



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

A report on
Maerdy Community Primary School
Graigwen
Maerdy
Ferndale
RCT
CF43 4TW

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by

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

About Maerdy Community Primary School

Maerdy Community Primary School is in the village of Maerdy, in the Rhondda Cynon Taff local authority. There are 284 pupils on roll including 29 part-time nursery pupils. There are eight single-age classes and one mixed-age Year 1 and Year 2 class. The school also has one learning resource base class with ten pupils from key stage 2. Most of these pupils come from within the local authority.

The three-year average for pupils eligible for free school meals is around 44%. This is significantly higher than the national average of 18%. The school identifies around 34% of pupils as having additional learning needs. This is well above the national average of 21%. Most pupils are of white British ethnicity.

The headteacher took up her position in September 2010. The school's last inspection was in January 2012.

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

Summary

Maerdy Community Primary School is highly inclusive and provides a safe, welcoming and stimulating learning environment for its pupils. Nearly all pupils are happy and enjoy coming to school. They make good progress and achieve well.

The foundation phase of the school provides extensive opportunities for pupils to develop literacy and numeracy skills successfully through a wide range of activities. All teachers across the school foster a positive climate for learning and provide pupils with interesting activities that engage them well. Most pupils' input into how and what they learn is a strong aspect of the school's work. Standards of behaviour and self-discipline of almost all pupils in lessons and around the school are high. Staff in the school's resource base assess and meet the needs of pupils effectively.

School leaders provide effective leadership and a clear strategic direction for the school's work. The headteacher has established a strong teaching community where staff learn from each other successfully.

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

Recommendations

R1 Improve pupils' Welsh oracy and reading skills

R2 Improve attendance

R3 Improve provision to develop pupils' independent writing skills

What happens next

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

Main findings

Standards: Good

On entry to the school, around half of the pupils' skills are at around the level expected for their age. During their time at the school, most pupils make good progress in developing their literacy and numeracy skills and achieve good standards. Pupils who have additional learning needs, including those in the learning resource base, achieve well in line with their needs and abilities. Many more able pupils recall their previous learning well and apply their skills successfully to new situations.

In the foundation phase, most pupils develop effective communication skills. They listen well to staff and each other and they contribute sensibly to class discussions. Many pupils read confidently and develop an appropriate understanding of the link between letters and sounds. Most pupils develop their early writing skills successfully. In the reception class, most pupils begin to write in a recognisable form, for example they are able to write instructions on how to make a musical instrument. By the end of the foundation phase, many older pupils write well in a suitable range of simple genres, for example, when they retell the tale of 'Billy the seal'.

In key stage 2, most pupils speak confidently and make sensible contributions to class discussions. For example, older pupils in Year 6 participate enthusiastically in class debates about the responsibility of a sea captain. Many pupils make good progress in their reading and develop their research skills well. For example, pupils in Year 5 present detailed information about Tim Peake's space mission. Older pupils in Year 6 read fluently and expressively and discuss characters in the books they are reading confidently. Across the key stage, many pupils make good progress with their writing skills. For example, in Year 4 they identify the key features of a newspaper report well, using headlines, captions, and paragraphs for effect. By Year 6, older pupils write successfully in a range of formal and informal genres. They construct engaging information texts about Wales and write powerful newspaper articles suitable for online news sites. Most more able pupils display effective use of descriptive language, emotion and mood. However, across the school many pupils don't express themselves independently enough in writing tasks.

Many pupils have positive attitudes to learning Welsh. Most foundation phase pupils develop a useful understanding of basic Welsh words and phrases. In key stage 2, a few pupils ask and answer simple questions appropriately and develop basic reading skills. However, many pupils have limited words and phrases and lack confidence to speak Welsh outside of designated Welsh lessons.

Most pupils throughout the school make good progress in developing their numeracy skills in mathematics lessons and apply them in a range of activities across the curriculum. For example, in the foundation phase, most reception pupils measure using standard and non-standard units to calculate the amount of sugar in drinks. By the end of the phase, many apply their skills independently when using different coins during role-play activities in the class 'Chinese restaurant'. In key stage 2 many pupils apply their numeracy skills well in topic work. For example, they select appropriate methods of calculation and use these accurately to work out the distance the travel distance for bananas from Costa Rica to the United Kingdom.

Most pupils have suitable information and communication technology (ICT) skills. In the foundation phase, most pupils use simple painting programmes to create pictures, add text, change colours and font size confidently. They collect data about favourite fruits and present their findings correctly on a simple graph. Many pupils in key stage 2 work well using a word processing package to present their spooky story and display research work creatively on a multi-media presentation. They create databases about Welsh rugby players and use a spreadsheet accurately to compare temperatures between Wales and the Galapagos Islands.

Wellbeing and attitudes to learning: Good

Nearly all pupils are happy and feel safe at school. Most pupils are confident to talk to adults and to their friends if they are worried or upset. They are caring towards each other and treat others with respect in lessons, the dining hall and around the school. The playground buddies lead weekly circle time sessions successfully which focus on how to make playtimes enjoyable and fun for all pupils. The positive relationships between pupils of all ages, is a prominent feature of the school. Most pupils understand how to stay safe on line and have a well-developed knowledge of e-safety.

