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

A report on

Pontnewydd Primary School

Bryncelyn Road
Pontnewydd
Cwmbran
Torfaen
NP44 1JW

Date of inspection: February 2022

by

Estyn, Her Majesty's Inspectorate for Education

and Training in Wales

About Pontnewydd Primary School

Name of provider	Pontnewydd Primary & Nursery
Local authority	Torfaen
Language of the provider	English Medium
Type of school	Primary
Religious character	
Number of pupils on roll	412
Pupils of statutory school age	318
Number in nursery classes (if applicable)	57
Percentage of statutory school age 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 the primary sector is 21.3%)*	34.9%
Percentage of statutory school age pupils identified as having additional learning needs (a) (*The national percentage of pupils identified as having an additional learning need in the primary sector is 20.6%*)	19.5%
Percentage of statutory school age pupils who speak Welsh at home	*
Percentage of statutory school age pupils with English as an additional language	2.2%
Date of headteacher appointment	January 2008
Date of previous Estyn inspection (if applicable)	14-10-2014
Start date of inspection	
Additional information	

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

The pupils at Pontnewydd Primary enjoy coming to school and make good progress with their academic and social skills. There is a feeling of mutual trust and respect between the pupils and the staff. Pupils know that adults in the school care for them and that they can turn to them when they face challenges or have difficulties. Senior leaders have worked hard to create this ethos and it plays a key role in ensuring effective learning in the school.

The strong caring ethos and the sense of teamwork mean that the school was well placed to deal with the impact of the pandemic. Leaders adopted a more formal approach to teaching in the youngest classes to ensure that pupils, staff and the community stayed safe. Leaders now recognise a need to reconsider and re-establish effective provision for the youngest pupils and to provide more opportunities for them to collaborate, experiment and learn through experience.

Staff see school improvement as everyone's responsibility. Leaders ensure that a wide range of people, including staff, pupils, parents and governors, can express their opinions about the work of the school. Similarly, staff are clear about their role in delivering whole school improvements. The governing body plays an important part in the life of the school. Governors support and challenge senior leaders effectively. They have a wide range of knowledge and experience that helps them to carry out their roles effectively.

The school is generally good at identifying the areas of its work that are most effective and those aspects that need to be improved. For instance, the school's work to develop the quality of reading has been successful and led to improvements in its provision and the progress that pupils make. On a few occasions, the school's systems do not pick up all issues related to teaching, such as making sure that teachers have the skills to ensure that pupils have a secure understanding of mathematical concepts.

Recommendations

R1 Re-establish effective provision in the youngest classes

R2 Improve teachers' understanding of how to help pupils to consolidate mathematical concepts

R3 Improve pupils' understanding of how to use basic punctuation

What happens next

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

Main evaluation

Learning

In nearly all cases, pupils make good progress in their learning during their time at the school. Over a half of pupils start nursery with skills below those expected for their age. The school's tracking information shows that before the pandemic many pupils made effective progress during their early education. The pandemic has slowed this progress for a majority of pupils, particularly in the development of their mathematical skills.

Despite often low starting points and the negative impact of the pandemic, pupils in nursery and reception develop their communication skills well. They improve their vocabulary quickly and talk with confidence to adults and each other. Many older pupils speak clearly and confidently for a range of purposes, including providing clear explanations and lively presentations.

Nursery and reception pupils enjoy listening to stories and retelling them to their friends and adults. They begin to recognise and name a range of sounds and use this knowledge to start to read simple but stage-appropriate texts. Many older pupils speak enthusiastically about the school's provision for reading and how they enjoy completing the quizzes when they have finished a book. Pupils feel these help them to improve their comprehension skills. Many older pupils identify key themes in novels and poems and extract information to back up their opinions.

Younger pupils develop their fine motor skills appropriately and begin to use a suitable pencil grip. They start to form a few letters correctly and use their knowledge of sound-symbol relationships to help them read and write a few simple words. In reception, a majority of pupils identify the first and last sounds when writing words. More able pupils start to use middle sounds as well and put spaces between the words that they write. As pupils progress through the school, they draw on the rich vocabulary they have been taught and use this in their written work. Many use adjectives and writing conventions, such as similes, to make their writing lively, interesting and suitable to the audience. Although pupils' work is usually well constructed, many pupils, even those who are older, struggle to use basic sentence punctuation and grammar accurately. This means that their writing can become confused, particularly when read aloud.

