



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

A report on

Our Lady & St Michael's School

**14 Pen Y Pound Road
Abergavenny
Monmouthshire
NP7 5UD**

Date of inspection: July 2024

by

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

About Our Lady & St Michael's School

Name of provider	Our Lady St Michael's School
Local authority	Monmouthshire County Council
Language of the provider	English
Type of school	Primary
Religious character	Roman Catholic
Number of pupils on roll	212
Pupils of statutory school age	182
Number in nursery classes	0
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%)	25.2%
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%)	16.5%
Percentage of pupils who speak Welsh at home	*
Percentage of pupils with English as an additional language	18.7%
Date of headteacher appointment	15/06/2017
Date of previous Estyn inspection (if applicable)	14/03/2016
Start date of inspection	01/07/2024

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

Pupils at Our Lady and St Michael's Roman Catholic Primary thoroughly enjoy coming to school. The ethos is calm, caring and highly inclusive and the pupils have a deep sense of belonging. 'We live, we love, we learn, we grow in Jesus' clearly reflects the aims of the school and underpins its values. Pupils and staff feel safe and appreciated in the happy and homely environment.

Pupils' attitudes to learning and their behaviour are exemplary. Nearly all engage immediately at the beginning of each lesson and show perseverance and resilience in what they achieve. They are considerate and show high levels of respect to their friends, staff and visitors. All pupils embrace the opportunities to be involved in aspects of school life and impact positively on issues that are important to them.

Pupils' oracy skills in English across the school are exceptional. Most pupils make strong progress in developing their reading and writing skills and become highly competent writers. Most pupils develop effective discrete maths skills and, overall, the older pupils' digital skills are developing well. There is an enthusiasm across the school to learn Welsh and most pupils apply their skills confidently in their lessons.

The school is developing a purposeful curriculum for its pupils. Staff provide them with interesting opportunities to build on their knowledge and to strengthen their understanding in a range of interesting lessons. However, the provision for younger pupils to develop their independent skills, in class and in the outdoor environment, is underdeveloped.

The headteacher provides compassionate leadership that helps staff, pupils and their families to succeed. Governors show a good awareness of their roles and responsibilities and provide strong support for the school. The school has a wide range of processes to monitor the school's provision and, overall, accurately identifies key areas for improvement. However, as a result of developing roles within the leadership structure, the pace of improvement in key areas is slow.

The headteacher, with the support of staff and governors, promotes a robust culture of safeguarding. The links with parents and the local community are strong.

Recommendations

- R1 Embed leadership at all levels to address the school's priorities for improvement successfully
- R2 Provide opportunities for younger pupils to develop their independent skills in the classroom and outdoor area

What happens next

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

Main evaluation

Learning

Nearly all pupils have social skills that are above what is expected for their age when they start school. Nearly all pupils, including those from low-income households, make good progress from their starting points in all aspects of their learning. Most pupils with additional learning needs (ALN) make good progress against their personal targets.

Nearly all pupils develop strong oracy skills. In the Reception class, for example, many develop language patterns of a high standard at a very early stage, for instance when discussing their feelings and offering a range of interesting adjectives to improve their written work. Across the school, most pupils hold conversations with ease and are comfortable discussing any aspects of their work and school life. By the time they reach Year 6, most pupils speak eloquently and confidently, for instance speaking in detail about their current topic, the general election.

Across the school, pupils' development of their Welsh language skills is purposeful. Many younger pupils count to twenty and beyond in Welsh and many older pupils willingly respond to high level questions in a more formal situation. Most pupils show a thorough understanding of commands and comments made by the staff but lack confidence when using their Welsh in more informal situations.

Most pupils are capable readers and show a deep understanding of what they have read. The younger pupils discuss class books and stories with enthusiasm and demonstrate a good recall of the class story. In Year 2, most pupils become confident readers who can explain the context of their books in detail. By Year 6, most pupils read an increasing range of fiction and nonfiction texts and explain what they enjoy about the books they read. They research topics confidently and present the information creatively across the curriculum.

Most pupils develop highly effective writing skills. The school promotes a positive writing culture and encourages pupils to express themselves through writing. They consistently present work that is engaging, well-structured and original. In the Reception class, most pupils develop their letter formation well and begin writing simple words across a variety of contexts, successfully writing facts about ladybirds, for example. As pupils progress through the school, most develop into confident, independent and capable writers. By Year 6, most pupils plan and draft their work with ease and use imaginative vocabulary choices. For example, they write a script about the disciples with detailed stage instructions and an interesting personal manifesto. They make intelligent use of rhetorical questions and emotive language to captivate the readers' attention.

