

**Inspection under Section 28 of the
Education Act 2005**

A Report on the Quality of Education in

**St Mary's Roman Catholic Voluntary Aided Primary School
Catholic Road
Brynmawr
Blaenau Gwent
NP23 4EF**

School Number: 677/3308

Date of Inspection: 02/06/09

by

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St Mary's Roman Catholic (RC) Voluntary Aided (VA) Primary School was inspected as part of a national programme of school inspection. The purpose of inspection is to identify good features and shortcomings in schools in order that they may improve the quality of education offered and raise the standards achieved by their pupils. The inspection of all schools within a six-year cycle is also designed to give parents information about the performance of their child's school

The inspection of St Mary's RC VA Primary School took place between 2nd and 4th June 2009. An independent team of inspectors, led by Mr Robert Alun Isaac undertook the inspection. Estyn, a statutory body independent of, but funded by, the National Assembly for Wales, commissioned the inspection.

The team was required to report on the standards achieved by pupils, the quality of education provided by the school, the quality of leadership and management and the contribution made by the school to its pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.

The five-point scale used to represent all inspection judgments in this report is as follows:

Grade 1	good with outstanding features
Grade 2	good features and no important shortcomings
Grade 3	good features outweigh shortcomings
Grade 4	some good features, but shortcomings in important areas
Grade 5	many important shortcomings

There are three types of inspection.

For **all** inspections, there is a written report on seven key questions.

For **short** inspections, there are no subject reports.

For **standard** inspections, there are also reports on six subjects.

For **full** inspections, there are also reports on all subjects.

Estyn decides the kind of inspection that a school receives, mainly on the basis of its past performance. Most schools receive a standard inspection. All nursery schools, special schools, pupil referral units and any new or amalgamated schools receive a full inspection.

This school received a **standard** inspection.

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 5 during the academic year. Year 1 refers to the year group of pupils who reach the age of 6 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 National Curriculum covers four key stages as follows:

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

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Context

The nature of the provider

1. St Mary's Roman Catholic (RC) Voluntary Aided (VA) Primary School is situated in Brynmawr, a small town close to the A465 'Heads of the Valleys' road in Blaenau Gwent. It caters for boys and girls aged three to 11 years and covers a wider than average catchment area from not only Brynmawr but also other towns and villages along the A467 as far as Abertillery to the south. It serves the parishes of St Mary's Brynmawr, St. Mary's Abertillery and the former parish of St. David's Llanhilleth.
2. The school reports that the catchment is generally economically disadvantaged and has suffered from many years of industrial decline but is now benefiting from improved transport links and the construction of new housing. The local education authority (LEA) is administered by Blaenau Gwent Borough Council. Currently, the school has total numbers on roll of 175 learners. These numbers have risen very substantially in the last six years. Learners start, part-time, in the nursery at the age of three and leave the school at the end of Year 6. All classes contain single age groups. A significant minority of almost half the school has enrolled at times later than when they were of nursery age, coming from other schools. Free school meals are received by 32 per cent of pupils, which is well above the national average for Wales.
3. The annual intake covers the full ability range, but is broadly below average as indicated by baseline assessments. Forty-two pupils (25 per cent) are considered to have some form of additional learning need (ALN) or special educational need (SEN), including three (1.7 per cent) who are the subject of a formal statement of SEN. The former figure is above the national average. English is the sole or predominant home language in most cases. No pupil comes from a Welsh speaking home and eight per cent have a minority ethnic background. A few receive extra support in learning English as an additional language (EAL) and speak either Tagalog, Malayalam, Hindi or Tamil. Three pupils are looked after or fostered by the local authority.
4. There are eight full-time teachers, including the headteacher and two part-time teachers who teach classes during other teachers' planning, preparation and assessment (PPA) time. Ten teaching assistants also provide support. At the time of the inspection the school's accommodation had just been completely refurbished and extended to include new classrooms, interactive whiteboards and nursery flooring. No changes have been made to the school's status in recent years. The present headteacher has been in post since 2003 and the school was last inspected June 2003. The school is currently implementing the foundation phase in the nursery and reception classes.
5. The Catholic Church's Archdiocese of Cardiff arranged for the inspection of religious education and collective worship at the same time as this Section 28 inspection. A Section 50 report is issued separately.

The school's priorities and targets

6. The school's mission statement states that it aims for all to "work, pray, share and learn together in a supportive environment." It also aims to have a partnership with parents and the parish to ensure that each child develops academically, spiritually, physically and socially.
7. The school development plan (SDP) for 2008/09 states that its aim is "to bring about a recognisable improvement in the quality of teaching and learning." The SDP also sets out the following areas for further improvement: the Foundation Phase, the use of information and communications technology (ICT), the teaching of literacy and the provision for outdoor learning.

Summary

8. St. Mary's is a good, thriving school which provides outstanding care, support and guidance and is led with commitment and great clarity of purpose. Standards are good, teaching is effective and the curriculum is enriching. The school has improved significantly over the last six years and it gives good value for money. It recognises that it needs to raise further the standards achieved by pupils in English, particularly boys.

Table of grades awarded

Key Question	Inspection grade
1 How well do learners achieve?	Grade 2
2 How effective are teaching, training and assessment?	Grade 2
3 How well do the learning experiences meet the needs and interests of learners and the wider community?	Grade 2
4 How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	Grade 1
5 How effective are leadership and strategic management?	Grade 2
6 How well do leaders and managers evaluate and improve quality and standards?	Grade 2
7 How efficient are leaders and managers in using resources?	Grade 2

9. The inspection team agreed with the school's judgment in six out of the seven key questions. Where there was a difference, in Key Question 4, this was because the team awarded a higher grade due to the identification of a number of outstanding features.

Standards in subjects and/or areas of learning for under-fives

10. Initial assessments show that when children join the school in nursery their attainments are often broadly below average. From that time onward they learn quickly and effectively.

Area of Learning for children aged under five	Nursery	Reception
Personal and social development, wellbeing and cultural diversity	1	1
Language, literacy and communication skills	2	2
Welsh Language Development	2	2
Mathematical development	2	2
Knowledge and understanding of the world	2	2
Physical development	2	2
Creative development	1	1

11. The overall quality of the educational provision for the under-fives is appropriate to their needs and children make good progress towards the foundation phase outcomes. They also make good progress in the key skills of speaking, listening, reading, writing, numeracy and ICT.
12. The assessments of pupils' achievements in English, mathematics and science in May 2009 which are analysed below were conducted internally by teachers and checked by an external moderation panel of advisory staff from the local education authority (LEA).
13. In 2009, at the end of key stage 1, the proportion of pupils that attained at least national curriculum Level 2 was above the local but below the national averages in English and science and in line with the local but below the national averages in mathematics.
14. The proportion in key stage 1 that attained national curriculum Level 3 was well below the national average in English, mathematics and science. Their attainments were average in English and below average in mathematics and science when compared with the results of pupils in similar schools across Wales, that is, those with similar numbers entitled to receive free school meals.
15. The key stage 1 collective results for pupils who attained at least Level 2 in all three core subjects were above the local but below the national averages and close to the average achieved by pupils in similar schools. Girls achieved a little more highly than boys.
16. In 2009, at the end of key stage 2, the proportion of pupils that attained at least national curriculum Level 4 was above the local averages in English, mathematics and science. Their achievements were below the national average in English, above the average in mathematics and in line with the average in science.

17. The proportion of pupils that attained national curriculum Level 5 was in line with the national average in English, mathematics and science. Their attainments were average in English and science and above average in mathematics when compared with the results of pupils from similar schools.
18. The key stage 2 collective results for pupils who attained at least Level 4 in all three core subjects were above the local and national averages and also above average when compared with similar schools. This is a significant achievement and shows that pupils make good progress from year to year. In 2009, Girls achieved much more highly than boys, sometimes by at least 20 per cent.
19. Overall standards in English, mathematics and science have varied over the last three years in both key stages although the school's own analysis in its self-evaluation report shows that pupils have done better at key stage 2 than key stage 1. This is because they make good progress the longer they study at the school.
20. The numbers who are assessed in Year 6 have grown over the last four years but still remain small, at between 4 and 13, compared with other schools nationally. The other important factor is that many pupils have started at the school in the middle of their primary phase education rather than enrolling in the nursery. Out of the entire cohort from Year 1 to Year 6, almost 50 per cent have started in year groups above nursery age.
21. The overall grades awarded for standards achieved in the subjects and areas of learning inspected were as follows:

Grade 1	Grade 2	Grade 3	Grade 4	Grade 5
17%	79%	4%	0%	0%

22. These percentages are a great improvement on those reported in the last inspection. They also compare well with the national figures published in the Annual Report of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector (HMCI) for 2007-08 where 84 per cent of standards in primary schools in Wales are Grade 2 or better and 12 per cent are Grade 1.

