



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

A report on

St Mary's Roman Catholic - Brynmawr

**Catholic Road
Brynmawr
Blaenau Gwent
Brynmawr
NP23 4EF**

Date of inspection: June 2024

by

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

About St Mary's Roman Catholic - Brynmawr

Name of provider	St Mary's Roman Catholic - Brynmawr
Local authority	Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council
Language of the provider	English
Type of school	Primary
Religious character	Roman Catholic
Number of pupils on roll	235
Pupils of statutory school age	196
Number in nursery classes	39
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%)	24.2%
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%)	10.6%
Percentage of pupils who speak Welsh at home	0.0%
Percentage of pupils with English as an additional language	20.0%
Date of headteacher appointment	01/05/2024
Date of previous Estyn inspection (if applicable)	01/06/2016
Start date of inspection	10/06/2024

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

St Mary's RC Primary is a welcoming, caring school where staff work closely with one another to create a supportive learning community, sharing the school's vision to 'work, pray, share and learn together'. Leaders and staff develop positive relationships with pupils, parents, governors and the wider community, to create a successful learning environment where everyone feels valued, respected and included.

Across the school, staff work closely to support all members of the community, providing valuable support for new families, especially those new to the community and whose first language is not English. They provide beneficial opportunities for families to participate in school life, both during the school day and after-school events. The school places pupils' well-being at the heart of their work, and provides effectively for vulnerable pupils.

Across the school, many pupils, including those with additional learning needs (ALN), make suitable progress from their individual starting points. Most pupils develop their numeracy and reading skills well. They apply their numeracy skills to support their learning in other areas of the curriculum, for example when completing bar graphs to record distances travelled by athletes. Many pupils develop appropriate digital skills to produce presentations and create simple animations. However, pupils' oracy and writing skills are less developed and they do not have enough opportunities to build on their literacy skills progressively in their work across the curriculum.

Where teaching is effective, teachers use assessments appropriately to plan lessons that build on pupils' prior learning, and they ensure that there is suitable challenge for all pupils. However, in a minority of lessons, teachers over-direct learning, expectations are too low and there are limited opportunities for pupils to develop their independence.

Leaders are developing self-evaluation processes to evaluate and monitor the progress pupils make and these are beginning to have a positive impact, especially in reading. However, overall, leaders' use of self-evaluation and monitoring to support improvement planning is broad and lengthy and does not focus well enough on the most important areas to bring about improvements in the quality of teaching and learning.

Leaders work closely with the governing body to manage the school's budget appropriately and to ensure that safeguarding procedures are robust. The newly formed leadership team work well together and participate in joint monitoring activities to identify the school's improvement priorities. They liaise with teachers to strengthen their knowledge of recent reform, including ALN reform and Curriculum for Wales. Leaders establish effective relationships with other schools and this supports teachers' professional development, strengthening their knowledge and skills in relation to curriculum changes.

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Recommendations

- R1 Focus self-evaluation and improvement planning on the areas of school development most in need of improving
- R2 Address the inconsistencies in teaching to ensure that all pupils make the progress they should and develop as effective independent learners

What happens next

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

Main evaluation

Learning

Many pupils begin school with skills below those expected for their age. Most pupils, including those from low-income households and those with ALN, make good progress from their individual starting points.

Most pupils' speaking and listening skills develop appropriately. Younger pupils take turns, listen to each other and participate in simple conversations. As pupils move from Nursery to Year 2, they ask and answer questions with increasing confidence when discussing their learning. Most older pupils are beginning to work collaboratively, sharing ideas and listening to each other's viewpoints. However, pupils do not develop their talk for a wide enough range of purposes and this limits the progress they make.

Many pupils across the school develop their reading skills successfully. Younger pupils begin to build and blend sounds. By Year 2 pupils answer simple questions about what they read and make plausible attempts to read unfamiliar words. Older pupils read with confidence, expression and fluency. By Year 6, many pupils summarise the plot of a story accurately and talk about it with enthusiasm.

Younger pupils develop emergent writing skills appropriately. They begin to form letters correctly and spell simple words accurately. By Year 3, pupils begin to use the features of persuasive texts. For example, when creating leaflets about ocean pollution, they suggest catchy headings and include relevant information. A majority of pupils use description effectively when retelling a familiar story and apply their writing skills in their work topic work. For example, older pupils produce informative leaflets when learning about Patagonia. However, a minority of pupils do not develop their writing skills well enough, to build on their skills progressively. They do not have

sufficient opportunities to write independently and creatively and do not write for a range of different purposes.