Most pupils across the school make clear progress in their discrete mathematical skills. By Year 2, most develop a useful range of mathematical skills and enjoy activities, by handling money, solving word problems and developing their knowledge of fractions well. Most pupils from Year 3 to Year 6 work confidently with the four rules of number, shape and measurement and develop secure data-handling skills. However, they do not apply their skills across the curriculum often enough.

Overall, most older pupils develop useful digital skills and log into digital platforms confidently to access their work. In Year 2, many pupils can record their work competently by taking photographs and are able to access the photographic evidence with ease. However, overall, most pupils from Reception to Year 2 do not develop their digital skills well enough. From Year 3 to Year 6 most pupils use a range of programs to present information in an interesting way, for example when producing a documentary on a topic of their own choice and creating an animation based on the class book. In addition, many older pupils use their coding skills successfully to create their own games based on class topics. The majority of pupils are beginning to create databases and spreadsheets suitably. However, they do not present data often enough.

Most pupils develop their artistic skills well. The youngest pupils create art in a range of contexts. For example, from the Reception class to Year 2, most pupils emulate the artwork of artists and create self-portraits by using the natural resources from the school grounds. By Year 6, pupils are producing detailed sketches of flowers, shading and mixing colours skilfully. Across the school, most pupils take advantage of opportunities to develop their musical skills, by composing in class and by learning new instruments. Most pupils develop physical skills with increasing confidence through class lessons and extend their skills appropriately by attending the school's clubs. Overall, most pupils thinking and problem-solving skills are developing suitably.

Well-being and attitudes to learning

All pupils speak with pride about their school as a safe and supportive environment. Nearly all pupils enjoy coming to school. They believe that they are treated fairly and that their views are valued and taken seriously. Nearly all pupils feel confident to approach teachers and leaders about issues that are important to them.

Pupils' behaviour around the school is exemplary. They are polite and respectful to each other, staff and visitors. They show care and consideration to each other, in particular the Year 6 pupils in their buddy role as 'archangels' when they look after the Reception 'cherubs'. This support is highly beneficial to help the new pupils settle into their daily routines and to engage with their learning for their first year in school.

Break times are calm, and during these times nearly all pupils use the extensive grounds to play freely and creatively. This helps pupils to play together happily and settle quickly once they return to the classroom. They show mature social skills and support one another, both within and beyond the classroom environment. Nearly all pupils have a good awareness of the importance of kindness and equality, which they extend to new pupils when they arrive during the school year. As a result, new arrivals quickly become active participants in all aspects of school life.

Nearly all pupils listen attentively to adults and other pupils and follow instructions sensibly and promptly. Working relationships between staff and pupils across the school are very strong and highly supportive. In all classes pupils settle promptly to their tasks and have very positive attitudes towards their learning. They are keen to discuss and share their work, demonstrate a pride in their achievements and a willingness to improve. Nearly all pupils concentrate for appropriate lengths of time and use a suitable range of strategies when they face a problem. However, over-direction by adults inhibits the ability of younger pupils to look for solutions, solve problems and make progress in their learning independently.

Many older pupils begin to understand their rights and responsibilities and discuss issues such as unfairness maturely. Most pupils show empathy by supporting local and national charities. They develop a sound understanding of how to look after the environment and the wider world.

Most pupils respond well to feedback from adults, which motivates and encourages them to do their best. They are beginning to contribute ideas more regularly to what and how they would like to learn within a given topic. However, their contribution to improving their own and the work of others is in the very early stages of development.

Most pupils show exemplary maturity when taking on additional responsibilities, such as joining the numerous pupil voice groups in the school. They meet often and, overall, these groups listen carefully to pupils' views and contribute to improving the school community and ethos. The Minni Vinnies have organised a tea party for the older members of the church, and in their words, 'brought joy to the community'. The reading ambassadors lead a weekly reading club and successfully share their passion for reading with younger pupils. Many older pupils attend a range of extra-curricular activities, which help to develop their physical and social skills and enjoyment in school life.

