



Rhagoriaeth i bawb – Excellence for all

Arolygiaeth Ei Mawrhydi dros Addysg
a Hyfforddiant yng Nghymru

Her Majesty's Inspectorate
for Education and Training in Wales

A report on

**Ferndale Infants School
North Road
Ferndale
Rhondda Cynon Taf
CF43 4PS**

Date of inspection: November 2011

by

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



During each inspection, inspectors aim to answer three key questions:

Key Question 1: How good are the outcomes?

Key Question 2: How good is provision?

Key Question 3: How good are leadership and management?

Inspectors also provide an overall judgement on the school's current performance and on its prospects for improvement.

In these evaluations, inspectors use a four-point scale:

Judgement	What the judgement means
Excellent	Many strengths, including significant examples of sector-leading practice
Good	Many strengths and no important areas requiring significant improvement
Adequate	Strengths outweigh areas for improvement
Unsatisfactory	Important areas for improvement outweigh strengths

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

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Context

Ferndale Infants School is a local authority maintained school situated in the ex-mining community of Ferndale in the upper part of the Rhondda Fach. The present building replaced the former school in 1983.

The school is well supported by its families and many children have the support of their extended families. The area is considered to be economically disadvantaged, but most of the pupils are said to come from backgrounds that are neither advantaged nor disadvantaged. Children join the nursery immediately after their third birthday and move to the reception class in the September following their fourth birthday. There are currently 70 pupils in the school, including 16 full-time nursery children. The school is organised into three classes, two of which have mixed-year groups.

Just under 24% of pupils are entitled to free school meals. This is below the average for the Rhondda Cynon Taf authority area (25.6%) but above the Welsh figure of 19.9%.

There are no pupils with statements of special educational need, but 17% are on the school's additional learning needs register. Fewer than 2% of pupils have English as an additional language and no pupils are from homes where Welsh is the first language.

The school has a breakfast club. It has gained three Eco Schools green flags, three leaves in the healthy schools scheme and Fairtrade schools status for the second time. The school has also recently achieved the information and communication technology quality mark and the Basic Skills Quality Standard.

The individual school budget per pupil for Ferndale Infants School in 2011-2012 means that the budget is £3,732 per pupil. The maximum per pupil in the primary schools in Rhondda Cynon Taf is £6,499 and the minimum is £2,788. Ferndale Infants School is 36th out of the 114 primary schools in Rhondda Cynon Taf in terms of its school budget per pupil.

Summary

The school's current performance	Good
The school's prospects for improvement	Good

Current performance

The current performance of Ferndale Infants' School is good because:

- pupils make good progress in all subject areas during their time at the school;
- most pupils are engaged in their learning and are attentive in class;
- all pupils have access to a broad and balanced curriculum, which builds on their interests and prior knowledge;
- lessons are well structured and have a clear learning focus; and
- the school is a caring community that focuses successfully on developing pupil wellbeing.

Prospects for improvement

The school's prospects for improvement are good because:

- the school has a clear, agreed vision that is shared by pupils, staff and governors;
- data is analysed well and this provides a good basis for evaluating performance across the school;
- the governing body has a good understanding of how the school performs in comparison with similar schools; and
- there are effective self-evaluation procedures that focus appropriately on pupils' standards.

Recommendations

In order to improve the school needs to:

- R1 ensure that more able pupils' extended writing skills are developed appropriately;
- R2 further strengthen the links between the school's monitoring procedures and its self-evaluation; and
- R3 provide better opportunities for parents to contribute to the self-evaluation arrangements.

What happens next?

The school will produce an action plan that shows how it will address the recommendations.

Main findings

Key Question 1: How good are outcomes?

Good

Standards: Good

Many pupils enter the school with skills slightly below those normally expected for pupils of their age and below the local authority average. Overall, most pupils make good progress in lessons in all subject areas during their time at the school. They work well independently and in co-operation with others. Most pupils show good levels of concentration appropriate to their stage of development and remain on task during focused lessons and when working independently.

