



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

A report on

**Porth Community School
Cemetery Road
Porth
Cynon
CF39 0BS**

Date of inspection: November 2019

by

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

About Porth Community School

Porth Community School is an English-medium all-age (3-16) comprehensive school in Porth, Rhondda. The school opened in September 2018 following the closure of Porth County Community School, Porth Infants School, Porth Junior School and Llwynceilyn Infants School. There are 941 pupils on roll, including 257 in the primary phase and 684 in the secondary phase. At post-16, the school works with three other schools and further education colleges as part of the Upper Rhondda Partnership.

In total, around 23.4% of pupils are eligible for free school meals. This is higher than the national average of 18% for all-age schools in Wales. Around 37.5% of pupils live in the 20% most deprived areas in Wales. Just over 32% of pupils have a special educational need, which is higher than the national average of 21%. Around 3.3% of pupils have statements of special educational needs compared with 2.3% for Wales as a whole.

The headteacher was appointed as headteacher designate in January 2017 and commenced her role upon the school's opening in September 2018. The leadership team includes the headteacher, a deputy headteacher, director of finance and estates, four directors of learning and three heads of school.

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

Porth Community School provides a caring, inclusive and supportive ethos for pupils. Leaders have focused effectively on improving behaviour as a foundation for raising standards, and have shared this priority successfully across the school.

Most pupils of primary age and many pupils of secondary age demonstrate positive attitudes towards learning and behave well in lessons. Many pupils also behave well outside of lessons and interact positively with each other. However, low rates of attendance are having a negative impact on pupil progress and standards across the school.

Overall, a majority of pupils make sound progress in acquiring new knowledge, and developing understanding during lessons. However, the majority of pupils do not develop their skills well enough and make slow progress in lessons and by the time they leave the school. In many cases, teachers' expectations are not high enough and this has an adverse impact on the standards pupils achieve and how well they develop their skills.

The headteacher provides strong, focused leadership and has skilfully steered the school through a time of considerable change and instability since establishing the new school in September 2018. Sound leadership and effective improvement planning have been successful in securing improvement in significant areas of the school's work such as pupil behaviour, building positive relationships within the school and strengthening the provision for vulnerable pupils. However, leaders have not been sufficiently successful in bringing about improvements in important aspects such as attendance, pupils' standards and skills, and the quality of teaching.

Inspection area	Judgement
Standards	Unsatisfactory and needs urgent improvement
Wellbeing and attitudes to learning	Adequate and needs improvement
Teaching and learning experiences	Unsatisfactory and needs urgent improvement
Care, support and guidance	Adequate and needs improvement
Leadership and management	Adequate and needs improvement

Recommendations

- R1 Raise standards across the school including improving pupils' skills
- R2 Improve the quality of teaching and assessment
- R3 Strengthen the provision for progressive development of pupils' skills across the curriculum
- R4 Improve pupils' attendance
- R5 Improve leadership at all levels

What happens next

In accordance with the Education Act 2005, HMCI is of the opinion that this school is in need of significant improvement. The school will draw up an action plan to show how it is going to address the recommendations. Estyn will monitor the school's progress about 12 months after the publication of this report.

Main findings

Standards: Unsatisfactory and needs urgent improvement

The majority of pupils across both secondary and primary phases of the school recall prior knowledge appropriately and apply this knowledge suitably to new contexts. Overall, a majority of pupils make sound progress in acquiring new knowledge, and developing understanding. However, the majority of pupils do not develop their skills well enough and make slow progress. Often this is because teachers structure lessons excessively and provide too much help for pupils.

Many pupils listen respectfully to their teachers and peers during lessons and a majority respond appropriately when they are asked questions. These pupils contribute sensibly to class discussions making valuable links to prior learning for example, pupils in Years 5 and 6 explain the relevance of the pH number of stinging nettles and dock leaves. A few pupils articulate their opinions well. For example, Year 3 pupils express effectively their views on computer games and how to keep safe on line. The majority of pupils across the school have difficulty in explaining their thinking. They do not offer extended responses and do not have a rich enough variety of language, including subject specific vocabulary, to express complex ideas or to develop answers and arguments in depth. When given the opportunity a few pupils develop strong speaking skills. For example, pupils in the secondary phase are becoming increasingly confident in speaking Spanish and enjoy doing so.

