



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

A report on

**Blaendulais Primary School
Seven Sisters
Neath
Neath
SA10 9AA**

Date of inspection: November 2018

by

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

About Blaendulais Primary School

Blaendulais Primary School is in Seven Sisters, near Neath, in the local authority of Neath Port Talbot. The school has around 115 pupils on roll, aged from 3 to 11, including 15 nursery children who attend part-time. There are four mixed-age classes in the school. The school also has a resourced provision comprising two classes for up to 17 pupils with additional learning needs, aged between 3 and 11 years. Many of these pupils travel from outside the school's normal catchment area.

The 3-year rolling average of pupils who are eligible for free school meals is 41%. This is well above the national average of 18%. Around six per cent of pupils are in the care of the local authority. Nearly all pupils are of white British ethnicity. A very few pupils speak Welsh at home. The school identifies around 38% of pupils with additional learning needs. This is much higher than the national average of 21%. All pupils in the resourced provision have statements of special educational need.

The headteacher took up his post in January 2017. The school's last inspection was in May 2012.

Further information is available from the Welsh Government My Local School website at the link below.
<http://mylocalschool.wales.gov.uk/Schools/SchoolSearch?lang=en>

Summary

The school is a safe learning environment where pupils feel happy and well cared for. The behaviour of nearly all pupils is good and they work hard and enjoy their learning. During their time at school, nearly all pupils, including those in the learning resource centre, develop their literacy, numeracy and information and technology (ICT) skills well. They make strong progress towards their individual targets. Most teachers have high expectations and provide well for pupils' needs and interests. The curriculum is broad, balanced and engages pupils' curiosity well. Arrangements for supporting pupils with additional learning needs are a strength of the school. The headteacher provides effective leadership and has a clear strategic vision for the future of the school. He is thorough in his research as to how the school operates and how it can improve. He is supported well by a strong team of teachers and teaching assistants and by a diligent governing body.

Inspection area	Judgement
Standards	Good
Wellbeing and attitudes to learning	Good
Teaching and learning experiences	Good
Care, support and guidance	Good
Leadership and management	Good

Recommendations

- R1 Improve the accuracy of pupils' reading and handwriting in key stage 2
- R2 Ensure that all pupils' basic numeracy skills are more secure in key stage 2
- R3 Improve the effectiveness of teachers' written feedback, so that pupils know how to improve their work

What happens next

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

Main findings

Standards: Good

Most pupils enter the school with levels of skills, knowledge and understanding that are below those expected of pupils of that age. While at school, nearly all make good progress from their individual starting points. Pupils in the learning support centre classes respond well to the care and support they receive and make good progress towards their individual targets.

Many pupils in the foundation phase listen well for short periods, but find maintaining concentration difficult and often interrupt when others are speaking. Many younger pupils in the foundation phase have poorly-developed speech. However, many make good progress. By the end of the foundation phase, they speak clearly with a developing vocabulary.

In the foundation phase, many make strong progress in reading. They develop a secure understanding of letters and sounds that enables them to read unfamiliar words and they use picture cues appropriately to aid their understanding of what they have read. A majority in key stage 2 read aloud accurately, although a minority of pupils read hesitantly, with little expression and with limited understanding. Most have the necessary skills to enable them to sound out unfamiliar words and to deduce their meaning from their context.

Many pupils in the foundation phase make good progress in writing. In the early years class, they develop mark-making skills well and begin to recognise and copy letters and words. In Year 1 and Year 2, many pupils write in sentences that have capital letters and full stops. They spell familiar words correctly and use their knowledge of letters and sounds to make sensible attempts at more difficult words. They write for different purposes, such as recounting a visit to Craig y Nos park and writing imaginative accounts of being firefighters.

In key stage 2, the quality of pupils' handwriting is inconsistent. Most write legibly, but too many form letters irregularly and do not set out their work neatly. Most pupils write frequently to practise aspects of grammar and write independently for a range of purposes. For example, they research and plan interesting biographies of Roald Dahl and Alexander Fleming. Pupils who are more able show maturity and sensitivity when writing poems about Remembrance Day.

Most pupils in the foundation phase make good progress in developing their numeracy skills. They measure and weigh using standard units and apply this skill to writing instructions for making royal wedding cakes. They work out the cost of ingredients and calculate change from £10.00 accurately.

