



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

**A report on**

**Birchgrove Primary School**

**Birchgrove Road  
Birchgrove  
Cardiff  
CF14 1RR**

**Date of inspection: February 2024**

**by**

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

## About Birchgrove Primary School

Name of provider	Birchgrove Primary School
Local authority	Cardiff Council
Language of the provider	English
Type of school	Primary
Religious character	*
Number of pupils on roll	401
Pupils of statutory school age	401
Number in nursery classes	
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%)	9.76%
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%)	4.3%
Percentage of pupils who speak Welsh at home	2.3%
Percentage of pupils with English as an additional language	16.4%
Date of headteacher appointment	01/09/2012
Date of previous Estyn inspection (if applicable)	01/06/2016
Start date of inspection	26/02/2024

Data reported is sourced from the latest available Pupil Level Annual School Census. These figures may be slightly different to those observed during the inspection.

Further information is available from the Welsh Government My Local School website: [mylocalschool.gov.wales](https://mylocalschool.gov.wales)

a. The term 'additional learning needs' is being used to describe those pupils on the SEN/ALN register of the school.

## Overview

Birchgrove Primary School is a happy and inclusive learning community. Pupils enjoy school and have a positive attitude towards their learning. Pupils understand the importance of good attendance and are punctual in the morning. The behaviour of nearly all pupils is excellent and leaders and other staff ensure a strong culture of care and understanding. Nearly all pupils develop and use their literacy, numeracy and digital skills well and apply these effectively and enthusiastically across a broad range of learning experiences.

Teachers plan a wide range of authentic and stimulating experiences for pupils as part of an engaging curriculum. This includes a wide choice of interesting extra-curricular activities and a variety of educational visits that enrich the curriculum. However, there are limited opportunities for pupils to develop their skills as independent learners and to engage in learning in the outdoors.

Most pupils have a good understanding of how to keep healthy and enjoy walking or cycling to school. Staff provide timely and skilful support for pupils with social and emotional difficulties and meet the needs of pupils with additional learning needs (ALN) well. Pupils take on a range of leadership roles and undertake them diligently. For example, the 'Digidudes' help to develop the digital skills of other pupils.

The headteacher provides strong leadership, and she is well supported by staff and governors. They share a clear vision for the school based on preparing pupils for their future lives and community focused learning. The governing body has a good understanding of the strengths of the school and works effectively with the headteacher, staff, pupils and parents to support ongoing improvement.

## Recommendations

- R1 Improve the provision for outdoor learning
- R2 Develop pupils' independent learning skills

## What happens next

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

## Main evaluation

### Learning

During their time in the school, most pupils, including those with additional learning needs and those for whom English is a second language, make good progress in their learning from their differing starting points.

Nearly all pupils interact confidently with adults and other pupils and talk enthusiastically about their school and their learning. Younger pupils listen attentively to stories and respond to questions enthusiastically. Most older pupils speak articulately, with confidence and use an increasingly adventurous choice of vocabulary in class discussions.

The reading skills of nearly all pupils develop well and there is a shared enjoyment of reading across the school. Many younger pupils recall stories they have read enthusiastically, retell key events from the plot, and describe its main characters. By Year 2, most pupils attempt to read unfamiliar words using a useful variety of strategies confidently. They discuss the books they read and explain why they enjoy them. Most older pupils read a wide variety of texts purposefully and use their reading skills well to support their learning.

Across the school, nearly all pupils make very good progress in their writing skills and apply these successfully across the curriculum. The youngest pupils develop their fine motor skills appropriately and start to form letters correctly. Most older pupils write purposefully in a range of genres and present their work effectively. For example, pupils in Year 4 write a creative recount of the digestion of a grain of rice. By the end of Year 6 most pupils often write effectively at length.

Most pupils develop a purposeful understanding of basic Welsh words and phrases. The youngest pupils identify colours and begin to learn the vocabulary needed to describe what they are wearing. Older pupils use a range of Welsh sentence starters successfully such as 'Dw i'n meddwl' or 'dysgais '. Most pupils' confidence in speaking Welsh outside of lessons is developing.

Nearly all pupils' mathematics and numeracy skills develop very well and they apply these confidently in various contexts. The younger pupils engage enthusiastically in practical activities that support the development of key vocabulary and number skills. By the end of Year 2, most have a secure understanding of appropriate number facts and use data handling skills successfully, for instance to construct a tally chart of their favourite Welsh food. Older pupils sustain progress well, carrying out a range of calculations confidently. Across the school, most pupils apply their skills effectively in other aspects of their learning. For example, Year 6 pupils use their understanding of money effectively to keep to a budget when planning a birthday party.