Many pupils across the school develop sound basic reading skills. These pupils locate information from a range of sources confidently. For example, key stage 2 pupils use index and contents pages effectively to find information quickly about wasps and bees. Many pupils compare information from different sources successfully and a minority of pupils in the secondary phase use technical terminology accurately, for example when analysing aspects of writing style in first world war poetry. However, the majority of pupils have not developed higher order reading skills sufficiently and struggle to combine and synthesise information from different sources independently and infer implicit meaning in texts.

A minority of pupils across the school write logically and organise their work appropriately. However, pupils do not structure their writing effectively to explain or to link ideas. Other than in English lessons, pupils at the school do not have the opportunity to write at length often enough. The majority of pupils generally produce short and underdeveloped pieces of writing. This is largely due to over-reliance on worksheets and tasks which do not present sufficient challenge. The majority of pupils have a sound basic vocabulary. However, a minority have a limited vocabulary and do not use a variety of sentence types. Many pupils make basic errors of spelling, grammar and punctuation.

The majority of pupils have suitable number skills and use these to perform simple calculations. Many pupils, however, do not develop their numeracy skills effectively as they move through the school. As a result, they experience difficulty when trying to apply these skills to perform more complex calculations.

Many pupils in the primary phase develop a limited range of information and communication technology (ICT) skills by the end of key stage 2. For example, most pupils in Year 3 use tablets appropriately to search for information from the internet. However, the skills of the majority of pupils in key stage 3 do not build well enough on this foundation. Overall, the ICT skills of pupils across the school are underdeveloped.

When presented with opportunities, pupils at the school respond enthusiastically to demonstrate creative skills. For example, Year 8 pupils compose and perform a piece of music for an advert jingle skilfully.

Pupils across the school are beginning to apply their thinking skills when given the opportunity to do so. For example, pupils in key stage 2 consider questions well before responding to a 'big question' in science regarding the advantages of landfill waste management over composting.

Many pupils across the school display effective physical skills in a range of contexts. For example, many pupils in the nursery develop their fine motor skills effectively when making a clay hedgehog. Nearly all Year 8 pupils develop their football skills effectively during a PE lesson and many deploy these skills effectively during a game situation.

In 2019, the performance of pupils at the end of key stage 4 compares poorly with that of pupils in similar schools. Overall, pupils make less progress than expected in nearly all indicators. The performance of pupils eligible for free school meals is in line with that of this group of pupils in similar schools. All pupils are entered for the skills challenge certificate. However, the school's performance is below that of similar schools. Overall, pupils do not make progress in Welsh which is in line with their age and ability. Many pupils enter further education, employment or training at the end of Year 11.

Wellbeing and attitudes to learning: Adequate and needs improvement

The majority of pupils are happy and enthusiastic about coming to school. Positive relationships between staff and pupils are a particular strength. Throughout the school many pupils feel safe and are confident that staff deal effectively with any incidents of conflict.

Most pupils of primary age and many pupils of secondary age behave well in lessons and demonstrate positive attitudes for learning. Many pupils settle quickly in lessons but a few are slow to do so and disrupt their own learning and that of others. Many pupils are interested in their learning and stay on task during lessons. These pupils listen well to each other and respect the contributions of others.

Many pupils behave well outside of lessons and interact positively with each other. Most pupils treat each other in a caring, respectful and supportive manner. They are polite and courteous to each other and adults. Across the school, pupil behaviour has improved significantly since the school opened.

In lessons many pupils listen well to each other and respect the contributions of others. They show an interest in their learning. These pupils work well with others in

small groups and in whole class settings. Most pupils settle quickly in lessons but a few are slow to do so and this delays learning time for the whole class. A minority of pupils struggle to maintain concentration and focus on a set task for an extended period of time. A majority of pupils do not demonstrate the skills to improve their own learning, solve problems and develop their thinking.