Most pupils behave very well, are polite and show respect for each other and adults. They are enthusiastic about their learning and have positive attitudes towards their work. Most pupils are ready to learn at the start of the lessons and move purposefully between tasks and learning areas. Most foundation phase pupils work well independently and co-operate happily during their activities, for example when working in groups to make fruit kebabs. Across the school most pupils listen to the views of others well. They contribute well to what they want to learn and share their ideas readily when deciding on the week's independent 'missions'. They persevere and concentrate for extended periods when engaged in a range of learning activities. As a result, most complete tasks successfully.

Most pupils have a clear understanding of the need to eat and drink healthily and to take regular exercise. Most pupils take advantage of regular opportunities to take part in physical activities during lessons and break times. They speak enthusiastically about the benefits of taking part in a variety of sessions during the school day and extra-curricular sports clubs on their levels of agility and fitness.

Most pupils in key stage 2 are very glad of the opportunities that they receive to develop their leadership roles. The newly formed "Maerdy Ministry" represents different aspects of school life well including areas such as health and wellbeing, the curriculum and sport. Most pupils understand the importance of these responsibilities and are proud that they have brought about improvements and change in school in a short time. For example, the curriculum minister has carried out a learning walk to ensure that pupils' contributions to how and what they learn are visible and celebrated in all classrooms. Projects such as cake sales organised by the finance minister enable pupils to contribute funds to a local cancer hospital. Most pupils develop a good degree of empathy towards others. The most recent pupil voice group, the mini police have worked successfully with local police officers to develop pupils' understanding of local environmental issues such the dangers of mountain fires.

Many pupils and parents have responded suitably to the school's focus on improving attendance, and pupils understand the importance of attending school regularly. However, over the last three years, attendance levels have been on a downward trend and have remained lower than those in similar schools. Most pupils are punctual at the start of the school day.

Teaching and learning experiences: Good

The school provides a broad and balanced curriculum that engages nearly all pupils well. Teachers provide a wide variety of stimulating learning experiences that include, for instance, visits to the museum in Cardiff and the coast in Porthcawl. These help to enhance pupils' knowledge of the history of the wider area successfully. A broad range of interesting topics, such as 'The scented garden' and 'Tremors and Urban Pioneers', ensure that all pupils engage well in their learning.

The school is beginning to plan successfully for the new Curriculum for Wales through a number of enrichment weeks, such as focusing on health and fitness and our local area as themes. Teachers listen and respond positively to pupils' ideas when planning topics and adapt their lessons regularly. For example, pupils research and contribute to various themes, such as the impact of climate change on the Antarctic. Opportunities for the older pupils to design and deliver their own lessons, for example on yoga and free running, increases their motivation for learning beneficially.

Staff have a very good understanding of the principles of the foundation phase and they provide numerous opportunities to promote pupils' language, mathematical and ICT skills. Teachers plan activities that are practical and multisensory and build well upon pupils' own, first-hand experiences and interests. For example, the pupils in the nursery learn how to care for the class guinea pigs. Staff use the outdoor area extensively for imaginative and creative play, which develops most pupils as independent learners successfully. In key stage 2, the school provides many opportunities for pupils to develop their literacy and numeracy skills in other areas of learning. For example, they use their research skills well to find out about the history of evolution and Charles Darwin, and calculate the distance he travelled around the world. The school is developing its provision to deliver the digital competence framework suitably. As a result, pupils apply their ICT skills purposefully in many areas of learning.

All teachers plan learning activities that have clear objectives and staff communicate these clearly to pupils. Most lessons proceed at a pace and, stimulate and engage pupils well. Lessons build on prior learning effectively and all staff use questioning techniques well to check on pupils' understanding and to develop their thinking skills. Teachers deploy their assistants effectively and they work successfully together to enhance provision. All staff have a thorough understanding of the pupils' needs and intervene at appropriate times to provide support.

Most teachers provide pupils with useful feedback about how well they complete these tasks and celebrate the good features of a piece of work. There are regular opportunities for pupils to reflect on their own work and older pupils respond sensibly when identifying purposeful targets for improvement. All staff manage pupils' behaviour in classes and around the school successfully. However, across the

school many teachers over direct pupils, particularly in their writing tasks. They do not provide enough opportunities for pupils to demonstrate their creative writing skills independently.

Opportunities for pupils to develop their Welsh language skills in designated lessons are suitable. However, the school does not ensure that there are enough opportunities for pupils to practise their Welsh in informal situations around the school. Staff provide appropriate activities to enrich pupils' knowledge about the culture and heritage of Wales.

Care, support and guidance: Good

The school has a caring and highly inclusive ethos within a safe, secure and stimulating learning environment. This promotes pupils' social development very well and is a notable feature of the school. As a result, pupils feel happy, safe and have high levels of self-esteem.