In key stage 2, a majority of pupils make suitable progress in acquiring skills in a range of aspects of mathematics and perform basic operations accurately. However, a minority of pupils' basic numeracy skills are insecure. Most apply their numeracy skills appropriately in other areas of the curriculum. For example, pupils in Year 6 calculate the distance travelled by HMS Beagle and use fractions to compare the sizes of Galapagos finches.

Many pupils in the foundation phase make good progress in learning the Welsh vocabulary for colours, foods and the weather. They write sentences to describe themselves and where they live. Most pupils in key stage 2 have a positive attitude towards the language and are eager to greet visitors in Welsh. They follow instructions appropriately, but rarely respond in Welsh unless prompted. Most older pupils read simple Welsh books accurately and use picture cues to aid their understanding. In Year 6, many pupils hold simple conversations with one another, using sentence patterns that they have rehearsed in Welsh lessons. Many write short Welsh sentences about their hobbies. Older pupils generally spell words correctly when they write pen portraits of Welsh celebrities, such as Gareth Bale.

In the foundation phase, many pupils make good progress in information and communication technology (ICT). They develop suitable keyboard skills when using word-processing software and use a paint package to draw Christmas scenes. Many pupils in key stage 2 develop their ICT skills well. They use a range of applications to present their ideas in interesting ways, such as when they produce audio visual slide presentations about Egyptian pharaohs. Older pupils in key stage 2 use ICT confidently to draw historical time lines and to produce pie charts and line graphs to compare the nutritional values of various foods.

Wellbeing and attitudes to learning: Good

Nearly all pupils feel safe at school and know where to turn if they are worried or upset. They are confident that any problem will be dealt with fairly by staff. In most classes, pupils settle quickly to their work and the majority work hard and enjoy lessons. Many have secure recall of previous learning and show appropriate levels of concentration, persevering when faced with challenges, such as when performing calculations that involve many steps.

Nearly all pupils are polite and sociable. Most behave well in lessons and around the school. They co-operate well with others at work and play and have a caring attitude towards pupils in the learning support centre. They know the school rules and explain why these are important in ensuring the safety and wellbeing of all pupils. Most pupils have a sound awareness of how to stay safe, including when on the internet.

Across the school, many pupils contribute actively to decisions about what they would like to study in their class topics. Many older pupils take on additional responsibilities enthusiastically. For example, they support classmates in their roles as lead learners and play heroes. However, the roles of more formal pupil voice groups, such as the school council, are underdeveloped.

Nearly all pupils understand the importance of eating a well-balanced diet and taking regular exercise. Many pupils from key stage 2 explain clearly about the nutritional values of food and what constitutes healthy meals, although the contents of a minority of packed lunches contain too many sugary snacks. Most pupils show positive attitudes to exercise when attending sports activities, such as judo. At playtimes, many pupils use the new adventure wall energetically.

Rates of attendance are consistently good, placing the school in the top 25% when compared with similar schools.

Teaching and learning experiences: Good

All teachers build positive relationships with pupils and address their emotional needs well. Teachers know their pupils well and have clear strategies in place to enable pupils to succeed. They identify the needs of pupils well and provide positive nurturing environments that build pupils' confidence and self-esteem successfully. Teachers use an effective range of techniques to promote positive behaviour in most, but not all, classes.

Many teachers use a suitable range of teaching strategies to engage pupils. In many lessons, teachers share learning objectives and success criteria with pupils which enables them to achieve well. In these lessons, teachers use skilful questioning to extend pupils' learning. They provide purposeful opportunities to model expected standards of work. Many teachers pace lessons well and provide useful support to pupils throughout the lesson. In a few lessons, teaching is less effective because pupils are over-directed, and teachers' expectations of what pupils can achieve are too low. Consequently, in a few cases, pupils lack enthusiasm for their learning and disengage from their work.

All teachers plan effectively to provide pupils with relevant learning experiences within a broad and balanced curriculum. Teachers' long-term planning ensures there is appropriate coverage of the national curriculum. They plan regular trips to enhance pupils' learning experiences linked to topics. For example, when studying the Egyptians, older pupils visited the Egyptian Centre at Swansea University.

The quality of teachers' short-term planning varies across the school and does not always provide opportunities for pupils to develop their creative or independent learning enough. However, staff are beginning to adapt their planning to reflect the forthcoming new curriculum for Wales.