Many reception pupils recognise numbers to 10 and more able pupils confidently say which numbers are one more or one less than numbers up to 20. Overall, many younger pupils have gaps in their mathematical knowledge and understanding. For example, they are not sure which numbers add up to 10 or how to break down two- or three-digit numbers into their component parts. This is partly the result of missed learning opportunities during the pandemic, but staff also need to develop a better understanding of how to help pupils embed mathematical concepts. Higher up the school, many pupils decide how to solve numerical and word problems, choosing from a range of familiar strategies and often explaining in detail the reasons behind their choices.

Over the course of the pandemic, at home and in school, most pupils developed their digital skills well. They now apply those skills in a range of creative contexts to support their wider learning. For example, in Year 5, pupils used their digital and creative design skills to develop an app based around a futuristic virtual city.

The development of pupils' Welsh language skills has also been hampered by missed learning opportunities arising from the pandemic. Younger pupils use simple greetings and phrases, and older pupils communicate simple information about themselves, sometimes using the past tense, but these skills are not as advanced as might be expected for their stage of development. Despite this, pupils benefit from many adults in the school using Welsh frequently and confidently as part of their lesson delivery. As a result, most pupils understand more Welsh than they can speak.

When the opportunity arises, pupils enjoy using their creative and artistic skills. Year 2 have benefited greatly from being involved in an Arts Council Wales project. They used their artistic skills to create glow-in-the-dark puppets and use these to act out the imaginative stories they create. Generally, pupils apply their literacy and digital skills well in other areas of the curriculum. They use data handling skills appropriately but have less opportunity to apply other numeracy skills across all areas of learning.

Short, ten-week intervention programmes help many pupils to close some of the gaps in their learning, although many need to revisit these interventions more than once to help them learn basic skills they missed due to school closures. The school pays close attention to the progress of pupils at risk of underachieving as the result of deprivation. It delivers additional support to ensure that these pupils make suitable progress over time.

In the special needs resource base, most pupils make good progress in relation to their abilities and needs. Most develop relevant and important life skills, such as improving their communication skills, particularly in group situations. For example, pupils ask each other relevant questions about the local area when playing a game of 'Cwmbran-opoly'.

Well-being and attitudes to learning

There is a positive and respectful ethos throughout the school. Pupils are considerate and treat one another, staff and visitors with great respect. Most pupils listen maturely to the ideas and opinions of their peers, for example when discussing sensitive issues during their ROAR (rich oracy and literacy) sessions. Through the numerous opportunities to share their thoughts and feelings, the willingness of staff to listen and the use of the class worry monster, pupils feel they are supported well emotionally. Older pupils know that respecting the opinions and thoughts of others is an important life skill. From an early age, most pupils develop a clear understanding of why it is important to agree and follow shared rules. This is evident in the high standards of behaviour.

Most pupils show positive attitudes towards their work. They engage fully in their lessons and discuss their work on their topics, such as 'Planed Perffaith', with interest. Most pupils demonstrate enthusiasm and enjoyment in their learning. Older pupils are developing into confident and independent learners through, for example,

planning lessons of their choice and presenting them to the rest of the class. They make thoughtful decisions about their topics and activities and feel a sense of pride when their idea is taught to the rest of their class.

Through a variety of activities, such as those that raise funds for and awareness of local charities, pupils are developing well as ethical and informed citizens. They show a solid understanding of fairness and equality, for example demonstrating empathy towards homeless people by distributing personal cleanliness boxes. By studying famous people, such as Betty Campbell, pupils are aware of the diverse community of Wales. Pupils believe that everyone has the right to be happy and they show genuine concern about the wellbeing of others.

Pupils in leadership roles, such as the behaviour marshalls and the Heddlu Bach, are proud of their school and the difference they make to it. They understand the responsibility that goes with their roles and are keen to carry them out to the best of their ability. For example, the school council has a positive impact on furthering pupils' opportunities to develop their physical skills by ensuring that all equipment is safe during play and lunchtimes. Pupils understand the importance of regular exercise to achieve a healthy life and have a suitable knowledge of the importance of eating healthy snacks and how to make healthy choices relating to diet.

Most pupils show resilience when facing challenges and they overcome obstacles successfully. They have a thorough understanding of how to improve their work, and during their 'my independent time' they use a variety of self-help strategies effectively to do so. Most pupils persevere very well with their tasks. Year 6 pupils spend valuable time with Year 2, helping them with their outdoor learning tasks and developing sound friendships in the process. This has a positive effect on the younger pupils' confidence and older pupils' sense of responsibility.

Owing to the coronavirus pandemic, inspectors will not report pupils' rates of attendance during the academic years 2020-2021 and 2021-2022. Inspectors will, however, consider the school's/PRU's provision for monitoring and improving attendance as part of inspection area 4 (care, support and guidance).