Grades awarded for standards in the six subjects chosen for inspection

Subject	Nursery & Reception	Key Stage 1	Key Stage 2
Under Fives	Grade 2		
English		Grade 3	Grade 3
Mathematics		Grade 2	Grade 2
Geography		Grade 2	Grade 2
Information Communications Technology (ICT)		Grade 1	Grade 1
Physical education		Grade 2	Grade 2

23. In key stages 1 and 2, standards and progress in the key skills of speaking, listening, reading and writing across the curriculum are good. The writing of older pupils, in particular, displays good features and they use language well to communicate their ideas. Standards are also good in the use of numeracy and in pupils' knowledge of ICT. Standards in the use of incidental Welsh and bilingualism have more strengths than shortcomings. Pupils have too few opportunities daily to use Welsh in other subjects and to become more fluent.
24. Learners, including those with SEN or in vulnerable circumstances, make good progress in gaining knowledge, understanding and skills. Pupils with EAL also make good progress even when they start with little knowledge of English. This is mainly due to the close, individual support they get from teachers and teaching assistants.
25. Standards of behaviour and the attitudes of pupils towards learning are outstanding. They are courteous, friendly and welcoming and have a clear understanding of what is expected of them. They are also good ambassadors for their school and their behaviour during collective worship and when visiting church is exemplary.
26. Attendance rates for the past three terms average 92.7 per cent. These rates are slightly below average national attendance figures for pupils of primary school age. However, they compare favourably with those of schools that have a similar number of pupils entitled to receive free school meals. Most pupils are punctual and keen to attend school. Given the transitory nature of the school population and the high turnover in many year groups, the attendance and punctuality figures are commendable.
27. Pupils have a growing appreciation of equal opportunities issues, particularly relating to gender and disability issues, and recognise the importance of treating everyone fairly. Their understanding of the diversity of beliefs, social and cultural traditions in the world and global citizenship is, however, underdeveloped.

The quality of education and training

Grades for teaching

Grade 1	Grade 2	Grade 3	Grade 4	Grade 5
24%	73%	3%	0%	0%

28. These figures are above the national picture as confirmed in the report of HMCI in his annual report of 2007-08. Nationally the quality of teaching is reported to be good or better in 83 per cent of lessons within which 16 per cent has outstanding features.
29. The quality of the teaching is a strength of the school and has improved since the last inspection. The consistency of teachers' planning, teaching and subject knowledge is good and has a positive impact on the standards achieved by pupils in all year groups. In a number of lessons observed there

were outstanding features. These included use of the outdoor classroom, the interactive whiteboard and other computer resources. Teachers show skill in asking questions and developing lessons sequentially. They work well with teaching assistants to help those with ALN, SEN and EAL.

30. Assessment of children aged under five is good. Baseline assessments enable early intervention to support pupils' needs. The school's arrangements for assessment in key stages 1 and 2, including end of key stage teacher assessments, are good and fully meet national requirements. Teachers and LEA advisers have undertaken appropriate exercises in moderating assessments in relation to national curriculum criteria and this has improved the accuracy and consistency of assessment.
31. The school offers a rich, broad, interesting and balanced curriculum that meets the needs of the range of learners. It ensures that pupils progress systematically, grow in confidence and are ready for the next phase of their education. A wide range of variety experiences ensures that they enjoy learning.
32. Pupils' spiritual, moral and social development are good but the promotion of their cultural education has more strengths than shortcomings. St Mary's has an ethos of respect and care and a passion for the environment. The school's motto 'Working, Praying, Sharing and Learning Together' is in everyone's mind and is reflected in the way pupils conduct themselves. The national requirements for acts of collective worship are fully met.
33. The school has established highly successful partnerships with the local community, the church and the archdiocese. Clergy and parishioners hold the school in high regard and appreciate the contribution that staff and pupils make to the life and worship of the church community. The school confirms that the strength of the partnership between it and clergy is a key factor in the considerable increase in the numbers on roll.
34. The school is fully embracing the new curriculum for the foundation phase in the nursery and reception classes. Children enjoy a curriculum that is challenging, stimulating, creative and rich in learning experiences indoors and outside. The school's leaders and teaching staff have been proactive in implementing the curriculum ahead of the national timescales set.
35. The school's partnerships with parents, the local community, other schools and higher education institutions are highly successful. They have outstanding features that enhance pupils' learning experiences.
36. Parents are very supportive of and loyal to the school. They express satisfaction with the aims and values that the school promotes and particularly appreciate its sense of Christian community. Communication with parents is well-established and effective. A constructive home/school agreement is in place that has readily been accepted by parents.

37. The school's range of extra-curricular activities is outstanding. These include sport, music, creativity, ICT and the environment. A Year 6 pupil also runs a chess club. Pupils take full advantage of these opportunities. Clubs are well run and popular. They contribute effectively towards raising standards of personal development.
38. The promotion of education for sustainable development and global citizenship is underdeveloped and the school accepts that this is an area which needs to be expanded further.
39. Pupils are outstandingly well cared for, guided and supported in a very supportive and happy environment. The school has a calm and welcoming ethos and every pupil is valued and included.
40. The quality of relationships between teachers, teaching assistants and pupils is also outstanding. Teaching and teaching assistants give guidance and support of high quality. Specialist intervention programmes for pupils with specific learning disorders and physical and emotional difficulties are outstanding. The breakfast club is thriving and provides a positive start to the day for pupils of all ages.
41. Provision for pupils with SEN is good. This is an improvement since the last inspection. The school uses a good range of baseline and diagnostic assessments, in conjunction with parental referrals to identify pupils with SEN effectively and to influence teaching appropriately. The SEN Co-ordinator (SENCo) manages the arrangements very well. The school works collaboratively with a range of specialist agencies to ensure the best support is available. The school fully complies with statutory requirements, policies and procedures.

Leadership and management

42. The school has a clear sense of its own educational direction and good standards are promoted very well. The essence of the school's effectiveness is in the good team spirit between the headteacher, other staff, pupils and parents. The school's ethos embodies Christian principles.
43. The headteacher's leadership is characterised as thoughtful, reflective, empowering and very caring. It has seen the school through a period of curriculum change and significant improvement at many levels.
44. Subject co-ordinators are closely involved in policy making and implementing practicable schemes of work. They conscientiously monitor and evaluate the quality of teaching and the standards achieved in their subjects.
45. The quality of governance has good features with no important shortcomings. Governors are committed to the school and conscientious in their duties.
46. The school's self-evaluation processes are good. Members of staff, governors, parents and pupils are appropriately involved through questionnaires and

discussions. The school listens carefully to all its stakeholders and takes appropriate action for improvement and when managing change. Information about the school's performance is based on a careful analysis of assessment data and other information from class teachers. Subject leaders are fully involved in the process. The self-evaluation report arises from a good evidence base and clearly identifies strengths and areas for development.

47. The school has made good progress since the last inspection. It has successfully addressed all the key issues identified in the last report. It has also improved pupils' standards of achievement, the quality of teaching and the curriculum, the standards of care, guidance and support and the quality of leadership and management. It has developed quickly, greatly increasing the numbers on roll, extending the accommodation, but still retaining and improving its caring Catholic family ethos.
48. There are a sufficient number of qualified and experienced teachers and teaching assistants to meet the requirements of the national curriculum. They are appropriately deployed and work very well together as a team.
49. A generous number of well motivated teaching assistants help teachers. They operate effectively in classrooms and make a good contribution to classroom activities. This primarily includes support for pupils with ALN and SEN. Teaching assistants have had some, but not enough, in-service training and education (INSET) in the requirements of the new foundation phase.
50. Overall the quality of the accommodation is good. The headteacher and managers have invested wisely in new buildings and the outdoor accommodation. The new classrooms are spacious, clean and modern; teaching staff have had an input in the design. The indoor and outdoor areas for the foundation phase are outstanding and contribute significantly to standards of achievement.
51. Within the older area of the school, a few issues remain, although plans are in place to improve facilities. The school hall is too small to accommodate the whole community. As a result of this lack of space, physical education activities are restricted. Two classrooms are small and cramped with inadequate storage facilities and there is no medical room for pupils who are ill.
52. Good use is made of available resources and these are generally good in quantity, quality and range. There are, though, not enough materials to help pupils learn about other cultures and countries. All classes have interactive whiteboards which are used confidently by staff and pupils. The school has a new library which is still being stocked. There is no computer suite but teachers use a bank of laptop computers and all classes have two hours a week learning ICT skills and techniques.
53. Overall, financial management is good and the school is on course to meet its financial commitments this year. Priorities are set by the headteacher and the governing body's (GB) finance committee. Good financial protocols enable the headteacher to manage the financial implications of good staffing and up-to-

date equipment. The school budget is monitored efficiently by the headteacher and senior management team.

54. Current planning matches key resources to the main priorities for improvement in the SDP. Available resources are managed effectively so that the school achieves best value for money in its expenditure.
55. Taking into account the good standards achieved, the good teaching, the rich curriculum, the good quality of leadership and the significant improvements since the last inspection, the school gives good value for money.

Recommendations

The governors, headteacher and staff now need to incorporate and prioritise the following recommendations into its forward planning in order to improve the school further:

- R1 Raise pupils' attainments in English, particularly those of boys;
- R2 Continue to develop the classroom role of teaching assistants in the foundation phase; and
- R3 Improve pupils' awareness and understanding of cultural diversity and global citizenship.