Pupils across the school are beginning to develop their leadership skills through the Senedd and Eco club. Although at an early stage of development, they are starting to impact on school life. For example, they have made suggestions which have led to changes in lunchtime organisation in the secondary phase canteen. However, overall, pupil leadership groups have limited influence on school policy or teaching and learning, and a minority of pupils still do not feel that the school listens well enough to their views.

Pupils are beginning to engage in valuable charitable and community projects. For example, they have collected food for the local food bank and sold knitted chicks in aid of Velindre hospital.

Pupil attendance rates are low across the whole school and have deteriorated significantly over time despite numerous interventions. The number of pupils who are persistently absent is very high. The low rates of attendance are having a negative impact on pupil progress and standards across the school.

Teaching and learning experiences: Unsatisfactory and needs urgent improvement

Many teachers nurture positive working relationships with pupils and have suitable subject knowledge. They manage behaviour well and make effective use of teaching assistants to support pupils' learning.

A minority of teachers create an engaging and productive learning environment. They plan carefully, taking into account pupils' prior learning and their potential to achieve. These teachers prepare useful resources and interesting activities which support pupils to make sound progress in their knowledge and understanding.

In the very few cases where teaching is most effective, teachers cater for the different needs of all pupils particularly well. These teachers plan challenging activities that stretch pupils to achieve their potential. They adapt their teaching skilfully in response to pupil progress. These teachers support pupils well to develop their knowledge and to apply their skills. In these cases, pupils make strong progress.

In the foundation phase, a minority of teachers ensure a suitable balance of adult-led and free play activities. However, they do not provide the pupils with sufficient opportunities to improve their learning through enhanced and continuous provision, such as effective use of the outdoors.

In many cases, teachers' expectations of what pupils can achieve are too low. They do not provide pupils with a suitable degree of challenge and do not intervene effectively when pupils are off task. These teachers do not plan precisely or ambitiously enough to meet the needs and develop the skills of all individuals. For

example, they plan a range of activities and tasks that keep pupils busy but do not support them well enough to make progress. They over structure and over direct work, giving pupils too much help. As a result, the pace of learning is too slow and pupils do not develop well enough as independent, resilient learners who are able to apply their skills in different contexts. This limits the progress that they make.

A majority of teachers use questioning suitably to check pupils' knowledge. However, only a few use questioning effectively to challenge pupils' thinking and deepen their understanding. A minority of teachers monitor pupils' progress carefully, address misconceptions promptly and provide useful feedback that identifies clearly how pupils can improve their work. However, the majority of teachers' feedback does not help pupils to improve their knowledge or skills well enough. Many teachers do not monitor closely enough how well pupils have improved their work in response to the feedback.

The school provides a broadly suitable curriculum that meets the needs of most pupils. There is an appropriate range of learning pathways for most pupils as they progress into key stage 4 with an increasing choice of academic and vocational courses. However, in the primary phase the school does not offer a broad enough range of opportunities for pupils to develop all aspects of their mathematics skills.

The school is beginning to develop a curriculum to ensure continuity in learning experiences across the primary and secondary phases. For example, pupils in the primary phase regularly visit the secondary phase to develop their drama and music skills. This work within the school and with partner primary schools is in the early stages of development. The school provides appropriate opportunities to broaden the horizons of more able learners. For example, the mission discovery project supported these pupils to consider scientific experiments relating to the international space station.

The school offers an appropriate range of extra-curricular and after school activities which supports pupils' social development suitably. For example pupils from all age groups participated enthusiastically in a recent production of 'The Wizard of Oz'. The primary phase makes appropriate use of enrichment visits to engage pupils in their learning. For example, the recent Year 3 and 4 trip to a bush craft experience increased pupils' enthusiasm for studying the 'wild woods' topic.