Teachers in the early years provide many valuable opportunities for pupils to develop their learning through imaginative play. Teachers enhance and develop learning areas extremely well and, as a result, pupils develop their literacy, numeracy, creative and physical skills successfully. In these classes, staff make very good use of outdoor learning areas and these are particularly effective when developing pupils' literacy and numeracy skills. For example, pupils in the early years access the literacy shed independently to choose writing implements to create designs and to mark-make.

The school has incorporated the literacy and numeracy framework suitably into its plans. There are sufficient opportunities to develop pupils' literacy and numeracy skills across the curriculum. For example, pupils in the foundation phase develop their numeracy skills effectively when counting objects to balance moon rocks and to make simple comparisons of weight. In key stage two, pupils contribute purposefully to group discussions when creating presentations about Charles Darwin.

Teachers' plans to develop pupils' ICT skills are progressing steadily. Most teachers in key stage 2 provide purposeful opportunities for pupils to use and apply their ICT skills to support learning across the curriculum. For example, they encourage older pupils to research information from websites and to discuss whether various sources are reliable.

Many teachers use a range of assessments effectively to inform their planning for pupils' next steps in learning. Many teachers adapt activities well to meet the needs of different abilities within the class. They share learner outcomes and use this evidence to assess pupil progress. Leaders ensure assessments are accurate and reliable.

Teachers' verbal and written feedback to pupils varies across the school. Pupils do not always have a clear understanding of the written feedback in their books and, as a result, do not always know what they need to do to improve their work. There are limited opportunities for pupils to redraft or edit their work. However, older pupils are beginning to review and self-assess their work and are able to identify what they need to do to improve.

The school effectively promotes the history and heritage of Wales through its annual Eisteddfod and trips to local museums. Most teachers use Welsh regularly during lessons and encourage pupils to respond in Welsh. However, there is less emphasis on the use of Welsh outside of designated Welsh lessons.

Care, support and guidance: Good

The school provides a safe, nurturing environment for pupils. It is a caring community and makes effective arrangements to support pupils' wellbeing. The school's arrangements for safeguarding pupils meet requirements and give no cause for concern.

Leaders prioritise the social and emotional needs of pupils well and implement beneficial strategies to support them. The school-based nurture class provides valuable support and helps to build pupils' self-esteem and confidence. This provision delivers a successful wellbeing programme enabling pupils to reintegrate into mainstream classes effectively.

The provision for pupils who require additional support is a strength of the school. Both additional learning needs co-ordinators have a clear strategic approach, plan relevant training for staff and have a shared vision to ensure all pupils with additional needs receive strong support.

There are robust systems to track and monitor the progress of pupils, particularly those with additional learning needs. Staff use a range of assessments to identify the needs of pupils and implement worthwhile interventions. Many of these interventions are beginning to have a positive impact on learners' outcomes.

The school has strong relationships with supporting agencies and liaises well with parents to encourage home-school working. They use information and recommendations from external agencies to develop individual education plans for pupils and they implement these effectively. Leaders track the progress of pupils with additional learning needs in relation to their targets and individual starting points. They use wellbeing assessments competently to identify and support vulnerable learners. They measure pupil progress in relation to their personal and social development and provide suitable learning interventions to meet their needs.

The school provides effective support to pupils in the learning support centre classes. They use one-page profiles competently to support learners and teachers plan effectively for pupils' integration and transition from class to class. Teachers in these classes provide valuable learning experiences that enable pupils to progress well.

Leaders work well to improve pupils' behaviour. Staff and pupils regularly refer to the school's code of conduct and this is having a positive impact on pupils' behaviour. Successful nurture provision and rewards systems also have a positive effect on the behaviour of the most challenging pupils. As a result of these effective strategies, many pupils behave well in lessons and only a very few pupils cause low levels of disruption. This is usually due to their limited concentration spans and staff intervene quickly and appropriately to address any issues that arise in lessons.

The school provides suitable opportunities for pupils to learn about substance misuse, sex and relationships and online safety through the school's personal and social education programme. For example, older pupils attend a skills fortnight and learn about internet safety, substance misuse and fire safety. The school makes appropriate arrangements to promote healthy eating and drinking. Pupils in the foundation phase participate in a programme to encourage dental hygiene. There are many opportunities to promote pupils' physical health through physical education lessons and after school clubs, including zumba and judo. Sports ambassadors and play heroes promote active play and lead play activities during break times.

