



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

A report on

St James Primary

**Lansbury Park
Caerphilly
CF83 3GT**

Date of inspection: June 2024

by

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

This inspection was undertaken as part of trying out our new inspection arrangements. As a result, this report may be slightly different in format to other published reports for providers in the sector.

About St James Primary School

Name of provider	St James Primary
Local authority	Caerphilly County Borough Council
Language of the provider	English
Religious character	
Number of pupils on roll	309
Pupils of statutory school age	243
Number in nursery classes	36
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%)	62.8%
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%)	23.9%
Percentage of pupils who speak Welsh at home	0.0%
Percentage of pupils with English as an additional language (categories A-C)	2.1%
Date of headteacher appointment	March 2023
Date of previous Estyn inspection (if applicable)	17/05/2016
Start date of inspection	24/06/2024

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.

Summary

Since taking up her post, the headteacher has developed a more inclusive ethos that gives pupils a sense of belonging to the school. Working with staff and parents, she has developed a clear vision aimed at providing engaging and effective teaching and learning experiences, that encourage pupils to 'bloom'. This has helped to promote a growing sense of teamwork and a commitment among staff to offer the best for all pupils.

Staff support pupils' moral and social development well, teaching values like tolerance sensitively. As a result, most pupils are respectful of others and behave well. The specialist resource bases (SRBs) provide a welcoming, calm environment where most pupils feel settled and secure. The school supports pupils' emotional and social well-being effectively. Leaders have embedded purposeful strategies, and set aside dedicated spaces like the sensory room, which provide helpful spaces for pupils to calm themselves and prepare for learning.

Leaders set high expectations for themselves, staff and pupils. They provide professional learning opportunities for all staff, focused on improving teaching and learning. However, the impact of professional development is too variable and there remain too many inconsistencies in the quality of teaching. In around half of lessons, teachers do not provide purposeful enough learning experiences that allow pupils to make effective progress. They do not match the pace and challenge of learning tasks to pupils' ability closely enough.

The school is beginning to embed a curriculum that offers a range of systematic, progressive and engaging learning activities. However, these are recent changes, and inconsistencies in teachers' understanding of the curriculum mean that they have had a limited impact on pupils' progress so far.

Many pupils enter the school with language and social skills below those expected for their age. Staff are positive language role models, and support pupils to develop their oracy skills well. However, a majority of pupils' reading skills do not develop strongly enough. Similarly, around half of pupils do not write well enough in a wide enough range of styles. A majority of pupils develop appropriate number skills. However, a minority do not develop a broad enough range of mathematics skills.

The school has effective systems to support pupils with additional learning needs (ALN) and many make good progress towards their individual targets. In the SRBs, clear learning intentions and engaging activities help many pupils make beneficial progress, although not all activities are adapted well enough to meet individual needs.

Leaders are beginning to evaluate the school's strengths and areas for improvement more sharply. While they implement improvement strategies thoughtfully, for instance to develop pupils' reading skills, these do not always result in effective enough change.

Leaders monitor attendance carefully and have begun to reduce pupils' absences. However, the proportion of pupils who are persistently absent remains too high. Governors support the school diligently, but do not always challenge the school strongly on the progress that pupils make in their learning.

Recommendations

We have made four recommendations to help the school continue to improve:

- R1 Ensure that all teachers support and challenge pupils appropriately so that they make effective progress in developing their literacy and numeracy skills
- R2 Improve self-evaluation so that it focuses closely on identifying the impact of improvement strategies and professional learning on the quality of teaching and pupils' progress
- R3 Reduce the level of persistent absentees
- R4 Ensure that the school's curriculum provides pupils with meaningful learning experiences that enable them to make consistent and systematic progress

What happens next

In accordance with the Education Act 2005, HMCI is of the opinion that this school is in need of significant improvement. The school will draw up an action plan to show how it is going to address the recommendations. Estyn will monitor the school's progress about 12 months after the publication of this report.

Main findings

In a relatively short time, the headteacher has worked effectively with staff and parents to develop an inclusive ethos so that pupils feel valued and share a sense of belonging to St James Primary School. She has worked with the school community to develop and share a clear vision, focused on ensuring that pupils benefit from engaging learning and teaching, where all can 'bloom'. As a result, there is a growing sense of collaboration and teamwork amongst most staff, along with a commitment to provide the best that they can for pupils.

Leaders set and communicate high expectations for themselves, staff and pupils. They manage staff performance carefully and address underperformance appropriately. They provide all staff, including those in the specialist resource bases (SRBs), with a purposeful range of professional learning focused on improving teaching and learning. For example, professional learning focused on improving the learning environment has a noticeable impact on making classrooms more engaging.

However, the impact of professional learning is too variable. As a result, in around half of lessons teachers do not provide purposeful enough learning experiences to help all pupils to make beneficial progress.

The school is in the early stages of embedding a curriculum that reflects the needs of its community. There are a suitable range of interesting learning activities that capture pupils' imagination. For example, younger pupils enjoy learning about lifecycles by watching caterpillars transform into butterflies. The curriculum provides worthwhile opportunities for pupils to develop their creative skills. For example, older pupils create an imaginative jingle for a radio advert. Leaders have created planning that supports teachers to develop pupils' skills and understanding progressively. However, these are recent changes, and inconsistencies in teachers' understanding of the curriculum and in the quality of learning experiences mean that this work has a limited impact on pupils' progress.

Leaders are beginning to evaluate the school's strengths and areas that require improvement appropriately. Nevertheless, at present, they do not focus sharply enough on identifying the impact of professional learning and improvement strategies on the quality of teaching and on pupils' progress. Where leaders identify areas that need improvement, such as pupils' reading skills, they set in place suitable strategies to bring about change. However, improvement strategies do not always have a strong enough impact on the progress that pupils make. Leaders allocate grant funding appropriately to focus on supporting the progress and the well-being of identified pupils.