The secondary phase makes worthwhile use of partnerships with local businesses and colleges to raise pupils' aspirations for future employment or study. For example, the 'have a go days' in the local college have supported vulnerable learners to apply for appropriate courses.

The provision for the development of pupils' literacy, numeracy and ICT skills across the school is underdeveloped. The school is beginning to map skills development across the curriculum. However, the school does not plan for the progressive development of pupils' skills well enough. Staff offer suitable support for pupils with weak literacy skills. Support for pupils with weak numeracy skills is beginning to develop. However, leaders do not evaluate the impact of these interventions well enough.

The planning to develop pupils' Welsh language skills is in the early stages of development. In the primary phase, the school provides suitable opportunities to extend pupils' use of Welsh through extra-curricular activities such as trips to Llangrannog. However, in general, the school does not plan purposefully enough to develop a Welsh ethos or pupils' Welsh language skills.

Care, support and guidance: Adequate and needs improvement

Porth Community School provides a caring, inclusive and supportive ethos for pupils. Leaders have focused effectively on improving behaviour as a foundation for raising standards, and have shared this priority successfully across the school. Procedures to improve and monitor behaviour are strong and have led to significant improvements in pupils' behaviour.

The support given to vulnerable pupils is a strength of the school and, in particular, the provision for pupils with emotional and social needs. The school offers a range of valuable programmes for these pupils which are having a positive impact on improving their confidence, for example with pupils following modified and personalised timetables returning to mainstream education.

The school meets the needs of pupils with significant behavioural issues well through the alternative provision provided in the 'Gate' centre. Here, staff develop positive, trusting relationships with the pupils successfully. As a result, these vulnerable pupils are engaged in their learning and interact well with their peers.

The school's recent work to improve attendance has not been effective. Attendance rates at the school compare poorly with those in similar schools and the number of persistent absentees is very high.

Arrangements to support transition between the primary and secondary phases of the school are beginning to impact positively on pupils' confidence as they progress to the next stage in their education. However, transition arrangements for pupils from other partner primary schools are not as well advanced.

The school identifies pupils with special educational needs promptly and effectively. Provision for these pupils is well organised and they make good progress against their individual targets. Pupils' individual educational plans are purposeful and, in the majority of cases, include relevant targets. Overall, these plans contain sensible strategies to promote pupils' learning. However, only a minority of teachers use this information suitably in their teaching and planning.

The school has appropriate systems to record pupils' attainment in individual subjects. Leaders are beginning to use this information suitably to monitor pupil progress and identify those who are at risk of underachieving. However, processes for assessment, tracking and monitoring pupil progress have not been effective enough in supporting the school to improve standards, particularly in key stage 4.

Reports in the primary phase provide helpful information to parents on their child's progress. However, in the secondary phase the quality of written reports and the information to parents is inconsistent. Too many comments do not focus sufficiently on standards and do not give useful advice on how further progress can be made.

The school has appropriate arrangements for healthy eating and drinking and as a result, the pupils have suitable opportunities to develop an understanding of the importance of healthy eating and life style choices.

The school has suitable arrangements to develop pupils' moral, social and cultural development. Circle time, tutor periods and lessons help pupils to discuss important aspects such as tolerance and respecting diversity. The school makes beneficial use of strong partnerships with a range of agencies such as the police, health and charitable organisations to enhance pupils' experiences and understanding of health and social issues.

The provision for clubs during the day and after school allows pupils to enjoy a wide range of musical, sporting and cultural activities. This develops their personal strengths and helps them realise how to be valued members of the local community. The school show and other events help the pupils to develop creative skills and to grow in confidence in public performances.

The school provides appropriate opportunities for daily reflection that promote wellbeing and develop the spiritual aspects of pupils' lives. These sessions help pupils to extend their understanding and to consider their response to challenging situations. The provision to support pupils to become active citizens is beginning to develop through the school Senedd and Eco Club.