Nearly all pupils have a sound understanding of healthy eating and the need to eat a balanced diet. In addition, they have a good awareness of how certain ingredients can impact negatively on our bodies, such as salt. They enjoy physical exercise and participate enthusiastically in daily exercise, sporting tournaments, playtimes and lunchtimes. This contributes purposefully to pupils' high levels of well-being.

Teaching and learning experiences

The staff create a calm and nurturing environment for pupils to learn. Teachers know their pupils well and form warm, respectful relationships with them. The school's provision for pupils' personal and social education is good. Staff use praise effectively to celebrate pupils' efforts and achievements and, overall, they have high expectations of pupils' behaviour. Learning support assistants provide valuable support and contribute fully to the inclusive ethos of the school. The culture of mutual respect between staff and pupils, and between pupils and their peers, results in excellent collaboration.

The school is developing the curriculum purposefully. Teachers are beginning to plan a range of interesting topics across the areas of learning and experience, to stimulate and build on pupils' knowledge, develop their interests and wider skills sufficiently.

For example, the recent whole-school topic enables the pupils to engage well with a relevant and topical theme such as the Olympics. Although Year 6 pupils contribute notably to their own learning, such as organising a whole-school sports day to launch their new topic, other pupils do not contribute often enough to what and how they learn. Overall, teachers do not plan sufficient authentic learning experiences for pupils, particularly from Reception to Year 2, or use the school's extensive grounds to enable pupils to develop their skills in the outdoors.

The provision for developing pupils' speaking and listening skills is a strong feature of the school and pupils develop competent reading skills across all year groups. Teachers develop pupils' discrete literacy and numeracy skills to a high standard, although there are inconsistent opportunities for them to apply these skills in other areas of their learning, particularly numeracy. Most staff model the Welsh language well and roles, such as Helpwr Heddiw, help to promote the language purposefully. The quality of provision for the development of the Welsh language in formal lessons is good and staff are beginning to plan relevant activities for pupils to understand their 'cynefin' and wider community. Overall, from Year 3 to Year 6 the school's provision to develop pupils' digital skills is purposeful.

Most staff create a positive ethos for learning and, overall, strong relationships between staff and pupils ensure that most learners engage well in lessons. Where teaching is at its best, there are high levels of engagement and challenge combined with engaging activities that thoughtfully provide pupils with a level of independence. However, adults in the younger classes lead most activities and do not plan enough purposeful activities for pupils to take responsibility for their own learning and to develop as independent learners.

In lessons, teachers provide clear explanations to pupils to ensure that they are fully aware of what they need to do to succeed and use questioning carefully to develop the pupils' knowledge and understanding. Teachers use assessment information well to plan pupils' next steps in learning and to ensure appropriate challenge. Written feedback helps pupils understand how to improve their work and to reflect on their curriculum experiences to identify their successes. However, teachers are only beginning to provide opportunities for pupils to assess their own and their peers' work.

The school has a variety of purposeful extra-curricular activities that successfully develop pupils' physical skills. For example, many pupils enjoy attending the school running club, where they develop confidence and collaborate with each other well. In addition, visitors to the school enhance the curriculum and to teach pupils new skills, such as clog dancing, or inspire them to become authors. The school makes good use of a residential centre, where pupils from Year 6 learn about teamwork while taking part in outdoor activities.

Care, support and guidance

The school has a happy, inclusive and welcoming ethos. The strong focus on ensuring fairness, care and respect for all contributes strongly towards the polite and positive attitudes of all pupils. Behaviour across the school is excellent.

The provision for ALN pupils is effective. The school tracks pupils' progress carefully to identify and plan provision for individuals and groups of pupils. Well considered literacy and numeracy activities purposefully support the learning of pupils with ALN and, as a result, they make good progress from their starting points. Tailored social and emotional literacy programmes impact successfully on the well-being and engagement of targeted pupils. The school actively encourages the pupils to request emotional support independently by noting their concern and posting it in the 'request for support' box. Staff deal with these concerns promptly and effectively. Staff work closely with parents and a wide range of external agencies to improve the school's attendance.

Teachers ensure beneficial opportunities for pupils to discuss and reflect on their own beliefs and values and are beginning to include suitable opportunities for pupils to learn about other faiths. They help pupils to develop a comprehensive understanding of moral issues and global events and to empathise with others by involving them in supporting local charities. For instance, the older pupils sleep over in the school to raise money and awareness for homelessness in the community and organise activities to support countries impacted by natural disasters. Overall, the school promotes clear principles that help pupils to distinguish between right and wrong.