Nearly all pupils develop a good range of digital skills. Younger pupils use their digital skills well to create a 'Minibeast Madness' music video. In Years 3 and 4, pupils create digital music scores for the Eisteddfod and demonstrate a good awareness of musical elements. Older pupils use their digital skills purposefully to produce a range of animations and use multimedia software to create advertisements for an enterprise

project. Most pupils use their digital skills regularly to enhance their learning across other aspects of their work.

When given the opportunity, the youngest pupils show independence and creativity. For example, reception pupils make Welsh love spoons in the craft area and choose their own materials confidently. However, pupils have insufficient opportunities throughout the school to develop independent learning skills.

Most pupils make good progress in developing their physical skills. They quickly develop co-ordination and gross motor skills from an early age using the balance bikes. Most pupils develop a good range of creative skills and create pieces of artwork in the style of artists including Helen Elliott and Kyffin Williams. Most older pupils learn music vocabulary well and develop an understanding of musical elements using a range of instruments.

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

Nearly all pupils enjoy school and have a positive attitude to learning and their behaviour is excellent. They move calmly and in an orderly way between activities and to different areas of the school and are polite and well-mannered. For instance, they hold the door open for adults and greet visitors with a 'Shwmae'. Rates of attendance are high, and pupils engage with learning experiences enthusiastically.

Most pupils enjoy learning and engage purposefully in lessons. They talk confidently about their work and demonstrate resilience to overcome challenges. Younger pupils work well collaboratively to solve numeracy challenges and older pupils reflect on their learning and comment on how they can make it even better. Most pupils consider feedback from their teachers and peers and make suitable improvements to their work.

Nearly all pupils feel safe and know where to go if they are feeling anxious or upset. They have a secure understanding of how to use digital devices safely including when they work online. For example, pupils know the importance of not sharing passwords and usernames.

Most pupils have a secure understanding of the importance of eating healthy foods and drinking water regularly. Older learners explain why a balanced diet is important to maintain good health. Younger pupils enjoy eating vegetables and fruit for their morning snack and discuss how they can keep you healthy. Across the school pupils enjoy regular opportunities to be active during playtimes and lunchtimes. They understand the importance of regular exercise and how it can improve their well-being.

Most pupils understand the importance of caring for the environment in a sustainable way. Younger pupils learn about plastic free packaging and create reusable sandwich bags from beeswax. Older pupils explore how people can negatively affect the environment through actions such as deforestation. Pupils work with a local environmental organisation to create a 'Garden wall' of ivy at the front of the school and learn how it can reduce air borne pollution and attract pollinating insects.

Most pupils develop a good sense of empathy by supporting local and worldwide charities. Pupils in the school choir develop their sense of belonging in the community and perform at a nearby church and raise funds for a city hospice. Most older pupils explore values and beliefs in a thoughtful manner. They write an evocative poem called 'I am the Earth' and explore perspectives from different faiths.

Many pupils take advantage of the good range of extra-curricular clubs that the school provides. Younger learners develop their fine motor skills in a sewing club and create colourful bookmarks. Older pupils experiment with shape and structure when creating bridges from a range of materials in a science technology and engineering club.

Pupils develop their leaderships skills well through the involvement in the school's pupil groups and are proud of their achievements. Members of the Eco Committee check that pupils are using the recycling bins correctly and monitor energy usage by turning off lights and closing doors. The school's Criw Cymraeg promotes the Welsh language successfully.

### **Teaching and learning experiences**

Across the school, staff form positive working relationships with pupils based on mutual respect. They share a calm and consistent approach to promoting positive behaviour and, as a result, most pupils are ready to learn during lessons and other activities. The school's motto 'where every child is a star' reflects the ethos of the school in celebrating the successes and differences of every pupil.

The school has created a clear aim and vision for its curriculum. As a result, the curriculum is broad and balanced and successfully builds pupils' knowledge, experience and skills as they move through the school. Teachers plan a wide range of authentic and stimulating experiences for pupils that reflect their local area, Wales and the wider world. For example, pupils in Year 6 visit former military huts in a local park as part of their heroes and villains theme.