Staff consider pupils' moral and social development well. They teach pupils sensitively about important values, such as respect and tolerance, and how to maintain healthy relationships. As a result, nearly all pupils behave well. Teachers provide regular opportunities for pupils to learn to respect different identities, cultures and religions. For example, older pupils develop a beneficial understanding of the experiences of people living under apartheid. Staff model kind and respectful relationships and encourage pupils to share their views sensitively. As a result, nearly all pupils feel safe in school and are confident that adults will listen to them and support them appropriately. Staff in the SRBs create a welcoming, calm environment that ensures that most pupils are settled, happy and secure.

Many pupils enter the school with language and social skills that are below those expected for their age. Inconsistencies in the quality of teaching and in the success of learning experiences mean that, over time, pupils' progress is too variable, including the progress of pupils from low-income households. Many pupils with additional learning needs (ALN) and those in the SRBs make beneficial progress towards their individual targets.

Staff are positive language role models and use a range of purposeful learning strategies to enable many pupils to develop their oracy skills well. By Year 6, most pupils listen well and use a suitably wide vocabulary to express their ideas clearly, for instance when discussing whether a person's religion is a factor in sport. Although lacking confidence to speak without encouragement, many pupils develop their Welsh speaking skills appropriately. The school has introduced a structured system

for teaching pupils to read, and focused intervention groups are having a positive impact on the reading skills of groups of older pupils who need extra support. However, the quality of the teaching of reading varies too much and a majority of pupils' reading skills do not develop strongly enough.

There are suitable opportunities for pupils to write for a range of purposes. The youngest pupils develop their early writing skills well through a wide range of suitable provision, such as mark-making by using chalks on the playground. By Year 6, a majority of pupils write suitably for a range of purposes and develop their skills appropriately, for example to include interesting description in their writing. However, across the school, around half of pupils do not write well enough in a wide enough range of styles. They do not spell or use punctuation accurately enough.

A majority of pupils develop an appropriate understanding of number skills, such as adding and multiplying. For example, in Reception, pupils count objects to 20 accurately in their play activities, and by Year 6 a majority have a good understanding of multiplication tables. In the older classes, a majority of pupils are beginning to use and apply these skills confidently, for instance when considering data on how to reduce their carbon footprint. However, teachers do not plan learning that challenges or supports pupils at the right level often enough or give pupils sufficient opportunities to apply their numeracy skills in other curriculum areas. As a result, a minority of pupils do not make strong enough progress or develop a broad enough range of mathematical knowledge and understanding.

Where teaching is effective, a majority of pupils make good progress in their lessons. For example, in the youngest and oldest classes many lessons have a clear purpose and build thoughtfully on previous learning. In a minority of lessons, teachers question pupils well to help identify where they need further support. In the best instances they clarify misconceptions carefully. However, in a majority of lessons, teachers do not provide pupils with helpful enough feedback on how and what to improve. They do not match the pace and challenge of learning tasks to pupils' ability closely enough. As a result, pupils make too little progress, and in a few cases lose focus and interest. In a minority of younger classes, teachers do not provide learning that reflects the principles of foundation learning.

In the SRBs, many learning experiences have clear learning intentions and engage pupils well. Older pupils enjoy valuable first-hand learning experiences on weekly trips to a range of places that support their learning. For example, they visit Roath Park and Brecon canal when learning about boats. However, teachers do not always adapt activities effectively enough in response to pupils' individual needs. The resources and activities that pupils access independently do not always reflect the interests or needs of the pupils well enough. As a result, a minority do not make strong enough progress.

Leaders have developed detailed systems to identify pupils who need extra support and ensure that they receive timely and appropriate help. Leaders have shared effective strategies with all staff to help them support pupils with ALN with their learning. Where appropriate, they communicate beneficially with a range of outside agencies to help support pupils. As a result, many make effective progress towards

their individual targets. The school supports the social, emotional health and well-being of pupils successfully. Teachers use a range of strategies, such as regular 'check-ins', to ensure that pupils' individual needs are identified and met. The school makes imaginative and beneficial use of rooms, such as 'the bistro', where pupils from the SRB develop their independence successfully. The sensory room provides a calm atmosphere where pupils who have difficulty managing their emotions have the time and resources to prepare themselves appropriately for learning. Across the school, support assistants provide effective emotional support for pupils and help improve their literacy and numeracy skills through specific interventions. However, a minority of pupils do not always engage purposefully enough in learning activities in classes.

Leaders monitor the attendance of groups of pupils carefully. They work well with external partners to address absence from school and have made improvements in pupils' attendance. However, the proportion of pupils who are persistently absent remains too high.

Governors work diligently in support of the school. The headteacher works with them closely and provides them with a range of useful information. They have a good understanding of the community they serve and of the issues facing the school, such as pupils' attendance. They have begun to gather more first-hand evidence about the quality of learning and teaching at the school. However, at present their understanding of the progress that pupils make is limited and they do not challenge the school well enough about this element of its work.

Additional information

The school's arrangements for safeguarding pupils do not give any cause for concern.

The school has appropriate arrangements for promoting healthy eating and drinking.

Leaders and governors manage the school's finances appropriately, including use of the pupil development grant.

The school's arrangements for site security do not give any cause for concern.

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

Appendix 1: Numbers – quantities and proportions

The report makes references to different quantities and proportions e.g. '*most pupils...*' or '*very few pupils...*'. We use these terms to describe quantities and proportions as outlined in the table below:

nearly all =	with very few exceptions
most =	90% or more
many =	70% or more
a majority =	over 60%
half =	50%
around half =	close to 50%
a minority =	below 40%
few =	below 20%
very few =	less than 10%

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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