The governing body is responsible for amending its current development plan to incorporate action in response to the recommendations within 45 working days of receiving the report, showing what the school is going to do about the recommendations. This plan, or a summary of it, will be circulated to all parents at the school.

Standards

Key Question 1: How well do learners achieve?

Grade 2: Good features and no important shortcomings

56. The findings of the inspection team match the judgment made by the school in its self-evaluation report. Overall, standards of achievement are good with no important shortcomings. Standards have greatly improved since the time of the last inspection.

Standards in subjects and areas of learning for the under-fives

57. The assessments of pupils' achievements in English, mathematics and science in May 2009 which are analysed below were conducted by teachers and checked by a local education authority (LEA) moderation panel of advisory staff.
58. In 2009, at the end of key stage 1, the proportion of pupils that attained at least national curriculum Level 2 was above the local but below the national averages in English and science and in line with local but below the national averages in mathematics.
59. The proportion of pupils in key stage 1 that attained national curriculum Level 3 was well below the national average in English, mathematics and science. Their attainments were average in English and below average in mathematics and science when compared with the results of pupils from similar schools across Wales, that is, those with similar numbers registered as entitled to receive free school meals.
60. The key stage 1 collective results for pupils who attained at least Level 2 in all three core subjects were above the local but below the national averages and broadly average when compared with similar schools. Girls achieved a little more highly than boys.
61. In 2009, at the end of key stage 2, the proportion of pupils that attained at least national curriculum Level 4 was above the local averages in English, mathematics and science. Their achievements were below the national average in English, above the average in mathematics and in line with the average in science.
62. The proportion of pupils that attained national curriculum Level 5 was in line with the national average in English, mathematics and science. Their attainments were average in English and science and above average in mathematics when compared with the results of pupils from similar schools.
63. The key stage 2 collective results for pupils who attained at least Level 4 in all three core subjects were above the local and national averages and also above average when compared with similar schools. This is a significant achievement

and shows that pupils make good progress from year to year. Girls achieved much more highly than boys by at least 20 per cent.

64. Overall standards in English, mathematics and science have varied over the last three years in both key stages although the school's own analysis in its self-evaluation report shows that pupils have done better at key stage 2 than key stage 1. This is because they make good progress the longer they study at the school.
65. The numbers who are assessed in Year 6 have grown over the last four years but still remain small, at between 4 and 13, compared with other schools nationally. The other important factor is that many pupils have started at the school in the middle of their primary phase education rather than enrolling in the nursery. Out of the entire cohort from Year 1 to Year 6, almost 50 per cent have started in year groups above nursery age.

Area of Learning for children aged under five	Nursery	Reception
Personal and social development, wellbeing and cultural diversity	1	1
Language, literacy and communication skills	2	2
Welsh Language Development	2	2
Mathematical development	2	2
Knowledge and understanding of the world	2	2
Physical development	2	2
Creative development	1	1

66. Initial assessments show that when children join the school in nursery their attainments are often broadly below average. From that time onward they learn quickly and effectively.
67. The overall quality of the educational provision for the under-fives is appropriate to their needs and children make good progress towards the foundation phase outcomes. They also make good progress in the key skills of speaking, listening, reading, writing, numeracy and ICT.
68. The overall grades awarded for standards achieved in the subjects and areas of learning inspected were as follows:

Grade 1	Grade 2	Grade 3	Grade 4	Grade 5
17%	79%	4%	0%	0%

69. These percentages are a great improvement on those reported in the last inspection. They also compare well with the national figures published in the Annual Report of HMCI for 2007-08 where 84 per cent of standards in primary schools in Wales are Grade 2 or better and 12 per cent are Grade 1.
70. Learners, including those with SEN or in vulnerable circumstances, make good progress in gaining knowledge, understanding and skills. Pupils with EAL also

make good progress even when they start with little knowledge of English. This is mainly due to the close, individual support they get from teachers and teaching assistants.

Grades for standards in the six subjects inspected

Subject	Nursery & Reception	Key Stage 1	Key Stage 2
Under-Fives	Grade 2		
English		Grade 3	Grade 3
Mathematics		Grade 2	Grade 2
Geography		Grade 2	Grade 2
ICT		Grade 1	Grade 1
Physical education		Grade 2	Grade 2

71. The above table demonstrates that there are good features in many areas of learning for children aged under five and also in the work of key stage 1 and 2 pupils.
72. In key stages 1 and 2, standards and progress in the key skills of speaking, listening, reading and writing across the curriculum are good. The writing of older pupils, in particular, displays good features and they use language well to communicate their ideas. Standards are also good in the use of numeracy and in pupils' knowledge of ICT. Standards in the use of incidental Welsh and bilingualism have more strengths than shortcomings. Pupils have too few opportunities daily to use Welsh in other subjects and to become more fluent.
73. Children in the nursery and reception classes make good progress in working and playing both independently and in partnership with others. They are consistently encouraged to make their own choices and decisions and are eager to explore new learning situations.
74. Pupils in key stages 1 and 2 make good progress in their personal, social, moral and wider development. Their good relationships with staff underpin this and they feel confident in expressing themselves because they know their views are valued. Pupils are provided with guidance based on Christian values through the sensitive content of collective worship, the well structured personal and social education (PSE) programme and the school's highly supportive ethos.
75. Standards of behaviour and the attitudes of pupils towards learning are outstanding. They are courteous, friendly and welcoming and have a clear understanding of what is expected of them. They are also good ambassadors for their school and their behaviour during collective worship and when visiting church is exemplary.
76. Pupils in key stages 1 and 2 are enthusiastic learners and enjoy their work and play. They are actively engaged in lessons, listen carefully to their teachers and sustain concentration to the best of their abilities. They are keen to do their best because they know that their efforts are valued and celebrated.

77. Pupils work well independently and take responsibility for their own learning. They work together confidently in pairs and groups, organise activities fairly and ensure everyone can contribute. They readily engage with all the opportunities for learning offered to them.
78. Attendance rates for the past three terms average 92.7 per cent. This is slightly below the national average for pupils of primary school age. However, they compare favourably with those of schools that have a similar number of pupils entitled to receive free school meals. Most pupils are punctual and keen to attend school. Given the transitory nature of the school population and the high turnover in many year groups, the attendance and punctuality figures are commendable.
79. Pupils have a growing appreciation of equal opportunities issues, particularly relating to gender and disability issues, and recognise the importance of treating everyone fairly. Their understanding of the diversity of beliefs, social and cultural traditions in the world is under-developed.
80. Pupils are well prepared to take an active role in the life and work of the local community and they support a range of community activities and initiatives. Through well planned educational visits in the locality, they learn about the wider community and how they can contribute personally.

The quality of education and training

Key Question 2: How effective are teaching, training and assessment?

Grade 2: Good features and no important shortcomings

81. The overall quality of teaching is good. Outstanding features were observed in the teaching in a range of classes. The findings of the inspection team match the judgment made by the school in its self-evaluation report. Inspection evidence supported the school's judgment of Grade 2 in its self-evaluation report. The teaching has improved considerably since the time of the last inspection.

82. In the lessons observed, the quality of teaching was judged as follows:

Grade 1	Grade 2	Grade 3	Grade 4	Grade 5
24%	73%	3%	0%	0%

83. These figures are above the national picture as indicated in the report of HMCI in his annual report for 2007-08. Nationally the quality of teaching is reported to be good or better in 83 per cent of lessons with 16 per cent having outstanding features.

84. The quality of the teaching is a strength of the school. The consistency of teachers' planning, teaching and subject knowledge is good and has a positive impact on the standards achieved by pupils in all year groups. In a number of lessons observed there were outstanding features. These included:

- the use of the outdoor classroom;
- the use of the interactive whiteboard and other computer resources;
- skill in asking questions;
- the sequential development of lessons; and
- good teamwork with teaching assistants to help those with ALN, SEN and EAL.

85. Teachers have a high degree of subject knowledge and through their commitment to personal and whole school professional development have a good understanding of how pupils' learning styles differ and how important it is that their teaching styles reflect this.

86. Planning for children aged under five is carefully structured so that the needs and abilities of all are met. There are close and effective working relationships between teachers and their assistants. They organise a wide range of suitably stimulating, experiential activities and use innovative strategies so that pupils settle into school happily and become independent learners quickly.

87. In key stages 1 and 2, teachers plan very carefully so that the objectives of lessons are very closely matched to the different needs and abilities of pupils. Teachers have good expectations of their pupils and make these clear at the

beginning of each lesson. Lessons are well paced, learning objectives are shared and plenary sessions allow good time for reflection. This ensures that pupils know what they have achieved and what they need to do to improve their work.