Teachers have good subject knowledge and understand how to plan for the progressive development of pupils' literacy, numeracy and digital skills. As a result, pupils make good progress in these skills and use them effectively across the curriculum. For example, pupils in Year 1 use their knowledge of adjectives to write imaginative descriptive sentences about Anansi the spider after listening to the Ghanaian folktale. The school's provision to develop pupils' mathematical and numeracy skills is effective and pupils make rapid progress as a result. Teachers create a learning environment where pupils use their digital skills regularly throughout the school day.

Provision to develop pupils' Welsh skills is suitable to meet the needs of most pupils. Many teachers across the school model Welsh phrases, instructions and sentences appropriately in classrooms and collective worship. Opportunities for pupils to use their Welsh skills in authentic contexts outside the classroom are developing suitably.

The school has an effective approach for developing pupils' personal and social skills to support their understanding of making healthy lifestyle choices, managing their emotions and supporting their well-being. There is a strong focus on pupils

developing an understanding of how to form and maintain safe and respectful relationships and to develop as resilient learners.

Throughout the school there is a calm, purposeful and orderly learning environment. Most staff make effective use of indoor spaces to engage pupils purposefully. However, a few of the school's outdoor areas are undeveloped and opportunities for many pupils to learn outdoors are limited.

Most teachers share clear learning objectives and what pupils need to do to achieve these. In the most successful practice, teachers co-construct success criteria with pupils which leads to a greater understanding of their learning. Across the school, teachers provide regular opportunities for pupils to discuss each other's work and how they can make improvements. For example, pupils in Year 3 evaluate their partner's different types of jumps during a gymnastics lesson. However, on occasions staff over direct pupils during activities and limit their range of resources. In addition, there are few opportunities for pupils to choose how and what they learn, and this means that their independent skills do not develop at the same rate as other skills.

The school enriches pupils' learning through a range of lunch and afterschool clubs, such as sewing, hockey and chess. Purposeful visits and use of visitors helps pupils learn about their locality and community. For example, a visit from a local member of the Senedd (MS) enables older pupils to learn about democracy and governance. Visits to a local retirement home builds pupils' personal and social skills and help bridge the generation gap. Pupils gain valuable experiences about the features of the world of work through strong links with local businesses. There are opportunities for older pupils to write application letters and participate in job related interviews, for example to apply for the residential trip to Spain.

Reports to parents and carers provide appropriate information on their child's progress and what pupils need to do to continue to improve.

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

The school has a strong identity and children are proud of being 'Birchgrove Stars'. There is a shared sense of belonging and this impacts positively on pupils' attendance and experiences of school. Staff build effective relationships with pupils, parents, and carers. The school's inclusive and welcoming ethos means that new pupils settle well into school life.

Staff identify pupils' additional learning and social and emotional needs promptly. Teachers and support staff work effectively with the Additional Learning Needs co-ordinator (ALNCo) to plan valuable provision for identified pupils. The ALNCo has effective relationships with external agencies and colleagues from other schools that support the development of the school's own provision. She monitors the impact of interventions and analyses the progress made by pupils carefully. Staff liaise effectively with pupils and their families to create individual learning plans that include beneficial actions to ensure pupils' well-being and progress, for example using 'daily check ins' to support anxious pupils to share their emotions with staff. Nearly all pupils with additional learning needs make good progress from their different starting points.

The school has good provision for supporting children's social and emotional well-being. Teachers track pupils' well-being robustly and plan support if required. Experienced staff work effectively with identified pupils to improve their well-being and manage their emotions. Nearly all pupils feel safe in school and feel that staff support them well if they have worries or concerns.

The school supports the pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development well. Teachers provide valuable opportunities for pupils to learn about diversity through assemblies, lessons, and visits to different religious buildings. Older pupils use their creative skills to write and perform a catchy rap about the life of the Welsh headteacher, Betty Campbell. Staff provide pupils with purposeful opportunities to explore their understanding of children's rights. For instance, older pupils discuss the right that 'no child should be separated from their parents' in a history lesson about evacuees in World War Two.

The school enables pupils to take on roles of responsibility within the pupil leadership groups and there is good representation of ages and abilities. Members take their leadership roles seriously and work hard to improve aspects of school life. The effective 'Digidudes' run internet safety workshops and help younger learners code and programme robots.

The school promotes healthy living through a range of purposeful activities. Staff encourage pupils to walk and cycle and the school recently achieved national recognition in a 'walk to school' scheme. There is a good range of opportunities for pupils to develop their physical and competitive skills in local sports tournaments in rugby, cricket and athletics. Older pupils benefit from the varied physical challenges during their residential trip including abseiling and the mud assault course.