The school provides valuable opportunities for pupils, including those who are eligible for free school meals, those from low-income households and those who have ALN, to take on leadership roles. They take on responsibility with maturity and make positive changes to school life. The pupil voice groups have successfully improved the younger pupils' attitudes to reading and supported all pupils to improve their diet by highlighting how the overuse of salt in food can impact on your health. In addition, the digital leaders use their high-level coding skills to take part in a national competition, winning several new computers for the school.

Through the curriculum and extra-curricular activities, the school ensures that pupils have plentiful opportunities to be physically active and understand the importance of making sensible food choices. There are increasing opportunities for pupils to access competitive sports, for example, in the cluster sporting events in netball and football. The school ensures effective arrangements to support pupils to stay safe in their community and when working online.

Teachers plan useful educational visits to support the pupils' learning. These experiences contribute suitably to developing pupils' understanding of environmental issues and local history. The school provides relevant opportunities to develop pupils' sense of their Welsh identity through cultural events, such as taking part in the school and local Eisteddfod. Teachers ensure beneficial experiences for pupils to develop self-confidence, pride in themselves and an ability to work with others, for example through performances in school and by taking part in community events, such as Remembrance Sunday and a national gardening competition.

The school's culture of safeguarding and the inclusive ethos towards all pupils is a strength. Its arrangements for safeguarding pupils meet requirements and are not a cause for concern.

Leadership and management

The headteacher provides caring leadership and his passion in promoting the school as a nurturing and inclusive community, based on core Catholic values, is clearly evident.

Staff collaborate well to ensure that pupil well-being is at the heart of their work. They promote the school's agreed vision 'we live, we love, we learn, we live in Jesus' successfully and this contributes positively to a strong team ethos and mutual respect within the whole school community. Together, with the governing body, they have created a strong safeguarding culture where pupils feel safe and valued. Leaders and staff have a thorough understanding of the needs of the pupils and the local community and work with commitment to meet these needs.

Leaders and staff address local and national priorities well. For example, they are developing the school's curriculum purposefully, and work to address the Welsh Government's additional learning needs reform is comprehensive. Leaders plan beneficial opportunities for pupils to develop their Welsh oracy skills, literacy, discrete numeracy and overall digital skills. This has a positive impact on pupil progress and ensures that pupils build effectively on their prior learning.

As a result of several recent staff changes, the headteacher is slowly building the leadership capacity across the school. He is actively encouraging staff them to develop professionally, which is beginning to impact suitably on their ability to lead and to fulfil their roles and responsibilities. However, at present, leaders do not distribute these responsibilities amongst themselves effectively enough. Leaders co-ordinate the performance management of all staff effectively and link it closely to the school's improvement priorities. For example, the recent, whole-school training to improve feedback and marking procedures has improved consistency and clarity in most classes. As a result, most pupils have a clear understanding of the strengths and areas for improvement in their work.

School leaders undertake an extensive programme of activities to regularly monitor and evaluate teaching and learning, and pupil progress. They draw upon a range of first-hand information to inform their judgements and accurately identify key areas for improvement. Over time, staff have identified the need to improve pupils' writing, for example, and, as a result, pupils achieve high standards in their written work and there is a clear progress across the school. However, leaders do not use evaluations rigorously enough to ensure sustained progress at pace, for example to provide opportunities for younger pupils to take responsibility for their own learning and to work independently.

Governors support leaders effectively and are an integral part of school life. They have a thorough knowledge about the school through detailed reports from the headteacher, and by conducting regular on sight monitoring activities. Governors have a sound understanding of their roles, responsibilities and statutory duties, such as ensuring that the school has appropriate arrangements to promote healthy eating and drinking. In addition, they support the headteacher to manage and deploy the school's financial resources carefully. Many governors provide high levels of challenge to school leaders, asking probing questions and holding them to account appropriately for pupil progress and school improvement.

Leaders address the impact of socio-economic disadvantage on pupils' outcomes successfully. They assign the pupil development grant to worthwhile initiatives that make a notable difference to pupils' engagement, attitudes to learning and well-being. They ensure that there are no barriers to pupils participating in visits and extra-curricular activities.

The headteacher has developed strong and effective links with parents and there is a combined commitment to supporting pupils' learning and well-being. The school communicates regularly with parents to help them to understand how they can support their children at home.

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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