88. Questioning and brain storming allow teachers to ascertain prior knowledge and promote thinking of a higher order. Through such strategies, pupils become more independent in their learning and more able children become more challenged. Pupils' needs are well catered for through differentiation and different learning and teaching styles. Interactive whiteboards are used well to support many areas of the curriculum.
89. Teachers make very good use of resources and visual images to support pupils' understanding and to ensure lessons are stimulating. Members of staff foster supportive relationships and are encouraging and good humoured. Their classroom management is very good. They successfully create an ethos of mutual respect, and this promotes learning well.
90. Classrooms are vibrant and colourful and do much to celebrate pupils' success. Interactive displays in English and Welsh stimulate pupils' thinking. Teachers ensure that all pupils are treated fairly, irrespective of their abilities and backgrounds.
91. Teachers' use of incidental Welsh has some good features in the foundation phase and in key stage 1 but is not used enough with older pupils.
92. The school has in place a good system to ensure that pupils get good specialist teaching in important areas, such as ICT, which helps improve standards. Support staff and volunteers are effective in helping individuals and groups of pupils. Teaching assistants are involved in planning and in the evaluation of learning. They support pupils in reaching the objectives set in classwork and on specific learning programmes.
93. The strength of team work is a good feature of teaching. Members of staff are valued equally and teaching benefits greatly from the opportunities the school offers for continuing professional development.
94. Assessment of children aged under five is good. Baseline assessments enable early intervention to support individual pupils' needs. The school's arrangements for assessment in key stages 1 and 2, including end of key stage teacher assessments, are good and fully meet national requirements. Teachers and LEA advisers have undertaken appropriate exercises in moderating assessments in relation to national curriculum criteria and this has improved the accuracy and consistency of assessment.
95. Teachers' feedback orally to pupils in lessons is good and they mark work with proactive comments in line with the school's marking policy. Teachers mark pupils' work with positive comments. However, few teachers set realistic but challenging targets for them to improve their work.

96. The school is developing self-assessment, including peer marking to improve pupils' understanding of assessment and the next steps in their learning. Teachers encourage pupils to have talking partners and assess their understanding during lessons with the traffic lights initiative. This involves pupils raising their hands as the teacher calls out red, amber or green to signify how well they understand the concepts being studied.
97. The school keeps parents well informed about their children's progress. They are invited to attend one parental meeting a term to discuss progress. During the summer term they are invited into school to receive a detailed end of year report which informs them of progress made over the year. Teachers set targets for the following year in English, mathematics and science and discuss them with parents.

Key Question 3: How well do the learning experiences meet the needs and interests of learners and the wider community?

Grade 2: Good features and no important shortcomings

98. The findings of the inspection team match the judgment made by the school in its self-evaluation report. The curriculum has been greatly improved since the time of the last inspection when it was judged to have key shortcomings. The school is fully inclusive and provides pupils with a range of abilities and needs with equal access to the curriculum
99. The school offers a rich, broad, interesting and balanced curriculum that meets the needs of the range of learners. It ensures that pupils progress systematically, grow in confidence and are ready for the next phase of their education. A wide variety of practical experiences provided ensures that pupils enjoy learning.
100. A particular strength of the curriculum provision is the detailed planning of the work to be covered. It reflects the requirements of the national curriculum. Planning is guided well by the school's good policies and schemes of work. These are being updated in line with recent national revisions.
101. There is appropriate emphasis on developing pupils' basic skills which is an improvement since the last inspection. The school has gained the Basic Skills Agency's Quality Mark for the second time. Planning for the development and application of key skills is fully embedded in subjects across the curriculum. Pupils receive help, for example, in developing their independent or co-operative learning.
102. The school is fully embracing the new curriculum for the foundation phase in the nursery and reception classes. Children enjoy experiences that are challenging, stimulating, creative and rich in learning indoors and out. The school's leaders and teaching staff have been proactive in implementing the curriculum ahead of the national timescales set.

103. Pupils' spiritual, moral and social development are good but the promotion of their cultural education has more strengths than shortcomings. St Mary's has an ethos of respect and care and a passion for the environment. The school's motto 'Working, Praying, Sharing and Learning Together' is in everyone's mind and is reflected in the way pupils conduct themselves. The national requirements for acts of collective worship are fully met.
104. Policies and schemes of work for PSE are in place and they reflect national requirements. The school has many places where pupils can quietly think, reflect and worship. There are good opportunities for them to take on responsibilities and to help make decisions through the school council and eco council. However, the promotion of education for sustainable development and global citizenship is underdeveloped. Pupils' knowledge and understanding of other cultures is not well advanced and the school accepts that this is an area to be expanded further.
105. The school's partnerships with parents, the local community, other schools and higher education institutions are highly successful. They have outstanding features that enhance pupils' learning experiences.
106. Parents are very supportive of and loyal to the school. They express satisfaction with the aims and values that the school promotes and particularly appreciate its worth as a Christian community. Communication with them is well established and effective. A constructive home-school agreement is in place that has readily been accepted by parents.
107. The Friends' Association, although small in number, makes a very good contribution to school life. The association organises social and fund-raising activities that enhance links with the local community and provide the school with a valuable source of additional income. In addition parents and friends have provided much practical support in developing the outdoor areas, the foundation phase classes and the on-going decoration of the school.
108. The school enjoys positive partnerships with other schools in the locality, particularly the main receiving secondary school. Pastoral, administrative and curricular liaisons are well established.
109. The school has established productive partnerships with several institutes of higher education and provides training facilities for student teachers and students undertaking vocational and nursing qualifications. They are mentored carefully by staff and they make a positive contribution to school life.
110. The school has established highly successful partnerships with the local community, the church and the archdiocese. Clergy and parishioners hold the school in high regard and appreciate the contribution that staff and pupils make to the life and worship of the church community. The school confirms that the strength of the partnership between it and clergy is a key factor in the considerable increase in the numbers on roll.

111. The school provides good work-related education for pupils. Teachers successfully address the vocational aspect of the PSE programme and use the locality well to support this. Visits to commercial retailers enhance pupils' understanding of the world of work and give them good insights into the range of occupations open to them.
112. The school has good working partnerships with relevant agencies, including Careers Wales. However, no teachers have undertaken a business or industrial placement to enhance their professional development or enrich their teaching.
113. Provision for the cwricwlwm Cymreig is included in all schemes of work and is well considered in topic work. The school plans for the enhancement of pupils' bilingual skills although this is not implemented consistently. Particular attention is given to studying the heritage and culture of Wales and especially that of Brynmawr.
114. The school's range of extra-curricular activities is outstanding. These include sport, music, creativity, ICT and the environment. A Year 6 pupil also runs a chess club. Pupils take full advantage of these opportunities. Clubs are well run and popular. They contribute effectively towards raising standards of personal development.
115. Educational visits to places such as the residential outdoor adventure centre for Year 5 and Year 6 gives them the chance to experience outbound activities such as canoeing. It also gives them the opportunity to experience living with their friends away from home. Many more first hand experiences are offered, such as visits to the museum in Brynmawr or Big Pit in Blaenafon. Younger pupils walk in the locality to develop their understanding of maps and to appreciate the beauty of their surroundings.
116. The school welcomes visitors such as the Gwent Police schools support officer. He helps not only pupils but also staff to enhance the PSE curriculum.

Key Question 4: How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?

Grade 1: Good with outstanding features
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117. The findings of the inspection team do not match the judgment of Grade 2 made by the school in its self-evaluation report. This is because the inspection team identified a number of outstanding features which supported the award of Grade 1. This is a significant improvement since the last inspection.
118. Pupils are outstandingly well cared for, guided and supported in a very supportive and happy environment. The school has a calm and welcoming ethos and every pupil is valued and included.

119. The school has a positive partnership with pupils' parents and knows its pupils' families well. Its commitment to their welfare is outstanding. Individual education plans (IEPs) take full account of parents' and carers' views and pupils' own feelings and aspirations.
120. Parents are informed of where pupils need further help at home. A termly topic web enables parents to support their children at home. There is good informal contact between teachers and parents at the start and end of the day.
121. The school's induction programme is good. Arrangements for children aged under five are planned very carefully and those joining the nursery are offered taster days. Parents meet with the headteacher and are free to observe their children in class to allay any concerns. They receive a Teddy Tom booklet "Let's go to nursery" to explain the curriculum and daily procedures.
122. Parents have the choice for their children to attend full or part time and as a result of this phased entry even the youngest settle well into school life. There is a good buddy system in place where older pupils have responsibility for younger ones. Towards the end of their time in the nursery, children join with reception class to take part in practical team building tasks.
123. At the start of each academic year, a week of planned activities helps pupils settle into their new class. Pupils devise class rules and set behaviour and work ethic guidelines which establish each class's unique ethos and give pupils ownership. Pupils with EAL are looked after well. The parish priest gives very good support to the parents of these children. The language curriculum team welcomes parents with EAL to open days where they use computer programmes and borrow books to use at home.
124. An effective programme of activities is in place to ease transition to secondary school. There is a well-focused transition plan which contributes to the continuity and progression in pupils' knowledge as they move from key stage 2 to key stage 3. The weekly French lessons, taught by a teacher from the nearby secondary school, are popular and successful with Year 5 and Year 6 pupils.
125. The school provides very good quality PSE programmes, which take account of the national PSE Framework. Activities include many opportunities for pupils to talk about sensitive issues. Each class has a worry box where pupils register their concerns. The breakfast club is thriving and provides a positive start to the day for pupils of all ages. Rainbows sessions give bereaved children the opportunities to share their innermost feelings and concerns in confidence and with sensitivity. They also benefit from extra support from visitors and outside agencies. This is outstanding.
126. Outstanding procedures are in place to monitor pupils' punctuality, attendance, behaviour and performance and early intervention ensures that any individual concerns are dealt with efficiently.