The school provides worthwhile opportunities to develop pupils' understanding of spiritual and moral issues. Recently, pupil ambassadors have been appointed to raise awareness of the children's charter and use this approach to lead informative assemblies. Teachers promote pupils' cultural development well through a range of music, dance, and creative experiences. Each year, pupils have the opportunity to perform in concerts and pantomimes and the choir attends the local church to participate in Christmas concerts. There are frequent opportunities for pupils to interact with their local community. The mini-police work closely with the local community officer to improve the local area by reducing litter. Older pupils work with banks to develop their financial awareness, learning about profit and loss and savings.

The contribution of pupils to the life and work of the school is developing appropriately through a suitable range of organised groups. For example, the school council has recently raised money for the creation of an adventure wall on the key stage 2 playground.

Leadership and management: Good

The headteacher, along with the deputy headteacher, provides clear, purposeful and effective direction for the school. They promote continuous, sustainable improvements through regular joint planning meetings that motivate and develop staff. Leaders, staff and governors share a common commitment to meeting pupils' needs, ensuring their wellbeing and securing school improvement. They demonstrate positive professional values and behaviours, with high expectations of themselves, colleagues and pupils.

The headteacher implements a reflective culture in which he and others analyse aspects of school performance. For example, the tracking of pupils' reading ages showed that steady improvement stalled in Year 4. When research showed that this coincided with pupils' leaving the formal reading scheme and choosing their own books, the school successfully improved pupils' access to suitable reading materials.

All leaders contribute to school improvement priorities as part of a robust annual programme of monitoring and review activities. All staff understand the part they play in school improvement. They work collaboratively and contribute to improving pupils' standards, wellbeing and social skills well. Staff meetings focus clearly on school improvement priorities. Staff monitor standards, evaluate provision, and track pupils' progress appropriately. Meetings also deal with staff development opportunities to support curriculum reform. This gives a clear focus for all staff and contributes to effective teamwork. The school has responded well to national priorities in literacy and numeracy and it is reviewing its provision for the curriculum appropriately in the light of national developments.

The school has effective performance management procedures for teachers and support staff. The objectives set for staff link well to the school's improvement priorities. Leaders provide significant opportunities for all staff to support their own professional learning and to increase their professional skills. For example, staff have attended training on additional learning needs for early years provision. This has led to a pilot project to record pupil performance, progress and next steps for development in all areas of learning. Staff produce an individual learning journey log for every early years pupil each term. This has proved to be a valuable tool for staff and engages and informs parents of their child's progress well.

The school collaborates well with other schools to achieve improvements. For example, the co-ordinator for ICT attends cluster meetings to plan for the digital competence framework. This is leading to improved provision and raised standards of skills in literacy, numeracy and ICT.

The governing body fulfils its statutory requirements appropriately. It is familiar with the school's performance and school improvement priorities. Governors support the school and its leadership team well and offer constructive challenge in meetings. For example, they expect the school to support families of pupils who exhibit challenging behaviour by encouraging them to adopt similar strategies. A few governors visit the school regularly to work with pupils and meet with leaders to discuss their area of responsibility.

The school uses its delegated budget effectively. It provides an appropriate level of staffing and learning resources that supports the delivery of the curriculum well. It uses its pupil development grant suitably to employ teaching assistants to support the literacy and numeracy development of targeted pupils.

Copies of the report

Copies of this report are available from the school and from the Estyn website (www.estyn.gov.wales)

Estyn evaluates a provider's effectiveness using a four-point judgement scale:

Excellent	Very strong, sustained performance and practice
Good	Strong features, although minor aspects may require improvement
Adequate and needs improvement	Strengths outweigh weaknesses, but important aspects require improvement
Unsatisfactory and needs urgent improvement	Important weaknesses outweigh strengths

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 going to press. Any enquiries or comments regarding this document/publication should be addressed to:

Publication Section

Estyn

Anchor Court, Keen Road

Cardiff

CF24 5JW or by email to publications@estyn.gov.wales

This and other Estyn publications are available on our website: www.estyn.gov.wales

© Crown Copyright 2019: This report may be re used free of charge in any format or medium provided that it is re used accurately and not used in a misleading context. The material must be acknowledged as Crown copyright and the title of the report specified.

Publication date: 31/01/2019