Many pupils develop their mathematical skills appropriately. Younger pupils consider which numbers are odd or even and create clay flowers to demonstrate their understanding. By Year 2, pupils confidently count on in multiples of five beyond 100. They describe what makes a shape symmetrical and apply this knowledge when creating their own symmetrical art. Many older pupils develop their numeracy skills successfully. Pupils in Year 4 measure with accuracy and use tables correctly to record shadows during an investigation on light and dark.

Pupils' Welsh language skills are developing well. Many pupils demonstrate a positive attitude towards the Welsh language. For example, the youngest pupils greet each other with simple phrases and ask and answer basic questions. By Year 4, pupils engage enthusiastically in a range of Welsh language activities, asking and answering simple questions about their day. Across the school, pupils develop their Welsh skills in both formal and informal situations. For example, members of the Criw Cymraeg lead Welsh playground games for younger pupils and this helps develop their use of Welsh language during play activities.

Overall pupils' digital skills are developing suitably. Younger pupils begin to use digital devices, for example when finding and photographing coloured objects during a Welsh lesson. As they move through the school, a majority of pupils use a range of applications and programmes to support their learning in other areas of the curriculum. Older pupils create digital presentations demonstrating their understanding of the dangers of coal mining. They search, locate and select information from a range of sources. They develop their coding skills and learn how to animate objects as part of a project on Welsh myths and legends.

Many pupils develop their physical skills well. Most pupils in the younger classes develop their balance and control using bikes and balance vehicles. They use large outside construction materials such as crates and boards to build structures, including simple bridges and balances. By Year 2, many pupils develop their fine motor skills when using small items such as tweezers and pipettes to pick up small objects. Many older pupils continue to build on their physical skills successfully in lessons and after school clubs and enjoy taking part in competitive sports and residential trips.

Over time, many pupils develop their creative and artistic skills well, for a range of purposes. Younger pupils enjoy experimenting with colour to create paintings of the plants found in their outdoor learning areas. Many older pupils begin to add detail to their observational drawings and develop their use of tone and shade. Many pupils make good use of natural materials to create interesting collages using natural materials and older pupils design and make vehicles using recycled materials.

Well-being and attitudes to learning

Most pupils are polite and respectful towards staff, visitors and their peers. They know and demonstrate the values of the school to care, share and learn together.

They are proud of their school and value the support they receive from teachers. Most pupils feel safe and secure and know who to go to if they need help and support.

Many pupils value the diverse nature of their school and celebrate one another's differences. They demonstrate their curiosity when learning about different cultures and many older pupils understand the importance of equity and inclusion. They show respect for each other's beliefs and enjoy opportunities to talk about their own lifestyles, traditions and languages. The Rights Respecting Group implement a 'Monthly Matter' to promote children's rights, for example the right to live in a safe home and to be listened to. Nearly all pupils reflect on the school's daily mission and have opportunities to talk about how they put this into practice. They often put these missions into practice, for example to care for their friends and the environment.

Most older pupils participate in leadership groups and carry out their roles with commitment and enthusiasm. In these groups, they enjoy opportunities to make choices and decisions, discuss how their actions have an impact on the world around them, and consider how they can help people in need. For example, older pupils promote a 'Keep Brynmawr Tidy' project and carry out daily recycling collections. They organise second-hand uniform sales to support families and hold charity events to support children in need in other countries. The Friendship and Diversity Group organise and manage a 'buddy bench' to help pupils to develop friendships during break times.

Nearly all pupils behave well, both in lessons and during break times. They respect the school rules and promote these effectively when supporting playground activities. Nearly all pupils across the school have positive attitudes to learning. They engage in learning enthusiastically and settle quickly in lessons. Many pupils listen attentively and follow instructions to complete their work successfully. Many pupils are beginning to respond to the feedback they are given to express how challenged they feel or their enjoyment of an activity.

Most pupils understand the importance of eating healthily and taking regular physical exercise. Most pupils make good choices with their snacks and drinks, choosing fruit and water. Many pupils enjoy using the outdoor areas, during lessons and break-times and this helps them develop their physical skills throughout the day.

Most pupils develop their entrepreneurial and problem-solving skills well. When given the opportunity, they demonstrate increasing resilience and independence in challenging situations. For example, older pupils enjoy finding solutions when giving moveable vehicles instructions to move around obstacles in the classroom. They identify problems and seek to find solutions successfully.

