time for reflection. They regularly check and consolidate pupils' understanding. In a few cases teachers do not address important misconceptions and learning lacks depth. In these classes the learning experiences do not always challenge pupils suitably and limit their ability to develop as independent learners.

The school's teaching assistants are often highly effective in supporting pupils to make progress in their learning. They use questioning well and model language effectively. During intervention sessions, they provide strong support for vulnerable pupils and those with additional learning needs.

The school is developing its curriculum to align with the principles of Curriculum for Wales. Many leaders and teachers have a good knowledge of the areas of learning and experience (AoLEs) and cross-cutting themes. They are beginning to plan a broad range of purposeful learning experiences that include a few opportunities for pupils to discover the history and culture of Wales. Teachers use educational visits and visitors well to enrich learning experiences. For example, pupils benefit from visits in the locality and further afield that improve their understanding of woodland and rainforest habitats.

Teachers are beginning to plan sequences of lessons that enable pupils to transfer aspects of their knowledge and skills to other areas of the curriculum. Most provide a range of purposeful opportunities for pupils to transfer their literacy skills appropriately. The worthwhile focus on oracy from a young age is successful in developing pupils as effective listeners and confident speakers. By the time pupils reach Year 6, most offer articulate thoughtful responses, for example during ethical debates. Teachers support pupils to build on their oracy and reading skills well when writing for a variety of audiences. For example, younger pupils write emails to an artist living in the Amazon rainforest to find out what life is like there. Older pupils write on the issue of child labour during their work on human rights and use persuasive techniques to encourage people to reduce their use of plastic.

Teachers plan well for pupils to apply their digital skills to support and enhance their work. However, although many pupils develop a good knowledge and understanding of mathematical concepts, teachers do not provide sufficient opportunities for pupils to apply their numeracy skills purposefully at a high enough level. Most teachers provide daily opportunities for pupils to practise simple Welsh sentence patterns. However, teachers do not plan effectively for pupils to develop their Welsh language ability beyond these basic skills and, as a result, they do not make enough progress in speaking Welsh over time.

Across the school, teachers are beginning to plan opportunities for pupils to improve their understanding of ethical and moral issues nationally and globally. They are beginning to consider how learning experiences support pupils to raise their aspirations and prepare for their future lives. Older pupils, for example, learn about possible career pathways during a careers week. They participate in webinars with a range of workplaces to explore the skills they need for employment. They then build on these experiences when analysing profit and loss in their enterprise activities.

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

Despite the upheaval posed by the current building works, staff have embraced the challenge and minimised disruption for pupils. The school continues to ensure pupils feel a strong sense of belonging and the care they receive contributes significantly to their well-being and happiness. Staff uphold the school's values through their compassionate approach.

The school provides valuable support for pupils with ALN, and many make good progress from their individual starting points. Leaders have ensured that staff have the knowledge and skills to provide beneficial intervention and classroom support, often adapting this support appropriately to meet pupils' individual needs. Leaders have created useful systems for identifying the most appropriate support for vulnerable pupils and work well with staff to monitor the impact of these strategies effectively. The school provides strong transition support for the families of the youngest pupils as they enter Nursery. This is especially effective in supporting parents of pupils with ALN to help them prepare their children to begin school life. However, the school has been slow to address the requirements of Welsh Government's ALN reform and, as a result, arrangements to support pupils with additional needs do not fully meet statutory requirements.

The school is developing its approach to Religion, Values and Ethics (RVE) effectively, providing highly worthwhile opportunities for pupils to reflect on their values and beliefs. They enjoy exploring celebrations and thinking about the stories behind them. They benefit from opportunities to learn more about how the important messages behind religious stories can guide them in their own lives. Older pupils deepen their understanding when exploring values through religious concepts, such as karma.

Pupils make the most of valuable opportunities to develop their knowledge and understanding of Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE). Younger pupils pose questions such as, 'how are we the same but different?' and consider what it means to be a good friend. They are beginning to recognise that there are different communities in their locality and across the world and relate their work, for example



on a healthy diet, to human rights. As they move through the school, pupils build on their knowledge and understanding of different types of relationships, consider what it means to treat others fairly and begin to think about identity and expression. They consider their own identity and discover the lived experiences of others in poems and stories. They draw on their own experiences and formulate strategies for applying what they learn to their own lives.

Across the school, pupils develop well as ethical citizens, considering, for example, how their actions as consumers impact on climate change. Although pupils are beginning to learn about diversity this is at an early stage of development, and generally pupils do not have enough opportunities to learn about the culture and heritage of Wales.