127. The headteacher and administrative officer monitor attendance and punctuality rigorously. Very good follow-up procedures are in place, including a first day response and a highly productive partnership with the education welfare officer (EWO).
128. The school has very clear behaviour and anti-bullying policies which work well. A good code of conduct exists and pupils respond positively to the high expectations of staff. Teachers manage pupils with challenging behaviour in an exemplary way. Mutual respect and co-operation ensure that teaching takes place without disruption.
129. The academic performance of pupils is monitored carefully by class teachers, and pupils are increasingly taking a more active role in the setting and monitoring of their individual targets and the planning of their own progress.
130. The school complies with all inclusion, discipline and attendance requirements set out in National Assembly for Wales (NAW) Circular 47/06, Inclusion and Pupil Support.
131. The school is extremely effective at promoting health and fitness for pupils through its participation in the NAW initiative, Physical Education and School Sport (PESS), and a wide range of extra-curricular activities. Year 6 pupils are trained well in cycling proficiency.
132. The school is in its third year of the Healthy Schools' initiative. Healthy choices are available at lunchtime and many children choose to eat from the salad bar. An Education Business Partnership (EBP) link has provided healthy alternative foods for the tuck shop which encourages children to eat fruit. All have access to drinking water throughout the day.
133. All adults in the school are well aware of pupils with particular needs. They are knowledgeable about procedures in the event of accidents and emergencies such as how to help pupils with identified medical conditions and allergies. There is a comprehensive health and safety policy and risk assessments are systematic. All staff are trained in first aid procedures and are alert to issues relating to pupils' wellbeing.
134. There is an effective policy and sound procedures for child protection. The headteacher is the nominated officer. All staff and the GB are fully aware of their responsibilities. The school works very sensitively and effectively with families and agencies to support the high percentage of pupils who are vulnerable, at risk or in need.
135. Provision for pupils with SEN is good with outstanding features. This is an improvement since the last inspection. The quality of relationships between teachers, teaching assistants and pupils is outstanding. Teaching and teaching assistants give guidance and support of high quality. Specialist intervention programmes for pupils with specific learning disorders and physical and emotional difficulties are outstanding.

136. The school uses a good range of baseline and diagnostic assessments, in conjunction with parental referrals to identify pupils' SEN effectively and to influence teaching appropriately. The Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator (SENCo) manages the arrangements to provide ALN for pupils very well. The school works collaboratively with a range of specialist agencies to ensure the best support is available. The school fully complies with statutory requirements, policies and procedures.
137. Pupils with SEN receive excellent help from highly effective teachers and teaching assistants underpinned by good resources. Members of the support team are trained in signing, first aid, Reading Reflex, ICT support, early identification and autistic disorder support. High quality IEPs inform learning and teaching. Good communications ensure that pupils and parents are fully involved in the process. Pupils with SEN are fully included in all aspects of school life.
138. The school works closely with parents whose children show concern and behavioural targets are set. The school ensures that external agencies give appropriate support.
139. The quality of provision for equal opportunities is good and the school places a high priority on the social inclusion of all pupils.
140. Teachers recognise the diverse and often highly complex nature of pupils' backgrounds and take these aspects into account when planning support and guidance. All are treated equally with care, respect and dignity.
141. Gender equality is promoted well and all pupils have equal access to the curriculum and other facilities in the school. However, concerns still exist about the academic underachievement of boys compared to girls. Boys and girls work and play co-operatively together, valuing what each has to offer, and staff challenge stereotypical views rigorously.
142. The school has outstanding arrangements for the equal treatment of disabled pupils and those with complex medical needs. Good quality documentation, including an accessibility plan and disability equality scheme underpins this successful practice. Policies underline the school's commitment to disabled pupils' inclusion.
143. The measures taken to eliminate oppressive behaviour, racial discrimination and bullying are highly effective. Such incidents are rare because staff set clear boundaries and expect the best of pupils in their care. The school functions well as an inclusive, Christian community where pupils show respect and tolerance towards others.

Leadership and management

Key Question 5: How effective are leadership and strategic management?

Grade 2: Good features and no important shortcomings

144. The findings of the inspection team match the judgment made by the school in its self-evaluation report. The quality of leadership and management is good at all levels. The school has maintained this since its last inspection.
145. The school has a clear sense of its own educational direction and good standards are promoted very well. The essence of the school's effectiveness is in the good team spirit between the headteacher, other staff, pupils and parents. The school's ethos embodies simple Christian principles.
146. The headteacher's leadership is characterised as thoughtful, reflective, empowering and very caring. It has seen the school through a period of curriculum change and significant improvement at many levels. The staff team has been reshaped to good effect. Currently, the deputy headteacher is absent on long term sick leave and her post is held by the acting deputy headteacher. Teaching and learning responsibility (TLR) posts are allocated appropriately within the limited confines of the school's budget.
147. The school supports student teachers well and induction procedures for staff new to the school or to teaching are good. Good account is taken of national priorities, local partnerships and cluster arrangements.
148. Performance management procedures promote continuing professional development well. There is a good balance between meeting the professional needs of individual teachers and achieving the school's educational priorities.
149. Subject co-ordinators are closely involved in policy making and implementing practicable schemes of work. They conscientiously monitor and evaluate the quality of teaching and the standards achieved in their subjects.
150. The quality of governance has good features with no important shortcomings. Governors are committed to the school and conscientious in their duties. The GB has a good representation of governors with backgrounds in the Catholic Church, higher and further education and the civil service. Governors are well informed through their regular involvement in meetings with both teaching and teaching assistants. They are successful in helping to determine the school's strategic direction through their work in setting and costing targets for improvement.
151. Governors have formal links with subject co-ordinators and members of staff with other areas of responsibility. They take a close interest in their particular areas. All statutory requirements are fully met.

Key Question 6: How well do leaders and managers evaluate and improve quality and standards?

Grade 2: Good features and no important shortcomings

152. The findings of the inspection team match the judgment made by the school in its self-evaluation report. The quality of the school's self-evaluation is good as is the quality of its self-evaluation report. The school has maintained the quality of self-evaluation since its last inspection.
153. The school's self-evaluation processes are good. Members of staff, governors, parents and pupils are appropriately involved through questionnaires and discussions. Parents' views are sought on a variety of subjects through questionnaires and meetings. Pupils' views are also sought through the school council.
154. The school listens carefully to all its stakeholders and takes appropriate action for improvement and when managing change. Information about the school's performance is based on a careful analysis of assessment data and other information from class teachers. Subject leaders are fully involved in the process. The self-evaluation form arises from a good evidence base and clearly identifies strengths and areas for development.
155. There is a programme of lesson observations on a formal and informal basis. The subject leaders monitor their subjects through 'learning walks' around the school, discussions with the pupils and careful scrutiny of workbooks and project folders. Staff work very well together. They offer each other good support and guidance.
156. Subject leaders have compiled good portfolios of pupils' work as evidence of what pupils can do and standards they achieve in the foundation phase, key stage 1 and key stage 2. These have been compiled, marked and annotated work after rigorous discussions with staff to ensure consistency.
157. Subject leaders have good knowledge of their areas of responsibility. They produce an evaluative report for their areas of responsibility and draw up an action plan for improvement at the end of each school year. This is done in conjunction with individual governors. These action plans inform the SDP and help set priorities for improvement. The GB and headteacher closely monitor progress made in achieving these targets.
158. The headteacher and governors set clear, overall priorities for development in the SDP. Improvements are based on the self-evaluation report, subject action plans, national initiatives and issues raised from questionnaires. The SDP is well formulated and thorough, identifying appropriate timescales, accountabilities, resources needed and cost implications.
159. The school analyses assessments perceptively. It identified where pupils' understanding needed improvement this year after below average achievements in 2008. This has had a positive impact in that assessments of

Year 6 in 2009, after being externally moderated, show a significant improvement on the previous year.

160. The school has made good progress since the last inspection. It has successfully addressed all the key issues identified in the last report. It has also improved pupils' standards of achievement, the quality of teaching and the curriculum, the standards of care, guidance and support and the quality of leadership and management. It has developed quickly, greatly increasing the numbers on roll, extending the accommodation but still retaining and improving its caring Catholic family ethos.

Key Question 7: How efficient are leaders and managers in using resources?