Teaching and learning experiences

The school is developing a meaningful curriculum to align with the principles of Curriculum for Wales, reflecting the school's local area and Welsh heritage. Many teachers plan a broad menu of experiences that enable pupils to develop a range of skills, including their artistic, creative and digital skills. For example, younger pupils

combine their creative and digital skills when using photographs and drawings to produce simple animations of the life cycle of a butterfly. Teachers make good use of outdoor learning areas to plan purposeful learning experiences for younger pupils. For example, they create a woodwork station for younger pupils to create wooden structures and designate spaces for pupils to develop their imagination when creating homes for mini-beasts.

Teachers plan a range of suitable school trips and visits that broaden pupils' experiences and support their learning. For example, younger pupils work with the local biodiversity officer to learn about birds and animals in their locality and older pupils enjoy visiting the Senedd to find out about Welsh Parliament.

Through themed weeks and events, teachers provide important opportunities for pupils to develop their understanding of diversity and equality. They use their local community effectively to celebrate the many cultures that make up the school, for example by providing regular opportunities for pupils to enjoy traditional food from other countries and to celebrate festivals such as Diwali.

Teachers plan a range of valuable opportunities for pupils to develop their Welsh language skills as well as the culture and heritage of Wales. They successfully create opportunities for pupils to develop their skills both in lessons and in informal situations. For example, the Criw Cymraeg lead playground games through the medium of Welsh. Many teachers make effective use of learning environments to display Welsh vocabulary and phrases, and this helps pupils when asking and answering questions.

Teachers provide worthwhile opportunities for pupils to develop their physical skills. They arrange regular opportunities for pupils to engage in a range of sporting events and organise a sports week to promote physical development. They partner with local clubs to provide taster sessions such as skateboarding, bowls and karate and provide after-school clubs to support pupils' engagement in play activities. These sessions are particularly beneficial to pupils who have limited opportunities to engage in a range of different sport activities, beyond those on offer during the school day.

Where teaching is effective, teachers have good curriculum knowledge and use assessments effectively to plan learning experiences that build on pupils' existing skills and knowledge. In these lessons, teachers have high expectations and use effective questioning to support and challenge pupils. However, in a minority of lessons, teachers do not use assessment effectively to plan for pupils' next steps in learning. As a result, pupils do not always make the progress they should in oracy and writing. Overall, a majority of teachers over-direct learning and pupils do not develop suitably as independent learners.

Most teachers use a range of assessments to monitor pupils' progress effectively. They are beginning to provide pupils with regular feedback on their learning. Throughout the day, most teachers use feedback to praise efforts, to ensure pupils are on task and to address errors in work. Where feedback is most effective, teachers interact with pupils during lessons and use questioning effectively to help

pupils understand their learning. They encourage them to reflect on the skills they develop and to make improvements to their work. However, this work is at an early stage of development and pupils do not always have a secure enough understanding of what they have done well and what they need to do to improve their work.

The school plans effectively to develop pupils' reading skills and to promote a love of reading. However, there are too few opportunities for pupils to develop their talk for a wide enough range of purposes. They do not have regular opportunities to edit and redraft their work to improve it sufficiently and as a result pupils do not always make the progress they should.

Across the school, teachers plan a range of suitable activities to develop pupils' numeracy skills. They provide worthwhile practical activities for the youngest pupils to develop their understanding of numbers to 10. Older pupils select methods for calculating number problems and implement strategies to check their answers for accuracy. Many teachers provide purposeful activities for older pupils to develop their numeracy skills when solving worded number problems. For example, older pupils calculate percentages to find out discounts on holidays prices. Teachers provide a range of valuable opportunities for pupils to develop their understanding of measure and make effective use of the outdoors to support this. For example, younger pupils use hands to measure and compare the size of different objects in the play areas and older pupils use centimetres and metres to measure and compare each other's height.

Care, support and guidance

Leaders, teachers and support staff work effectively to create a caring, nurturing environment, where all members of the school community feel supported and included. This is a strength of the school. Pupils' well-being is an important priority for leaders and staff. Staff form strong working relationships with pupils. They treat pupils fairly, equally and with respect. Teachers and support staff provide beneficial support for pupils' emotional needs. As a result, most pupils feel happy and safe in school, and behave consistently well throughout the school day.

Teachers provide valuable support for pupils new to the community and those with English as an additional language. They plan regular opportunities for new families to engage in school life and support families when working with other professionals and agencies. For example, the school works closely with other agencies to share information about health and community links and approaches to supporting reading at home.