The school's arrangements for safeguarding are robust and give no cause for concern. Strategies to monitor and secure good rates of attendance are highly effective.

## **Leadership and management**

The headteacher is a strong leader who sets high expectations for herself and other staff. She places the well-being of the pupils and the staff at the centre of her work and ensures a strong culture of care and understanding. Leaders share a clear vision for the school that is understood well by pupils and staff. This vision focuses on the community learning together and preparing pupils for their future lives.

Staff have a clear understanding of their roles and responsibilities and have good opportunities to develop their leadership skills. School leaders use performance management processes successfully. Targets are linked appropriately to the school's priorities for improvement and to individual staff personal development goals. Leaders provide a suitable range of professional learning opportunities for staff that link to specific areas of the school's improvement plans effectively. Purposeful and sustained working with other schools in the cluster and external partners over recent years has proved to be a successful model of professional learning. For example, the development of the teaching of Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) has been successful in improving pupils' understanding of important issues, such as how to develop positive behaviours in relationships. However, professional learning has



not focused on developing pupils' independent skills and making good use of the schools' outdoor areas. This means that the outdoor environment and the role of adults as enablers of learning is at an early stage of development.

The headteacher provides detailed reports to governors that ensure they are well informed about aspect of school life, such as the development of teaching and learning. The governing body fulfils its role as a critical friend well. Governors are involved in self-evaluation activities regularly, such as the scrutiny of pupils' work and learning walks. They represent the local community well and aspire for pupils to feel a strong sense of belonging. Governors have a good understanding of national and local priorities, including the school's work to develop its own curriculum and the requirements of Welsh Government's ALN reform.

The school promotes a positive culture of safeguarding and ensures that school practices and policies meet requirements. Governors ensure that the school has appropriate arrangements to promote healthy eating and drinking.

Leaders monitor teaching and learning across the school regularly and provide suitable feedback for teaching staff. There are regular opportunities for all staff to contribute their ideas to whole-school evaluation and improvement processes, for example through questionnaires.

School leaders allocate financial resources appropriately to ensure that improvement priorities move forward effectively. The school uses specific grant funding successfully to ensure beneficial support for identified pupils. For example, leaders use the pupil development grant well to support pupils' well-being, literacy and numeracy skills. Leaders and staff pay due regard to the impact of poverty on attainment. They are mindful of the cost of visits arranged by the school and ensure that no pupils are excluded from these due to financial constraints.

Parents value the support the school provides for their children. Overall, they appreciate the timely communication from leaders and staff. They value the positive relationship they have with staff and describe how the school supports them to help their children at home, such as through workshops to develop early reading skills.

## Evidence base of the report

Before an inspection, inspectors:

- analyse the outcomes from the parent/carer and pupil questionnaires and consider the views of teachers and the governing body through their questionnaire responses

During an inspection, inspectors normally:

- hold a meeting with parents/carers to hear their views on the school and its effectiveness
- meet the headteacher, governors, senior and middle leaders (where appropriate) and individual teachers to evaluate the impact of the school's work
- meet pupils to discuss their work, to listen to them read and to gain their views about various aspects of their school
- meet groups of pupils in leadership roles, such as representatives from the school council and eco-committee
- visit a broad sample of classes, including learning support groups and undertake a variety of learning walks to observe pupils learning and to see staff teaching in a range of settings, including classrooms, support groups and in outdoor areas
- where appropriate, visit the specialist resource base within the school to see pupils' learning
- observe and speak to pupils at lunch and break times and at a sample of after-school clubs, where appropriate
- attend assemblies and daily acts of collective worship
- look closely at the school's self-evaluation processes
- consider the school's improvement plan and look at evidence to show how well the school has taken forward planned improvements
- scrutinise a range of school documents, including information on pupil assessment and progress, records of meetings of staff and the governing body, information on pupils' well-being, including the safeguarding of pupils, and records of staff training and professional development

After the on-site inspection and before the publication of the report, Estyn:

- review the findings of the inspection alongside the supporting evidence from the inspection team in order to validate, moderate and ensure the quality of the inspection

## Copies of the report

Copies of this report are available from the school and from the Estyn website ([www.estyn.gov.wales](http://www.estyn.gov.wales))

The report was produced in accordance with Section 28 of the Education Act 2005.

Every possible care has been taken to ensure that the information in this document is accurate at the time of publication. Any enquiries or comments regarding this document/publication should be addressed to:

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