Grade 2: Good features and no important shortcomings

161. The findings of the inspection team match the judgments made by the school in its self-evaluation report. This is a significant improvement since the last inspection when there were concerns about the accommodation.
162. There are a sufficient number of qualified and experienced teachers and teaching assistants to meet the requirements of the national curriculum. They are appropriately deployed and work very well together as a team.
163. All members of staff have job descriptions that provide an overview of their duties and responsibilities. Teachers and teaching assistants regularly attend a range of in-service courses to improve their skills and enhance their professional development. Opportunities for staff members to identify their own professional development and training needs reflect school priorities.
164. A generous number of well motivated teaching assistants help teachers. They operate effectively in classrooms and make a good contribution to classroom activities. This primarily includes support for pupils with SEN. Teaching assistants have had some, but not enough, INSET in the requirements of the foundation phase.
165. The school administrator ensures that daily administration runs smoothly and ancillary staff undertake their duties effectively and efficiently.
166. Arrangements have been made to meet the requirements of the teachers' workload agreement. PPA time is appropriately used by teachers to raise standards and is monitored effectively by the headteacher and senior management team.
167. Overall the quality of the accommodation is good and the school has increased in size considerably since its last inspection. The headteacher and managers have invested wisely in new buildings and the outdoor accommodation.

168. The new classrooms are spacious, clean and modern; teaching staff have had an input in their design. The indoor and outdoor areas for the foundation phase are outstanding and contribute significantly to standards of achievement.
169. The headteacher and staff make good use of all available space to provide pupils with a bright and welcoming learning environment. The quality of display is often very good and helps to celebrate pupils' achievements and promote learning.
170. Most of the school, other than the headteacher's office, is accessible to wheelchair users and there are adequate toilet facilities for the disabled. Games are taught in the playground and the school makes good use of the two nearby parks for field games such as cricket.
171. Within the older area of the school, a few issues remain, although plans are in place to improve facilities. The school hall is too small to accommodate the whole community. As a result of the lack of space physical education activities are restricted. Two classrooms are small and cramped with inadequate storage facilities and there is no medical room for pupils who are ill. The key stage 2 playground is still partially a building site but the school plans to develop it further for the older pupils.
172. Good use is made of available resources and these are generally good in quantity, quality and range. There are, though, not enough materials to help pupils learn about other cultures and countries. All classes have interactive whiteboards which are used confidently by staff and pupils. The school has a new library which is still being stocked. There is no computer suite but teachers use a bank of laptop computers and all classes have two hours a week learning ICT skills and techniques.
173. Overall, financial management is good and the school is on course to meet its financial commitments this year. Priorities are set by the headteacher and the GB's finance committee. Good financial protocols enable the headteacher to manage the financial implications of good staffing and up-to-date equipment. The school budget is monitored efficiently by the headteacher and senior management team.
174. Current planning matches key resources to the main priorities for improvement in the SDP. Available resources are managed effectively so that the school achieves best value for money in its expenditure. Taking into account the good standards achieved, the good teaching, the rich curriculum, the good quality of leadership and the significant improvements since the last inspection, the school gives good value for money.

Standards achieved in subjects and areas of learning

Under 5s

Overall: Grade 2 Good features and no important shortcomings

Personal and social development, wellbeing and cultural diversity
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Nursery : Grade 1 Good with outstanding features

Reception: Grade 1 Good with outstanding features
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Good features

175. The nursery and reception children enjoy coming to school very much. They are very happy, secure and stimulated. The atmosphere is calm and purposeful. They are well behaved and develop excellent relationships with staff and show respect to adults. They understand simple class rules and respect them.
176. Nursery and reception children interact well with their peers. They begin to share fairly and work co-operatively in their classrooms and outside. They show great respect for the resources and each other. They make choices and ask adults for help if they are unsure. They respond to new experiences with enthusiasm and demonstrate independence in selecting activities or resources.
177. Nursery children participate outstandingly well when working with an adult or on their own. They eagerly maintain good levels of involvement and complete paintings and stay for extended periods working with the sand. Children in the reception class give learning their full attention and they have excellent attitudes to their work. They spend long periods of time exploring the head of a mackerel, opening and closing the jaw and peering into the digital microscope to look at the bone structure.
178. Children in nursery and reception are aware that there are those who are less fortunate than themselves. They are beginning to understand different cultures and customs when they celebrate events such as the Chinese New Year. They also try different foods such as noodles. They learn how to be healthy and follow basic hygiene and safety rules.

Shortcomings

179. There are no important shortcomings.

Language, literacy and communication skills
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Nursery : Grade 2 Good features and no important shortcomings
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Reception: Grade 2 Good features and no important shortcomings

Good features

180. Nursery and reception children sit and listen very carefully. They react instantly to teachers' instructions and show interest in what adults and other children say. They enjoy telling their peers and staff about their experiences. This is because their understanding of conversational language is generally immature and below expectations for their age, particularly in the nursery. They make good progress and reception children eagerly retell stories they have enjoyed such as The Rainbow Fish.
181. Both nursery and reception children love stories and big books are part of the classroom culture. They enjoy saying well known words and phrases. Sensible predictions are made and some have good word recognition. They show a clear understanding that text carries meaning. Books are taken home to enable parents to read with them. In both classes they have the opportunity to hear traditional stories from Wales.
182. Nursery children make marks on paper with a variety of equipment, for example when they write the customers orders in 'The Garden Cafe.' Most in the reception class write their names and underwrite or overwrite teachers writing with success. Girls and boys both enjoy writing because the teacher plans for their needs and interests. They write signs for Mrs Lather's Laundry.

Shortcomings

183. There are no important shortcomings.

Welsh Language development

Nursery : Grade 2 Good features and no important shortcomings

Reception: Grade 2 Good features and no important shortcomings

Good features

184. Most nursery and reception children are unfamiliar with the Welsh language on entry to the school. They learn quickly and gain confidence and use word and phrases in response to teachers' questions. They become familiar with everyday Welsh vocabulary in daily routines. They know colours, simple shapes and count accurately to five. Reception children respond well to questions and enjoy singing Welsh songs. They know far more words than they are able to pronounce. They also enjoy looking at Welsh books and reading the stories.

Shortcomings

185. There are no important shortcomings.

Mathematical development

Nursery : Grade 2 Good features and no important shortcomings

Reception: Grade 2 Good features and no important shortcomings

Good features

186. Nursery and reception children learn mathematical vocabulary and make a sound start in understanding basic concepts and developing early numeracy skills.
187. Nursery children learn number rhymes and songs and join in with appropriate actions. They gradually recognise and use numbers to ten with confidence. They identify basic shapes and colours, for example, when making a colourful shape picture.
188. Reception children progress further and sort and match objects by their size, colour and shape. All enjoy counting especially if this involves singing and acting out rhymes. Older children recite numbers in order far beyond 20 and recognise numerals to 20 easily. They are surrounded by numbers such as washing temperatures in Mrs Lather's Laundry. Children make reference to them in their imaginative play. They understand the purpose on money when they play in the role play area.

Shortcomings

189. There are no important shortcomings.

Knowledge and understanding of the World

Nursery : Grade 2 Good features and no important shortcomings

Reception: Grade 2 Good features and no important shortcomings

Good features

190. Nursery and reception children are naturally curious and inquisitive and they enjoy many exciting opportunities for exploration, particularly in the outdoor classroom. They show interest in how and why things happen and how they work. All make good progress in their understanding of the world around them. They learn about the weather and know they must wear a hat if it is hot and sunny.
191. Nursery children love their 'Creepy Crawly' area in the garden. They go on a bug hunt and find ants and spiders. They do not hurt the creatures but stand, watch and ask questions, such as 'why does the spider go fast?' Reception children learn what plants require to flourish.

192. Children's ability to handle different apparatus is good. They all enjoy digging in the sand tray and filling containers in the water tray. They use scissors with increasing accuracy in the reception class and begin to try out a range of tools safely.
193. Reception and nursery children use computers and interactive whiteboards well. Reception children use the interactive whiteboard with remarkable confidence in changing the colours of the rainbow fish and they explain clearly how this is done.

Shortcomings

194. There are no important shortcomings.

Physical development

Nursery : Grade 2 Good features and no important shortcomings
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Reception: Grade 2 Good features and no important shortcomings

Good features

195. Nursery and reception children use the outdoor classrooms substantially. They learn to balance and climb with agility. They move confidently and imaginatively and show increasing control and co-ordination. They regularly use wheeled vehicles and the climbing frame.
196. Children enjoy an extensive range of activities and develop good fine and gross motor control. They throw, catch and roll balls correctly. They develop good skills in manipulating small toys and puzzles accurately and safely.

Shortcomings

197. There are no important shortcomings.

Creative Development

Nursery : Grade 1: Good with outstanding features
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Reception: Grade 1: Good with outstanding features

Outstanding features

198. Reception and nursery children experiment with a wide variety of media and materials. They love to paint bold, bright pictures to represent objects and creepy crawlies. They colour, print and make marks imaginatively. They paint with enthusiasm to express how they feel. Reception children create collages and use glitter and shiny paper. They design an imaginative Noah's Ark using a variety of techniques and media.

Good features

199. Reception and nursery children sing a variety of English and Welsh songs tunefully and some energetically. They respond to rhythm and keep the beat when playing a percussion instrument. They show sensitivity for the music when they listen to a piece or when they react to music being played.
200. Reception and nursery children greatly enjoy role play. They are highly imaginative and creative, for example, when dressing as pirates. They use props cleverly and enjoy trying to "walk the plank".