Teachers enrich the school's curriculum through a range of stimulating visits linked to the topics they plan. Pupils enjoy visits to the theatre, aquaria and literature festivals. Older pupils enjoy working with the Welsh College of Music and Drama to develop their confidence and skills in the performing arts. The school often acts appropriately to reduce the impact of poverty, supporting pupils to enjoy a broad range of curriculum activities including outdoor pursuits. Many pupils enjoy opportunities to participate in physical activity through the school's extra-curricular sports activities. However, opportunities for pupils to participate in a more varied range of experiences, such as music and dance are limited.

Staff are clear about their responsibilities and the actions they need to take to safeguard pupils. The school's procedures are effective and give no cause for concern. The school's curriculum supports pupils to develop their own understanding of how to be safe. Leaders monitor pupils' attendance robustly and identify those pupils whose attendance falls below an acceptable level. Staff communicate with families appropriately to support them, and as a result, attendance is improving.

## **Leadership and management**

School leaders have established a clear and shared vision with a focus on encouraging all pupils and staff to be their best and show respect. Pupils use this vision to guide them when making decisions about how they should behave and treat others. The headteacher is a compassionate leader, creating a positive ethos. As a result, most pupils and staff feel valued and develop strong mutual working relationships across the school.

Senior leaders adapt well to challenging situations. They make adaptations to leadership roles when needed, providing beneficial opportunities for experienced teachers to develop their leadership skills. As a result, the school has suitable succession planning in place, increasing the capacity to implement change and improve provision. A strong example of this approach can be seen in the collaborative and effective development of RSE and RVE.

Leaders and governors manage the school's finances well, making decisions carefully to ensure that the focus of spending plans remains on improving outcomes for all pupils. Leaders use the pupil development grant effectively to provide valuable well-being and learning support for pupils from low-income families. They work

diligently to remove barriers to learning, for example through subsidising extra-curricular experiences, residential visits and school celebratory events.

Leaders work in partnership with the governing body to regularly evaluate the quality of teaching and learning, and to identify the school's strengths and areas for development. Overall, the school's priorities for improvement generally reflect the needs of the school accurately. The school has demonstrated a suitable track record of making improvements, for example, raising standards of literacy and improving the breadth of learning experiences provided. Given sufficient time to implement and embed change and evaluate the impact of improvement strategies, the school makes effective improvements to teaching and learning. However, the school's monitoring activities do not always focus sharply enough on the timely impact of improvements. In a few areas identified for improvement, the rate of progress is too slow. Senior leaders have a good understanding of the progress made by groups of learners, including those with ALN and those eligible for free school meals. However, the school focuses too closely on summative data rather than developing a sound understanding of progression that will enable teachers to plan for pupils' individual next steps in learning across the curriculum.

Leaders of learning demonstrate sound knowledge of best practice in teaching and assessment. For example, the highly effective teaching in the youngest classes enables pupils to learn successfully through exploration and play. However, the school does not provide suitable opportunities for staff to share and build on the strong practice that exists in the school and, as a result, the quality of teaching is variable. Senior leaders provide regular opportunities for all staff to discuss their own strengths and identify aspects of their role that they wish to improve. Performance targets link closely with school priorities. Overall, the school's professional development opportunities support many teachers to develop suitable pedagogy. For example, training on developing writing skills has resulted in most pupils making good progress in writing. However, professional learning activities do not always focus closely enough on a few of the most important areas for improvement, such as numeracy and Welsh.

Governors understand their statutory duty to ensure the provision of healthy eating and drinking. They understand their role in safeguarding pupils and carry out their responsibilities diligently. Governors provide appropriate support and challenge for senior leaders, for example, when discussing the school budget. However, governors do not always challenge leaders robustly enough on the progress of a few school improvement priorities and the impact of policies and actions on pupils' progress.

Leaders communicate effectively with parents and regularly share pupils' learning experiences through a digital platform. The school organises useful opportunities for parents to engage in school events, including concerts and workshops. This provides parents with opportunities to find out about what their children are learning and how they can support them at home. The school has strong links with the local community and pupils regularly participate in local activities, events, and competitions. These strong links place Pontyclun Primary School at the heart of the local community.

## 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:

Publications Section  
Estyn  
Anchor Court, Keen Road  
Cardiff  
CF24 5JW or by email to [publications@estyn.gov.wales](mailto:publications@estyn.gov.wales)

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