Throughout the school, most pupils make good progress in their communication skills. They read at an appropriate level for their age and ability and talk about books with confidence, responding to what they have read. Most pupils listen carefully to their teachers and fellow pupils. They communicate confidently with adults and other pupils in a range of situations. Many are keen to ask questions and contribute ideas. In all classes, pupils readily offer suggestions about what they should learn. Most write competently for a variety of purposes across the curriculum. Their work is presented well and they readily talk about what they have written. However, more able pupils' ability to write independently and at length across the curriculum is underdeveloped.

The proportion of pupils achieving the core subject indicator, which means achieving level 2 (the expected level at seven years of age) at the end of key stage 1 in English, mathematics and science, has been above the average for the other schools in its family in three of the last four years. Performance levels for the core subject indicator show a clear upward trend. The proportion of more able pupils attaining the higher level 3 in all three core subjects has generally been above the average for the family for the last three years. In 2011, the percentage of pupils achieving the core subject indicator was in the upper 50% of national benchmarks when compared to the relative performance of other schools with similar proportions of pupils receiving free school meals.

End of the key stage assessment data shows a trend of girls generally performing better than boys in the core subjects. However, this gap in performance has decreased in recent years, with boys outperforming girls in writing and reading last year. Pupils with additional learning needs and pupils in receipt of free school meals generally make good progress and achieve well in relation to their starting points.

Pupils' attitudes to learning Welsh are positive and almost all pupils make good progress in gaining skills in the language.

Wellbeing: Good

All pupils feel safe in school and know whom to turn to with their concerns. They have a good understanding of the importance of a healthy diet and of engaging in an active lifestyle. Most pupils are interested and attentive in class. They like school

and are motivated to learn. From an early age, pupils are able to contribute ideas that influence what and how they learn.

Behaviour is good. Pupils show respect, care and concern for each other. They are courteous and considerate to their peers, adults and visitors. Relationships within the school are strong. Nearly all children make good progress in developing social and life skills and work well with others both in school and in the wider community. They are proud to help each other in their learning activities.

Attendance figures for 2010-2011 were below those of similar schools but overall figures have improved recently. However, the repeated absence and poor punctuality of a small number of pupils has a detrimental effect on their progress and wellbeing.

Members of the well-established eco committee take their roles seriously and feel that staff value their contribution and input. Some of their ideas are influencing decisions made in school. All pupils are involved in making decisions about their learning by choosing activities and have an awareness of targets for improvement.

Key Question 2: How good is provision?	Good
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Learning experiences: Good

All pupils have access to a broad and balanced curriculum, which builds on their interests and prior knowledge. Staff plan collaboratively to ensure a wide variety of interesting experiences that motivate and engage all pupils. Teachers' planning is detailed with clear learning objectives, which are evaluated effectively. Pupils contribute well to the planning at a level appropriate to their stage of development. This is a good feature of the school.

The school has fully implemented the Foundation Phase curriculum allowing all pupils appropriate opportunities to develop their communication skills across all areas of learning both indoors and outdoors. There is progression in planning for all subject skills across the year groups. However, planning for the development of higher level writing skills lacks sufficient detail and there is an overuse of worksheets and writing frames. The development of thinking, number, and information and communication technology skills is generally good across the curriculum although the formal recording of coverage of these skills is still at an early stage of development. Specific programmes for pupils needing additional support are organised effectively. The school provides a good range of extra-curricular activities and educational visits, which further enhance pupils' learning.

Teaching staff use Welsh regularly and effectively in the classroom and around the school. Pupils have many interesting opportunities to learn about their locality and also about Wales, its history and culture. The school is highly successful in promoting education for sustainable development and global citizenship through a wide range of activities. These include recycling, bird feeding, energy and waste monitoring and forest school lessons on a daily basis.

Teaching: Good

Overall, lessons are well structured and have a clear learning focus. Teachers and support staff establish good relationships with pupils and have appropriate expectations. All staff have good subject knowledge and use a variety of teaching approaches in lessons and activities. In most lessons, teachers ensure that pupils are well motivated and actively engaged. There is a good balance of continuous, enhanced and focused tasks. All staff have high expectations of pupil behaviour and this contributes to a calm teaching environment. Teaching assistants are deployed purposefully to support individuals and groups.