Teaching and learning experiences

The school has worked well with parents, pupils, staff and governors to establish and share its vision for the curriculum. Staff have explored a range of approaches to the curriculum and monitored their impact carefully. They have reflected on their successes and refined their plans appropriately. For example, they surveyed pupils' views and then developed their planning for the autumn term to reflect pupils' request to learn more about how they can look after the environment. The curriculum provides useful opportunities to ensure that pupils develop a good understanding of the diverse nature of Wales and the wider world.

Following the easing of restrictions resulting from the pandemic, teachers have begun to re-establish a range of extracurricular activities and visitors to school. These enrich the school's curriculum well. The curriculum provides beneficial opportunities for pupils to develop their wellbeing and creativity, and to collaborate with others. Teachers use the school's extensive grounds to support the curriculum. Many younger pupils access outdoor learning daily, but the activities teachers plan

do not always make the most of the specific benefits that learning in an outdoor environment provides. Generally, staff are beginning to re-establish more appropriate provision for the youngest pupils following a more formal approach during the pandemic. This formality, while necessary to keep pupils, staff and the community safe, offers limited opportunities for pupils to be independent and learn through experimentation and curiosity.

Teachers plan a wide range of opportunities for pupils to apply their literacy and digital skills. For example, Year 6 pupils confidently produce presentations to share their learning about famous characters in history, such as Anne Frank. Teachers plan well to develop pupils' reading skills and older pupils use an online reading scheme effectively to assess their own progress. Teachers are good language role models in both English and Welsh. Occasionally, teachers' understanding of how to teach key concepts in mathematics in a stage appropriate way is not fully secure.

Teachers ensure that pupils have a clear understanding of what they are learning and why, and how to be successful with their tasks. They provide pupils with clear instructions that helps them to do their work confidently. All staff establish highly positive working relationships with pupils. This creates a calm working environment and ensures that pupils feel confident to ask questions of adults and request help with their learning.

Teachers' planning generally takes into account the needs of all learners. It builds on teachers' research to support the move to the Curriculum for Wales and ensures that the four purposes and areas of learning and experience are well considered. The school's work with the four purposes has ensured that pupils have a good understanding of what it means to be, for example, ambitious or creative. They are now in a good position to build on this strength to provide more opportunities for pupils to consider how they can develop these attributes in themselves. Leaders and teachers work effectively to ensure that planning builds pupils' skills and knowledge progressively. In a minority of lessons, the pace of the session is too slow and this means that pupils do not always have enough time to complete their work.

There is a consistent and effective approach to giving written feedback to pupils across the school. Staff provide useful opportunities for pupils to assess their own work and discuss their progress with their peers before receiving feedback from adults. Teachers have consistently high expectations of pupils and encourage them to take some responsibility for their learning. For example, there are termly opportunities for pupils to discuss their progress with teachers and the next steps in their learning. Recent initiatives have begun to improve staff understanding of progression steps in the Curriculum for Wales. This is helping to develop a shared understanding of progression across the school and to ensure that assessments are valid, accurate and reliable. Teachers and leaders use a variety of standardised tests to track progress effectively. This helps to inform next steps for teaching and learning.

Care, support and guidance

Staff and governors ensure that the school is a caring and nurturing community where pupils feel safe, secure and happy. They create an inclusive ethos with significant mutual respect and trust between staff and pupils. Teachers know their

pupils very well and provide worthwhile experiences to develop their understanding of spiritual, moral, social and cultural issues during classroom activities and through educational visits. The curriculum provides frequent opportunities for pupils to focus on important values, such as honesty, fairness and justice, for example, through pupils engaging in discussion work on the evils of transatlantic slavery.

Staff ensure that pupils understand and act with awareness and sensitivity to issues of equality and diversity. The school's learning experiences challenge a wide range of stereotypical behaviours. This is particularly true for older pupils who, as part of their work on diversity and equality, explore a range of related issues including those facing LGBTQ+ people. Staff ensure that learners successfully develop values of empathy, courage and compassion. For example, the intergenerational 'Project Connect' allows pupils and residents at a local care home to share their skills and talents and encourages a sense of mutual respect.

At the core of its curriculum, the school ensures that all pupils, especially the most vulnerable, develop a solid understanding of their identity, heritage and culture, and how they relate to the local community and the wider world.