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

Leadership and management: Adequate and needs improvement

The headteacher provides strong, focused leadership. She is a powerful role model who leads by example and communicates high expectations in all that she does. She has skilfully steered the school through a time of considerable change and instability since establishing the new school in September 2018. Her clear vision is rooted firmly in a heartfelt commitment to pupils' wellbeing, providing the best life chances for pupils and establishing a school that is at the heart of its community. This vision is communicated effectively and embraced fully by staff and governors.

In the relatively short time the school has been in existence, leaders have been successful in building a team ethos and creating a sense of shared ambition. A notable feature of leaders is the way in which they reflect regularly on their work since the inception of the school. They are honest about actions that have not been successful and articulate clearly the lessons learned from these experiences. They have responded to the many challenges they have faced with a flexible approach and a positive attitude.

Sound leadership and effective improvement planning have been successful in securing improvement in significant areas of the school's work such as pupil behaviour, building positive relationships and the provision for vulnerable pupils. However, leaders have not been successful enough in bringing about improvements in important aspects such as attendance, pupils' standards and skills, and the quality of teaching.

Governors have a sound understanding of the main issues facing the school and a deep knowledge of its context and background. They are very supportive of the school and are developing suitably as critical friends who provide appropriate challenge.

There is a broadly appropriate leadership structure. However, significant responsibilities lie with a relatively small group of leaders. This limits the overall capacity of the leadership team to effect improvement.

There is a suitable programme of line management meetings that are beginning to be effective in holding staff to account and supporting improvements. These meetings focus appropriately on the school's overarching priorities and give attention to important aspects such as pupil progress. However, there is too much variability in the quality and impact of these meetings. In many cases, records focus overly on operational matters and do not generate appropriate strategic actions for improvement.

The headteacher has an honest and accurate picture of the school's strengths and areas for improvement. She has a realistic understanding of what needs to be done to improve and has prioritised appropriately. Other leaders are developing this understanding suitably.

All leaders undertake a range of suitable self-evaluation activities. These include lesson observations, work scrutiny, peer reviews and gathering pupils' views. Their use and analysis of data is at an early stage of development.

At the highest level of leadership, self-evaluation is forensic and searingly honest. It is a continuous process where leaders reflect regularly on the effectiveness of actions and aspects of the school's work, and identify pertinent improvement priorities as a result. In the best examples, this leads to precise actions and positive impact. However, this assured command of self-evaluation processes does not extend to all leaders. Overall, leaders' grasp of self-evaluation as a continuous process is underdeveloped and they do not have a sufficiently secure or detailed understanding of shortcomings in important areas or how to address them. Overall, the impact of leaders' improvement planning is too variable.

Leaders make generally appropriate use of self-evaluation activities to gain a broad understanding of the quality of teaching and learning. However, they do not have a detailed enough understanding of this aspect of the school's work. In particular, leaders do not focus sufficiently on specific shortcomings in pupils' skills and do not identify areas for improvement well enough. As a result, planning to improve teaching and learning, especially the development of pupils' skills, is not strategic or precise enough.

The school provides a menu of suitable professional learning opportunities which include leadership courses, a developing culture of coaching and mentoring, and burgeoning links with other schools. Professional learning activities are linked appropriately to the school's improvement priorities and individual staff needs.

There is an appropriate performance management system, which includes targets related to the school's overarching priorities. Reviews of performance are thorough and instances of underperformance are dealt with robustly.

The headteacher, business manager and governing body monitor the school's budget carefully. They manage expenditure well, matching the spending appropriately to the school's priorities and needs. They are resourceful in acquiring additional funds and provision that benefit the pupils, such as funding to support outdoor pursuits, the school production and coaching sessions for pupils from a local netball club. Leaders make effective use of grant funding, including the pupil development grant. This has had a positive impact on the outcomes and wellbeing of vulnerable pupils. The school lacks sufficient ICT equipment to support provision for the development of pupils' ICT skills across the whole school.

Evidence base of the report

Before an inspection, inspectors:

- analyse the outcomes from the parent 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 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' wellbeing, 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)

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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