Assessment for learning strategies are integrated effectively into nearly all lessons. Teachers and support staff ensure that pupils know what they will be learning and provide opportunities for pupils to discuss progress both during the lesson and in plenary sessions. 'Two stars and a wish' is used well as a tool for improving learning. The school assesses pupil progress well and uses this information effectively to identify more able pupils and those who are underperforming.

The child development assessment profile and annual report to parents provide clear information about pupils' progress and wellbeing. Parents can provide a written response to reports and useful consultations with parents take place regularly.

Care, support and guidance: Good

The school is a caring community that focuses successfully on developing pupil wellbeing through increasing self-esteem and confidence. Parents value the strong and positive relationships between staff and pupils. There are effective arrangements to support the health and wellbeing of pupils. These include healthy snacks and a range of after school activities. There are successful procedures in place to promote positive behaviour. Efficient monitoring of attendance has been successful in raising the attendance rate over recent terms. Pupils have a clear sense of fairness through Fairtrade activities. Well-planned assemblies and opportunities for collective worship promote the pupils' spiritual development. Their cultural awareness is developed through participation in local community events and sporting activities. Parents value the information provided by the creative school website.

The school has procedures and an appropriate policy for safeguarding.

The school identifies pupils' learning needs early. All pupils with additional learning needs access the Foundation Phase curriculum in full. Their individual learning plans are adapted to be child friendly. They receive effective support from an appropriate range of interventions and this has a positive impact on their learning and progress. For instance, the 'On Track' group focusing on social and emotional skills and self-esteem has impacted positively on pupil wellbeing. The school works well with external agencies such as the education psychologist. Close links exist with a specialist unit for behaviour, which has benefited pupils.

Learning environment: Good

The school has a very caring ethos, which promotes respect and equality for all. Pupils are encouraged to be kind and helpful to one another through assemblies and curriculum work. All pupils receive equal access to all areas of the school's provision.

The school uses classrooms and shared learning areas well to enhance pupils' learning. There is a good range of learning resources throughout the school, which staff and pupils use effectively. Displays are vibrant and stimulating. The school has plenty of space for outdoor play and learning and uses this well. Areas such as the forest school and the secure court yard provide good opportunities for exploration and effectively promote pupil independence. Overall, the school keeps the premises and grounds in very good condition.

Key Question 3: How good are leadership and management?	Good
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Leadership: Good

The school has a clear, agreed vision that is shared by pupils, staff and governors. Weekly staff meetings focus on the school's priorities for development. This helps all staff to develop a shared understanding of their roles in relation to the school's priorities for raising standards. The school analyses data well and this provides a good basis for evaluating performance across the school.

Performance management procedures for teaching and support staff are sound and lead to development objectives for individual staff members. These relate effectively to pupil standards and link well with identified areas for development. Objectives also relate appropriately to individual development needs.

The governing body has a good understanding of how the school performs in comparison with similar schools. Members receive informative analyses of data and are aware of the issues arising from these. They are appropriately involved in the school's self-evaluation process and the resulting improvement plans. Members of the governing body shoulder responsibility for aspects of the school's work and a few are volunteer helpers at the school. This helps to develop their first-hand knowledge of relevant issues and enhances the governing body's role as a critical friend.

School development planning takes account of local and national priorities. For example, Year 2 pupils are fully integrated into the Foundation Phase. The school has also benefited from its effective involvement in the local authority's small schools' network.

Improving quality: Good

The school has effective self-evaluation procedures that focus appropriately on raising pupils' standards. These include a useful analysis of performance data and procedures to review all aspects of the school's work. The work takes the views of pupils into account and draws well upon local initiatives. However, procedures for gathering the views of parents are underdeveloped.

The school assesses most of its strengths and weaknesses well and most staff are well involved in the process. For example, it has identified the need to improve aspects of provision in numeracy and enhance the links with parents through better use of information and communication technology. These are current improvement priorities. However, the monitoring cycle is not fully effective in informing the self-evaluation process and subsequent improvement plans.

Improvement plans include a range of relevant actions and identify members of staff with responsibility for their delivery. They also include success criteria and well-defined timescales for evaluation and completion. Most teachers are involved in professional learning communities within and beyond the school. These networks have contributed well to developing classroom practice.