Shortcomings

201. There are no important shortcomings.

English

Key Stage 1: Grade 3 Good features outweigh shortcomings

Key stage 2: Grade 3 Good features outweigh shortcomings

Good features

202. Pupils in key stage 1 listen carefully to explanations, stories and the contributions of their peers. They can sequence events and retell tales using their own words. They make progress in speaking for different purposes and audiences and collaborate well in discussions. They speak in a variety of contexts with increasing confidence.
203. Standards in reading in key stage 1 are good. Pupils display a good understanding of the characters, settings and structure of stories. Some identify grammatical conventions, such as an exclamation mark or a question mark. Most Year 1 pupils recognise full stops and capital letters.
204. By the end of key stage 1, the more able can read unfamiliar texts with growing confidence. Other readers have a positive attitude to reading and use a range of strategies to help them understand the text. Many develop a good knowledge of the alphabetical order of letters. They use a good range of vocabulary when discussing the weather or writing poems.
205. Key stage 1 pupils are confident and articulate when speaking in front of the class. They read with understanding and identify the moral choices that Jack makes when he climbs the beanstalk and meets the giant. The majority have reading ages equal to or higher than their chronological ages.
206. Pupils in key stage 1, including those with SEN, make good progress in learning to write from a low basic level. They suggest good ideas for the endings to stories read aloud to the class. A few more able in key stage 1 write

at length; their writing is well organised and they plan and revise their work well.

207. Younger pupils have increasingly good handwriting which is often neat, fairly regular and printed.
208. Most pupils in key stage 2 listen respectfully to their teachers and to others. In lessons they remain focused for a sustained time. They make good progress in speaking for different purposes and audiences and collaborate to some extent in discussions. They instruct their partners using clear language and descriptive vocabulary.
209. Pupils in key stage 2 read aloud with good expression. They recognise and read phrases accurately. They predict what might happen next in the story with imagination and confidence. They ask questions about the topics they investigate and suggest and use appropriate sources of information. Most have a good understanding of the basic skills of reading and develop strategies to deal with unfamiliar words. Many can identify types of words, such as nouns or verbs, and they obey the conventions of punctuation when reading aloud.
210. Most key stage 2 pupils identify various descriptive figures of speech, such as similes and metaphors. Their poetry about the sounds and colours of winter are simple but effective. They have good strategies to understand phraseology and use figures of speech aptly. Those with SEN and EAL make rapid progress and use good strategies to read unfamiliar words and to pronounce combinations of letters.
211. Year 6 pupils' skills in reading have many good features. They have a number of favourite writers. They are confident in discussing plot and character and have benefited from visits to the school by poets and actors. The more able read with expression, skim texts for adjectives and use different voices for different characters. Their book reviews are straightforward. They answer questions in compound sentences using connectives and polysyllabic words.
212. Pupils in key stage 2 understand some of the characteristics of myths and legends and, as a result, when they write creatively, they recall important aspects and find appropriate adjectives. Many make good use of the school's supply of books, although the choice of reading on offer is not broad. Most in key stage 2 show a good awareness of different degrees of formality in writing. Their handwriting is usually neat and well formed.
213. Older girls in key stage 2 write well. Their work shows a command of the characteristics of creative, persuasive and informative writing. They have a good understanding of how to write for different audiences. Many understand how to use punctuation well and they develop a sound vocabulary. Their writing is occasionally extended.
214. Older boys in key stage 2 have improved their writing after involvement in a project connected with Cardiff City Football Club and through their work with visiting writers-in-residence.

215. Pupils have a growing understanding of different topics and concepts in English due to the use of the interactive whiteboard for literacy lessons. Older ones in key stage 2 use computers skilfully for word processing or presenting their stories and poems. They combine suitable images and text well but this is less common.

Shortcomings

216. When answering questions, most older pupils give oral and written responses in single words or phrases.

217. Boys lack the listening skills and attention spans of girls, sometimes because of the subject matter they are presented with.

218. By the end of Year 2 many write to some degree but not creatively using some of the key features of narrative. A few boys produce extended writing of good quality but generally girls' writing is much better. Older pupils in key stage 2 tend to write transactional English rather than higher level, imaginative prose.

219. Pupils do not use dictionaries and thesauri enough to support their independent research.

Mathematics

Key stage 1: Grade 2 Good features and no important shortcomings

Key stage 2: Grade 2 Good features and no important shortcomings

Good features

220. Across key stage 1, most pupils develop good skills in mathematics. In mental mathematics activities they demonstrate a growing understanding of ordering numbers up to 50, smallest to largest. They count in tens to 200, know number bonds to 9, add a 1 digit number to a two digit number using a variety of methods and count in twos and fives. They begin to recognise patterns in numbers, identifying the missing number in a sequence.

221. Key stage 1 pupils recall and build on their previous knowledge, and explain some of the strategies they used for adding on a one digit number to a large number. Most recognise odd and even numbers to 100. They know doubles and halves to ten.

222. Pupils in key stage 1 estimate the weight of objects using appropriate mathematical vocabulary stating which is heavier or lighter. They increase the length of a measurement by one. They begin to collect, collate and interpret data. They calculate the cost of items in their flower shop.

223. In key stage 2 most pupils solve money problems well, remembering to read the problem carefully, deciding whether one or two steps are necessary and deciding which operation or operations are required. They use addition,

subtraction, division and multiplication operations confidently and correctly to establish the cost of items and the change from a given sum of money.

224. Most key stage 2 pupils have a good knowledge of multiplication tables and use them confidently in their calculations. They use their knowledge of tables to find out the fractions of numbers. They read and write the time on an analogue clock. They construct block graphs using tally charts and interpret them well.
225. Most key stage 2 pupils recognise and name two and three dimensional shapes using the correct mathematical vocabulary and describing their properties. They explain how many faces, vertices and edges each shape has. They recognise the nets of three dimensional shapes. They use clixi effectively to make a cuboid, cube and square-based pyramid. The more able construct their own nets using squared paper. They measure accurately.
226. At the end of key stage 2 pupils confidently handle the vocabulary of averages. They are secure in their understanding and identification of the mean, the median, the range and the mode. They round up numbers to the nearest ten, hundred, thousand, tenth, hundredth and thousandth. Their data handling is well developed and they interpret a range of data in different forms.

Shortcomings

227. There are no important shortcomings.

Information communications technology
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Key stage 1: Grade 1 Good with outstanding features

Key stage 2: Grade 1 Good with outstanding features

Outstanding features

228. Key stage 1 pupils are very well prepared for using ICT in key stage 2. They are adept in using the interactive whiteboard and desktop computers.
229. Key stage 2 pupils find, open and use appropriate files on a hard disk. They improve their capability in ICT to some degree. In their word-processed writing, for example, they use different fonts and styles of text. They use computers to combine text and images of good quality. They manipulate sounds and explore simulations dextrously. Year 3 pupils produce good spreadsheets and manipulate objects and icons well on screen and Year 4 digitally process their poems about Wales. They take part in e-safety competitions.
230. Year 5 and Year 6 pupils use computers to produce well-written letters and texts on the seasons of Christ's life and eco-newsletters. Their potted notes for mini-autobiographies are perceptive and to the point. They use Microsoft Publisher well to produce posters raising awareness of water wastage. They have produced other posters about membership of the school council and

events such as the Year 6 play and the eco-school magazine. Year 5 and Year 6 pupils are fluent with spreadsheets and know how to set up formulae to total columns of numbers or change the format of cells.

Good features

231. Pupils learn to use computers to communicate and handle information, to some degree, in other subjects. They use digital cameras and digital microscopes well to record their work and analyse objects from a very early age.
232. Key stage 1 pupils develop a number of basic skills, for example, executing program commands, saving their work, using the mouse and cursor and operating a number of facilities on the tool bar such as the airbrush, the spray, the borders tool, the fill tool and the pen to create digital images.
233. Key stage 1 pupils use a digital mouse, icons and the screen pointer competently. They develop skills in word-processing. They create and print simple sentences. Year 1 pupils have created good pictograms and use lots of WordArt. They build their keyboard fluency.
234. Younger pupils with SEN make good progress with good support from teaching assistants or parent helpers. In Year 2, they know that people communicate via the telephone or electronic mail as well as through writing by hand. They are competent when highlighting blocks of text and they change the colour, type and size of font carefully. They learn simple programming when using a programmable toy.
235. Year 6 pupils have good skills in using presentational software or web design. They have good abilities when using the resources of the internet to enrich their learning or when using a variety of digital communications technologies. Many pupils, generally, further enhance their good internet skills in the ICT club.

Shortcomings

236. There are no important shortcomings.

Geography

KS1: Grade 2 Good features and no important shortcomings

KS2: Grade 2 Good features and no important shortcomings

Good features

237. Most key stage 1 pupils build well on their knowledge of their local area and the wider world well. They label a simple plan of the school and recognise the journey a postal letter makes and how they travel to school. They identify places of significance on a simple map of Brynmawr. They identify Brynmawr and Porthcawl and features such as the coastline on a map of Wales.