Staff work hard to establish and support strong working relationships with parents. For example, they use family engagement projects over the school holidays and live online streaming of project days to engage parents in the learning experiences of pupils. This encourages parents to take an active role in their child's learning and development. In addition, staff lead useful online workshops to develop parents' capacity to support their children. These include sessions on how the school teaches phonics and reading.

Staff in the school's special needs resource base are deployed effectively to support pupils' learning and independence and work well to help pupils to regulate their emotions. Pupils from the special needs resource base are fully integrated into the school and receive the same opportunities as their peers. Staff ensure that the additional learning needs of pupils across the school are not a barrier to their participation in the school community or their progress.

Leaders and staff use pupil tracking information effectively to plan and provide support to address the needs of individuals and groups of pupils. This helps to ensure that pupils with educational, emotional, social or health needs receive the provision and intervention that suits them best. Confident and knowledgeable staff deliver a valuable range of intervention programmes to support the development of pupils' academic and emotional skills. However, targets in individual development plans are not always specific enough to address the identified needs of individual pupils.

The school's provision to support pupils' mental health and well-being is strong. Staff pay close attention to the feelings of pupils and plan effective approaches if they have concerns. For example, during the pandemic, regular staff check-ins with pupils proved valuable in ensuring that staff could promptly identify and respond to issues with pupils' well-being as they arose. The school's use of calm areas and worry monsters is well embedded. This helps pupils to talk about their feelings and use effective strategies to regulate their emotions. The nurturing ethos of the school extends to staff and parents. For example, weekly well-being breakfast mornings for

staff and regular coffee mornings for parents during the pandemic provided emotional support in challenging times. The use of chaplaincy support has been successful in supporting individual pupils to address their anxiety during the pandemic.

The school keeps good-quality records for attendance and absence from school and addresses persistent absenteeism well. Systems to support and challenge low attendance are effective and applied by leaders and staff consistently. The school works well with outside agencies to address issues of poor attendance. The school's arrangements for safeguarding pupils meet requirements and give no cause for concern.

Leadership and management

Senior leaders and governors at Pontnewydd Primary School provide clear strategic direction for the development of the school. They work successfully with parents, pupils and staff to set the school's vision, evaluate the quality of provision and plan and deliver improvements. The clear team ethos among the staff is a particular strength. This places the needs of pupils and an ongoing drive for improvement at the centre of the school's work.

The school has well-developed systems for evaluating the quality of its work and the standards achieved by pupils. One of the strengths of the school's approach is the wide range of staff involved in monitoring activities. This helps to ensure that all staff feel that they are part of the school improvement process. Similarly, the school is effective in gathering the opinions of a wide range of stakeholders. For example, leaders survey pupil and parental opinion effectively through the use of questionnaires. Senior leaders draw this together with a wide range of other information to inform annual self-evaluation days. These involve all staff and governors working collaboratively to review the school's self-evaluation report and identify areas of priority for the next year.

The school is developing a solid track record of improvement. For instance, its self-evaluation processes identified a need to improve reading skills of pupils across the school. In response, teachers researched effective ways to do this and implemented approaches that have significantly improved the standard of reading. The school is conscious of the nature of its community and the risk that many pupils will underachieve as a result of deprivation. To counter this, it has introduced a range of approaches that allow staff to track the progress of targeted pupils and implement appropriate interventions. Overall, self-evaluation processes identify appropriate areas for improvement. However, in a few cases, monitoring actives do not identify priorities well enough, for example in a few aspects of teaching.

The role of the governing body in supporting and challenging the work of the school is highly effective. Governors bring a wide range of knowledge, skills and experience, which they use well to support the school. For example, one governor provided chaplaincy support to pupils and staff as they dealt with the impact of the pandemic. As a result of frequent engagement with staff through their link governor work and regular visits to the school, governors have a clear understanding of the quality of provision and the challenges that the school faces. They support the school to manage and deploy its resources effectively, including the use of the pupil development grant. They work with leaders to ensure that suitable policies and

procedures are in in place to promote the importance of healthy eating and drinking among pupils.

Leaders place a high priority on developing staff's professional skills. They link this well to the school's improvement priorities and the outcomes of evaluation activities. A notable strength is the school's recent engagement in research projects linked to the implementation of the Curriculum for Wales. By working with staff from Cardiff University, leaders have ensured that teachers have a sound understanding of how to carry out action research. This is leading to improvements in areas such as pupils' ability to take managed risks and solve problems. Staff are confident in sharing their practice within the school and across the local cluster of schools. The school collaborates well with other local primary schools and the high school. For example, they are working together to develop a shared approach to teaching aspects of the Curriculum for Wales.

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

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