Partnership working: Good

The school has established a good range of partnerships with parents and carers, other education providers and the local community. Many parents work effectively with the school to support pupils' reading and information technology skills. They have also contributed well to the development of the school garden and other aspects of the outdoor learning environment. Parents are well informed about the life and work of the school through text messages, newsletters and the school website.

The school has beneficial links with the primary school to which nearly all pupils transfer. A good range of transition activities helps to promote pupil wellbeing and ensures effective continuity of work and experience. Valuable links exist with a local college and initial teacher training provider and the school regularly supports students. The school participates in effective partnerships with other schools, both through the local cluster and the small schools network. The partnership with a local retailer in its 'green energy for schools' scheme developed pupils' awareness of environmental issues and has secured significant additional resources, including solar panels.

Resource management: Good

The school deploys teaching and support staff well, making effective use of their skills and expertise. This contributes to the successful development of pupils' learning experiences. Teachers make valuable use of planning, preparation and assessment time. Performance management and appraisal arrangements identify the development needs of staff effectively. The school budget links well to the school development plan and is monitored effectively.

The school offers good value for money because of its efficient use of funds and the good outcomes that pupils achieve.

Appendix 1

Commentary on performance data

Within its family of schools, the proportion of pupils achieving level 2 (the expected level at seven years of age) at the end of key stage 1 in English, mathematics and science (the core subject indicator) compares favourably with the average for other schools. Performance levels for the core subject indicator show a clear upward trend and have been above the average for the school's family in three of the last four years. They have been above the national average for the last two. With the exception of English in 2009 and mathematics in 2010, the performance in each of the individual core subjects has been above the average for the family for the last four years.

With the exception of mathematics in 2010, the proportion of more able pupils attaining the higher level 3 in all three core subjects has been above the average for the family in each of the last three years. For science, it has also been higher than the Welsh average for the last three years. However, the proportion of more able pupils attaining the higher level 3 for English has been lower than the Welsh average for each of the last three years. Assessment outcomes generally match the findings of the inspection team.

In 2011, the percentage of pupils achieving the core subject indicator was in the upper 50% of national benchmarks when compared to performance levels in similar schools. However, the school was in the lower 50% of schools for the previous three years. English has been in the lower 50% of results for schools for the last four years and mathematics in the lower 50% for the last three years.

Appendix 2

Stakeholder satisfaction report

Parent questionnaire responses

All parents say that they are satisfied with the school and that it is well run. They note that their children like the school and they all feel that the children are safe there. Most parents say that they are well informed about the progress their children make at the school. They all say that pupils are well behaved and believe that staff treat all children fairly and with respect. All parents also feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions, suggestions or a problem. They agree that their child was helped to settle in well when they first started school. A few say that they do not understand the school's procedure for dealing with complaints.

Appendix 3

The inspection team

Iwan Roberts	Reporting Inspector
Sarah Hurst	Team Inspector
Deirdre Emberson	Lay Inspector
Susan Wilson	Peer Inspector
Rhian Rees	School Nominee

Copies of the report

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

Under the Independent School Standards (Wales) Regulations 2003, the school must provide copies of the report to all parents of the school. Where a pupil is subject to placement by a local authority, a copy of the report should be sent by the school to each relevant authority.

Year groups and key stages

Schools use a common system of numbering year groups from the start of compulsory schooling to 18 years of age. This system emphasises the importance of continuity and eases communication among schools, governing bodies, parents and LEAs.

The term 'Reception' (R) refers to the year group of pupils in a primary school who reach the age of five during the academic year. Year 1 refers to the year group of pupils who reach the age of six during the academic year and so on. Year 13 is the year group of students who reach the age of 18 during the academic year.

Primary phase:

Year	R	Y1	Y2	Y3	Y4	Y5	Y6
Ages	4-5	5-6	6-7	7-8	8-9	9-10	10-11

Secondary phase:

Year	Y7	Y8	Y9	Y10	Y11	Y12	Y13
Ages	11-12	12-13	13-14	14-15	15-16	16-17	17-18

The four key stages cover the following year groups:

Key stage 1	Year 1 and Year 2
Key stage 2	Year 3 to Year 6
Key stage 3	Year 7 to Year 9
Key stage 4	Year 10 and Year 11