238. Key stage 1 pupils have a sound understanding of the features of their local environment. They know that when people visit shops in cars they need parking places and that not all people have cars, so need alternative transport, hence the bus station close to the school. They have a good range of research skills. They gather information in different ways, using surveys, questionnaires and taking photographs. They conclude that they live in a very busy town recognising that this presents some problems in the environment such as noise, traffic, parking issues and safety issues for pedestrians.
239. Most pupils know the difference between natural and man made features. They recognise physical and human features well and label pictures taken on their visit to Porthcawl. They have very good understanding of direction. They instruct a programmable toy to move forward, left or right. The more able place picture cards on named co-ordinates. They identify Africa on a map of the world and begin to compare their lives in school and home with those of children in Kenya.
240. Key stage 2 pupils identify and name the world's continents on a map. Most know that Kenya is on the eastern coast of Africa. They know a little about home life in Kenya, that houses are basic and that residents walk to fetch water, grow their own food and experience a hot climate.
241. They recognise a map of Great Britain and a few pupils identify Wales. Most pupils know the features of a National Park such as, mountains, lakes, woodland and animals. Many know that there are three National Parks in Wales and name them. Most locate and label the highest peaks, rivers, lakes and towns.
242. Most pupils develop a good understanding of places and the environment. They recognise the impact that weather and climate has on a location and how physical features impact upon human, social and economic issues. Most pupils are aware of the weather and climate of Wales.
243. Key stage 2 pupils use correct geographical vocabulary and recognise the importance of maps and symbols when reporting weather conditions. When delivering their weather report they know they need to deliver clear factual information. They are aware of their audience and adapt their language appropriately, using terms such as minimum and maximum temperatures and wind speed.
244. In both key stages all pupils have a good understanding of environmental changes and sustainable development.

Shortcomings

245. There are no important shortcomings.

Physical education

Key Stage 1: Grade 2 Good features and no important shortcomings

Key Stage 2: Grade 2 Good features and no important shortcomings

Good and outstanding features

246. All pupils in key stage 2 have the opportunity to learn to swim and take full advantage of this. All swim at least 25 metres of the pool and a large minority swim much longer distances.
247. Across the school pupils know the importance of thorough warm up and cool down sessions and are very diligent in following the teacher's instructions.
248. Many pupils enjoy the PE day and wear suitable kit. They remove their jewellery and tie their hair back when necessary. They change without fuss and lose no time getting to the hall, outside playground or park. They are keen and enthusiastic about their physical education.
249. Pupils in both key stages work extremely well with a partner or in groups or as a team. They are mature and sensible and have a great sense of fair play and team spirit.
250. Pupils in key stage 1 enjoy learning how to jump correctly. They know the importance of bending the knees when landing. They perform a frog jump, a happy cat jump and a fox jump. They demonstrate good levels of agility and control as they move around the small hall. They do their best not to bump into each other.
251. The majority of Year 3 pupils show appropriate skills when catching, throwing and batting a ball and apply all they know to the game of rounders. They make good progress in keeping their eye on the ball. The skills of some are well developed particularly the boys who show a keen, competitive edge.
252. Across the school pupils make evaluations of their own performance and of their peers. They crucially appraise what they see and do in order to bring about improvement.

Shortcomings

253. There are no major shortcomings but girls' abilities in catching and throwing are limited.
254. Pupils' movement sequences in dance and gymnastics are necessarily confined by the narrow size of the hall.

School's response to the inspection

255. Staff and governors are pleased that the inspectors acknowledged the outstanding teaching, care and guidance enjoyed by pupils and highlighted the improvements achieved since the last inspection in May 2003 and following a recent period of expansion. They believe that the process, although challenging, has affirmed their hard work and dedication to pupils.
256. An action plan, which will be sent to all parents/carers in due course, has already been developed in response to the identified key areas for improvement highlighted in the report. The governors' annual report to parents will keep them informed on the progress made.
257. Staff and governors express their thanks to the registered inspector and his team for their hard work during the inspection week. Although inspection can be stressful, all staff agree that the professionalism and dedication shown by the inspectors made the experience worthwhile and the process will ultimately make a good school even better.

Appendix 1

Basic information about the school

Name of school	St Mary's R.C. Primary School
School type	Primary including Foundation Phase
Age-range of pupils	3 to 11
Address of school	Catholic Road Brynmawr South Wales
Postcode	NP23 4EF
Telephone number	01495 310596

Headteacher	Mr Tim Baxter
Date of appointment	18 th March 2003
Chair of governors	Mr Tim Pritchard
Registered inspector	Mr Rob Isaac
Dates of inspection	2 nd to 4 th June 2009

Appendix 2

School data and indicators

Number of pupils in each year group									
Year group	N (fte)	R	Y1	Y2	Y3	Y4	Y5	Y6	Total
Number of pupils	37	27	22	20	21	21	14	13	175

Total number of teachers			
	Full-time	Part-time	Full-time equivalent (fte)
Number of teachers	8	2	9

Staffing information	
Pupil: teacher (fte) ratio (excluding nursery class)	17 to 1
Pupil: adult (fte) ratio in nursery class	9 to 1
Average class size, excluding nursery class	19.4
Teacher (fte): class ratio	1.12 to 1

Percentage attendance for three complete terms prior to inspection			
Term	N	R	Rest of school
Summer 2008	85.9%	87.9%	93.8%
Autumn 2008	84.1%	90.0%	93.0%
Spring 2009	84.6%	87.9%	87.9%

Percentage of pupils entitled to free school meals	32%
Number of pupils excluded during 12 months prior to inspection	0

Appendix 3

National Curriculum Assessment Results End of key stage 1:

KS1 National Curriculum Assessment Results 2009 compared with national results in 2008			Number of pupils in Y2:		20		
Percentage of pupils at each level							
			D	W	1	2	3
English:	Teacher Assessment	School	0	10	15	66	15
		National	0	4	14	63	19
En: reading	Teacher Assessment	School	0	15	10	55	20
		National	0	4	15	55	26
En: writing	Teacher Assessment	School	0	15	10	55	20
		National	0	5	16	68	11
Mathematics	Teacher Assessment	School	0	10	15	75	0
		National	0	2	11	65	22
Science	Teacher Assessment	School	0	10	10	65	15
		National	0	2	9	66	23
Percentage of pupils attaining at least level 2 in English, mathematics and science according to teacher assessment							
In the school	75%		In Wales	80.7%			

End of key stage 2:

KS2 National Curriculum Assessment Results 2009 compared with national results in 2008			Number of pupils in Y6		13						
Percentage of pupils at each level											
			D	A	F	W	1	2	3	4	5
English	Teacher Assessment	School	5	0	0	0	0	15	8	46	31
		National	0	0	0	0	1	3	16	51	29
Mathematics	Teacher Assessment	School	5	0	0	0	0	15	0	54	31
		National	0	0	0	0	1	3	15	51	30
Science	Teacher Assessment	School	5	0	0	0	0	15	0	54	31
		National	0	0	0	1	1	2	11	54	32
Percentage of pupils attaining at least level 4 in English, mathematics and science by teacher assessment											
In the school	77.0		In Wales	75.5							

- D Pupils who are exempted under statutory arrangements from part or all of the National Curriculum
A Pupils who have failed to register a level because of absence
F Pupils who have failed to register a level for reasons other than absence
W Pupils who are working towards level 1

Appendix 4

Evidence base of the inspection

Four inspectors spent a total of nine inspector days in the school and met as a team before the inspection started. The team also included the school's nominee.

The inspectors visited:

- Thirty-four lessons or parts of lessons;
- all classes;
- registrations, assemblies, acts of collective worship and a representative baptismal ceremony; and
- a range of extra-curricular activities.

Members of the inspection team had meetings with:

- staff, governors and parents before the inspection began; and
- senior managers, teachers, support and administrative staff;
- groups of pupils representing each year group;
- the school council and the eco council; and
- representatives of organisations associated with the school such as the LEA.

The team considered:

- the school's self-evaluation report;
- responses to a questionnaire from 25 parents, which in general were over 97 per cent in support of the school;
- documentation provided by the school before and during the inspection;
- a range of pupils' past and present work; and
- samples of pupils' reports.

The inspection team also held post-inspection meetings with the headteacher, staff and governors.

Appendix 5

Composition and responsibilities of the inspection team

Inspector	Type	Aspect and Subject Responsibilities
Mr Rob Isaac	Registered inspector	Pre-inspection commentary Context and aims Key Question 1 Key Question 5 English ICT Summary and full reports Editing
Mrs Gail Robertson	Team Inspector	Key Question 3 (3.1 – 3.5) Key Question 6 Key Question 7 (staffing, resources & finances) Early years Physical education
Mrs Janet Warr	Lay Inspector	Contributing to: Key Question 1 (1.10 – 1.16) Key Question 3 (3.6,3.8) Key Question 4 (equal opportunities) Key Question 7 (accommodation)
Mrs Ann Williams	Team Inspector	Key Question 2 Key Question 3 (3.10 – 3.14) Key Question 4 (inc. care, guidance & SEN) Mathematics Geography Bilingualism
Mr Tim Baxter	Nominee	Self-evaluation report Contributing to team discussions School's response to the report

Acknowledgement

The registered inspector and team wish to thank the governors, headteacher, staff and pupils for their co-operation before, during and after the inspection.

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