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a Hyfforddiant yng Nghymru

Her Majesty's Inspectorate
for Education and Training in Wales

A report on

**Dowlais Primary School
High Street
Dowlais
Merthyr Tydfil
CF48 3HB**

Date of inspection: February 2011

by

Dorothy Morris

Under Contract to

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

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

Key Question 1: How good are the outcomes?

Key Question 2: How good is provision?

Key Question 3: How good are leadership and management?

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

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

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

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

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Context

Dowlais Primary School was created through the amalgamation of Gwernllwyn Junior School and Dowlais Infants School in September 2009 and occupies two sites, a short distance apart. It serves the community of Dowlais and is maintained by Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council local authority. The area is one of considerable economic deprivation and the school is the tenth most challenged in its family of schools. Twenty per cent of pupils are in receipt of free school meals; a figure which is similar to the national average but below that of the local authority.

The school caters for pupils aged three to eleven years old and there are 229 pupils (full time equivalent) on roll. The school accommodates a local authority learning resource base (LRB) at key stage 2, which is mainly for pupils with language and moderate learning difficulties.

Pupils attending the school represent the full range of ability. Currently, 29% of pupils are designated as having special educational needs (SEN); no pupil has a statement of SEN. Nearly all pupils come from homes where English is the predominant language. Five pupils speak English as an additional language and a very few pupils are from ethnic minorities. No pupil speaks Welsh as a first language.

The school has achieved many awards. It is an accredited Healthy School and has achieved Eco School status. It has met the standards to gain Investors in People accreditation and the Basic Skills Quality Mark.

The current headteacher was appointed in September 2004. Following amalgamation, there have been new staff appointments, changes to teachers' roles and responsibilities, and improvements to the accommodation.

The 2010-2011 individual school budget per pupil for Dowlais Primary School is £3339 which compares with a maximum of £6431 and a minimum of £3035 for primary schools in Merthyr Tydfil. The school has the 12th highest budget per pupil out of the 25 primary schools in the authority.

Summary

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

Current performance

The school's performance is good because:

- most pupils make good progress;
- teaching is good overall;
- the school provides a range of good learning experiences for pupils;
- pupils are well-behaved and develop good social skills;
- the monitoring and tracking of pupils' progress is good;
- the school is a close and caring community which celebrates pupils' efforts and achievements.

Prospects for improvement

Prospects for improvement are good because:

- the headteacher has a clear vision for the further development of the school based on a good understanding of its needs;
- the school has managed change well and its good planning has achieved improvements in provision;
- priorities for further improvement are clearly focused on raising standards based on a thorough analysis of data;
- staff have responded well to their new roles and responsibilities and work effectively as a team;
- the inclusive ethos of care and support promotes pupils' learning and development effectively.

Recommendations

In order to develop further, the school needs to:

- R1 improve pupils' standards of achievement, including the more able, more consistently across the key stages;*
- R2 strengthen pupils' oral and writing skills further across the school;*
- R3 improve pupils' Welsh language skills;*
- R4 develop assessment for learning strategies more consistently across the school;*
- R5 embed the leadership responsibilities of new senior managers and develop the role of the governing body.*

**Aspects of the above have been included in the school improvement plan.*

What happens next?

The school will produce an action plan to show how it will address the recommendations.

Main findings

Key Question 1: How good are outcomes?

Good

Standards: Good

Many children enter school with skills significantly below those normally expected for children of their age. School data shows that most pupils make good progress in their learning during their time in school. They make very good progress in their personal and social development.

Over the last four years, pupils' results at seven years of age as measured by the end of key stage 1 teacher assessments in English, mathematics and science have been above those of the local authority, national and the family of schools in most years. In 2010, there was a dip in pupil performance particularly in mathematics and science. The high percentage of pupils with SEN in the cohort (39%) impacted adversely on outcomes. When compared to similar schools nationally, based on entitlement to free school meals, the overall results place the school in the upper 50% in most years.

Over the last four years, pupils' overall results at the end of key stage 2, excluding pupils from the LRB, have been above those of the local authority, national and the family of schools in English and science in most years. They also compare favourably in mathematics. There was a dip in the outcomes in 2010 again reflecting the percentage of pupils with SEN (29%) in the cohort. When compared to similar

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schools nationally, based on entitlement to free school meals, outcomes in 2010 placed the school in the lowest 25%. In the previous three years, the results placed the school in the upper 50%. A scrutiny of pupils' current work demonstrates that by the end of key stage 2, pupils make good progress and the majority achieve well particularly in English and mathematics.

When the figures include pupils from the attached LRB, pupils' results in English, mathematics and science are above the local authority averages in two years and below in the remainder. Outcomes are generally below the national and family of schools' averages. When compared to similar schools nationally, based on entitlement to free school meals, the overall results range between the lowest 25% and the lowest 50%.

In recent years, the percentage of pupils achieving above the expected level (level 3) at the end of key stage 1 is uneven. It is consistently above the averages for the local authority, national and family of schools in English and, in most years, in science. It fluctuates in mathematics. At the end of key stage 2, the percentage of pupils achieving above the expected level (level 5) is generally below the averages for the local authority, national and family of schools.