The school has effective procedures in place to monitor the progress of pupils with ALN. Leaders work closely with teachers to identify pupils who may benefit from support and provide early intervention to support these pupils. They provide targeted support to develop pupils' learning and well-being needs. As a result, most pupils targeted for support and those with ALN make good progress.

The school provides worthwhile opportunities for all older pupils to join leadership groups including the school council, Planet Protectors and Criw Cymraeg, supporting

pupils to take on responsibilities and contribute to developing the school. Where pupils are most effective, they lead and act on the decisions they make. For example, the Planet Protectors secured a grant to improve shared grounds between the Church and school and work hard to maintain and develop the school grounds to benefit all pupils.

Teachers provide purposeful opportunities for pupils to find out about different religions and to celebrate the different cultures represented in school through whole-school culture days. Teachers provide valuable opportunities for pupils to learn about diversity and inclusion through the curriculum. For example, teachers provide opportunities for pupils to learn sign language and this helps develop pupils' understanding of how their actions can make a difference to others.

The school promotes healthy lifestyles appropriately. For example, pupils learn about healthy foods and the importance of physical exercise. Teachers provide a range of opportunities for pupils to benefit from physical activities and team sports, including football and netball. They create soft seating areas in classrooms where pupils can reflect on their emotions. They provide appreciation boards to encourage pupils to write positive comments about one another. These strategies effectively support pupils to manage their emotions and behaviour.

The school's arrangements to keep all pupils safe are effective and give no cause for concern. Leaders work closely with the local authority and neighbouring church to ensure the school site is a safe place for learning. Teachers develop pupils' understanding of internet safety and the importance of not sharing passwords to others.

Leaders monitor pupils' attendance closely. They identify pupils who do not attend school regularly and work closely with families to promote the importance of attending school regularly and arriving on time. Teachers use reward systems to promote the importance of regular attendance.

Leadership and management

Leaders at St Mary's RC Primary have created a welcoming and caring school where everyone feels valued and listened to. They have established a vision for the school focused on 'caring, sharing and working together'. Leaders work closely with staff, pupils and their families to offer support, and liaise with outside agencies to access further support. As a result, many pupils and their families develop a strong sense of belonging to the school.

Leaders and staff develop positive relationships with pupils, parents and the wider community. They show respect, care and support for one another. Leaders provide a range of worthwhile opportunities for families to engage in school life and are especially supportive of families who are new to the school. They organise coffee mornings to welcome new families and arrange for supporting agencies to assist families, for example when completing grant applications for school uniform. Leaders organise collaborative events that enable parents and children to learn alongside each other and to showcase their work. Leaders also create opportunities for families

to engage in activities beyond the school day and invite them to support fundraising events.

Leaders work closely with the secondary schools to support pupils when they transition from Year 6 to Year 7. There are purposeful opportunities for older pupils to visit secondary schools, participate in lessons and take part in extra-curricular events. For example, pupils in Year 6 participate in the Bryn Trek and use this opportunity to get to know pupils from other primary schools. Leaders develop beneficial links with the local pre-school and this helps teachers get to know families and their children before they start nursery.

Leaders develop a strong sense of commitment when driving school improvement. They are ambitious and share a collective desire to broaden learning experience for all pupils. Teachers work successfully with external providers to provide a range of musical, creative and sporting opportunities and these enrich the curriculum available.

Across the school, leaders and staff are committed to improving pupils' Welsh language development and their knowledge of Welsh culture. Leaders provide valuable staff development to improve their expertise and this supports pupils' progress effectively.

Leaders and governors gather a wide range of evidence to identify the school's strengths and areas for development. For example, leaders work successfully with advisors to review the school's provision for ALN to ensure that it meets the requirements of ALN reform. Leaders align professional development opportunities to school priorities and enable staff to share effective practice. However, the school's evaluation of its work does not focus well enough on pupils' outcomes. Overall, leaders plan to address too many areas for improvement and, as a result, do not focus closely enough on the aspects most in need of improvement such as inconsistencies in the quality of teaching.

Governors know the school well and discharge their roles and responsibilities effectively. They have a clear understanding of the school's strengths and areas for development and are involved in monitoring activities that help them develop an understanding of the school's provision and improvement work. This helps governors contribute appropriately, for example when evaluating the school's progress towards implementing Curriculum for Wales.

Leaders and governors manage and monitor the school budget effectively. They review spending and ensure that grant funding contributes appropriately to improving pupils' outcomes. Leaders and governors ensure that there are clear systems in place for safeguarding pupils and staff, and that there are appropriate arrangements to promote healthy eating and drinking.

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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