There are effective systems for tracking pupils' progress. Teachers use a wide range of information to check that pupils are making good progress. The school's provision to support pupils with additional learning needs is strong. Staff identify pupils' additional learning and personal needs from an early age and ensure that they receive the necessary support to succeed in their work as they move through the school. A wide range of intervention programmes and strategies enables pupils to make good progress in their learning. Individual education targets for pupils with additional learning needs are specific and measurable, and pupils and parents play an important part in the process.

All pupils in the learning resource base have detailed programmes, which have a very positive impact on their individual progress. They take a full part in their own learning and assess confidently their own and other pupils' progress towards meeting their personal targets. The additional learning needs co-ordinator uses the provision creatively to support other mainstream pupils. This impacts positively on the progress and wellbeing of all targeted pupils.

Staff work well with a wide range of specialist services, which support pupils and parents beneficially. Activities such as daily parent and child reading sessions and the learning walks to share pupils' work, enable parents to have a suitable understanding of the work of the school and of how well their children are doing. In addition, the family engagement officer makes home visits for pre-school families, which benefits the pupils' social skills well when they start school.

The school has worthwhile arrangements to promote healthy eating and drinking, and ensures that there are opportunities for the pupils to take part in physical education lessons. The school provides a suitable range of extra-curricular clubs and activities that enrich pupils' learning successfully and contribute well to pupils' wellbeing. There are a number of opportunities for pupils to undertake leadership roles. This has a positive effect on pupils' wellbeing and on the day-to-day life of the school, for example through the work of the school's ministry.

The school's provision for pupils' social development is effective. Staff make good use of a residential course and a visit to London for Years 5 and 6, where pupils

learn about trust, team work and living in contrasting communities. Through a variety of curriculum activities, for example to promote fairness to farmers around the world and studying countries such as Thailand, pupils reflect well on how they should treat others and understand the diversity of the wider world. The school promotes respect and tolerance well through planned lessons, pupils' voice groups and charity events.

Staff promote pupils' cultural development successfully through art, music and drama activities. Daily acts of collective worship provide beneficial opportunities for pupils to reflect on values such as courage, friendship and kindness, thereby promoting their spiritual and moral development effectively. Opportunities to develop the pupils' knowledge and understanding of different beliefs and faiths progressively across the school are suitable.

The headteacher has introduced a range of strategies to promote good attendance and punctuality, including working closely with the local authority. However, these approaches are not having as much impact as they could on improving pupils' overall attendance over time.

The school's procedures for safeguarding pupils meet requirements and give no cause for concern.

Leadership and management: Good

The headteacher has a clear vision to give all pupils the best possible opportunity to succeed in a safe and happy environment. All staff have high expectations and they successfully share these with the school community. Together they create an extremely caring ethos, with a clear focus on all pupils' wellbeing.

Members of the leadership team work very well together. They model high professional standards and have a broad range of skills and expertise. Senior leaders develop successful leadership skills in both adults and pupils, in and beyond the class. For example, under the guidance of a learning assistant older pupils have led and developed international links with a school in Uganda. All members of staff have a clear understanding of their role, and regular meetings to discuss pupil progress ensure that all teachers are accountable for the standards that pupils achieve. The school pays good attention to address national priorities, such as reducing the impact of deprivation on vulnerable pupils. Leaders also maintain a strong focus on standards in literacy and numeracy and the use of these skills across the curriculum.

The school is an effective learning community. Leaders provide good opportunities for staff to share good practice and to evaluate each other's effectiveness within a trusting, supportive environment. For example, the foundation phase leader has led and managed the creation of a very effective outdoor learning area for foundation phase pupils. Processes to manage the professional development of staff are successful. There are useful opportunities for all members of staff to attend courses and to work with other schools to view effective practice. This has a positive effect on planning, teaching and developing pupils' social and emotional wellbeing. As a result, pupils' attitudes towards their work is positive.

There are comprehensive arrangements to evaluate the work of the school. Leaders share responsibilities effectively and use information from scrutinising books, lesson observations, learning walks and thorough data analysis to identify the school's strengths and areas for development. As a result, they set a clear strategic direction for the school. They gather the views of the parents and pupils who, for example, have identified a need to increase pupils input into their own learning.

The school uses findings from self-evaluation work well to identify improvement priorities. Arrangements to monitor the impact of improvement initiatives are effective. These processes have resulted in improved outcomes for pupils, for example in improving mathematical development in the foundation phase and in the standard of behaviour. However, leaders have not addressed attendance issues well enough.

The governing body is supportive and knows the school and the community it serves very well. They know the strengths and areas for development in the school. Governors track finances and target funds carefully to improve the wellbeing and learning of pupils. They are beginning to visit the school regularly and participate in evaluating the school's effectiveness suitably. As a result, they are able to offer effective challenge and hold the school to account, for example, on the impact of the nursery provision on the level of pupils' basic skills on entry into the school.

The school has sufficient, well-qualified and experienced staff to deliver the curriculum successfully. Careful planning of the pupils development grant ensures that eligible pupils make good progress towards achieving their targets and improving their wellbeing. The school makes good use of its resources to create a vibrant learning environment that meets the needs of all pupils well.

Copies of the report

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

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

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

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

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

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