There are no consistent differences in the performance of boys and girls although there are variations from year to year. Most pupils with additional learning needs, including pupils with English as an additional language, make good progress and achieve their targets. Many pupils targeted for reading support show good and often very good progress. Overall, pupils entitled to free school meals make consistent progress and achieve well relative to their ability and stage of development. Due to cohort related factors, there was a dip in outcomes in 2010, particularly in key stage 1, when compared with national and local averages.

Pupils' independent learning skills are developing well with older key stage 2 pupils in particular demonstrating a range of good thinking and problem-solving strategies in subjects such as mathematics and history.

Nearly all pupils listen well and are attentive in class. The majority speak readily with older pupils in upper key stage 2 responding in a more extended manner when discussing their work. A minority of pupils across the school offer limited responses during discussion. Pupils write competently in relation to their age and ability but a minority of pupils' work demonstrates an insecure grasp of spelling, syntax and a limited range of vocabulary. In upper key stage 2, pupils' writing skills are improving with examples of well written stories and poems. Pupils' reading skills are good overall. Pupils use their number skills appropriately across the curriculum. Many older key stage 2 pupils apply their skills very effectively in a range of contexts. Many pupils achieve good standards in information communications technology (ICT) and use their skills well in a variety of activities.

Standards in Welsh are good in the Foundation Phase and adequate in the other key stages. Across the school, most pupils understand and respond accurately to a range of simple questions and instructions during lessons, registration periods and collective worship. Nevertheless, as they move through the school pupils generally do not extend their vocabulary and sentence patterns sufficiently to maintain a simple

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conversation or build on their reading and writing skills sufficiently. Pupils' knowledge of Welsh culture and heritage is good.

Wellbeing: Good

Pupils feel happy and safe in school and express confidence in the care provided by the staff. They show respect, care and concern for each other and relate well to their teachers, staff and visitors. Nearly all pupils have a good understanding of how to be healthy and safe. They recognise the importance of exercise and eating a healthy diet.

Most pupils demonstrate good attitudes to learning. They work productively with others and strive well to complete tasks to the best of their ability.

Standards of behaviour are good and pupils say little or no bullying occurs due to the implementation of peer mediator initiatives. Attendance figures of 92.4% compare well with similar schools. Most pupils arrive punctually.

Across the school pupils readily take on appropriate responsibilities. Members of the school council and eco committee are actively involved in making decisions about school life and represent the views of their peers well. Pupils develop a good range of social and life skills through participation in a wide range of extra-curricular activities that successfully promote awareness of life outside school.

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

The school provides a wide range of good learning experiences which meets pupils' needs effectively. Whole school planning to develop a skills-based curriculum is developing well overall. Teachers plan carefully on a daily basis to include relevant opportunities for pupils to develop and apply their thinking, communication, numeracy and information and communications technology skills in different contexts. In the best practice, at the upper end of key stage 2, there is good provision to extend and improve pupils' writing and numeracy skills. Across the school, there is a good emphasis on responding to the needs of pupils with additional learning needs; this is a strength.

There is good provision within and beyond the curriculum to develop education for sustainable development and global citizenship. Very often, these opportunities are used innovatively to enable pupils to apply skills learnt in other subject areas.

Planning and provision for Welsh language development is inconsistent. In the Foundation Phase, provision is good. In the other classes, there are planned activities but practice lacks the consistency to foster pupils' skills sufficiently. In a few classes, there is good use of incidental Welsh throughout the day. Overall, there are good opportunities for pupils to learn about their locality, and the history and culture of Wales.

Teaching: Good

Teaching is good overall. In the majority of lessons observed most pupils are fully and actively engaged in the learning process. Teachers have good subject knowledge which they use effectively to guide the learning. In Year 6, there are excellent features in the way the teaching develops pupils' investigative and problem solving tasks in real life contexts. Across the school, adults are well deployed to meet the needs of learners.

Most teachers use a range of approaches and activities well to provide appropriate challenge and support. On occasion, tasks are not sufficiently well matched to pupils' levels of ability and there is an over reliance on worksheets.

There are effective systems for target setting and tracking of pupil progress. Tracking outcomes directly influence the content of lessons and approaches to teaching. Marking is generally purposeful and relevant to the learning activity; this is a strength at upper key stage 2. Reports to parents are informative but do not consistently focus on future learning needs.

Assessment for learning is at a developmental stage. In the best practice, strategies are embedded and place pupils at the heart of the learning process. This is particularly evident at upper key stage 2.

Care, support and guidance: Good

The school is a caring and supportive community where pupils are respected and valued. It offers a wide range of initiatives which promote healthy living and wellbeing and includes pupils, parents and members of the community such as the police officer and school nurse. There are also effective policies to promote good behaviour. The school has an appropriate policy and procedures for safeguarding.

There is good provision for pupils with additional learning needs. The staff identify pupils' specific needs early and provide a network of support activities which contribute to improved standards of achievement. This is reflected well in pupils' reading skills and in the improved personal and social skills of pupils with behavioural problems. Pupils' individual education plans include clear targets and reflect the views of pupils and parents. Pupils in the LRB are included successfully in mainstream classes for a range of activities. The school collaborates well with a number of agencies to provide additional support for pupils who require specialist support.

Parents and carers receive a good range of information about the life and work of the school via newsletters, information technology, parents' evenings and an effective open door policy.

The school promotes pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development well. The very positive school ethos provides a stable and ordered environment in which values such as honesty, fairness and respect are given particular emphasis.

Learning environment: Good

The school is a fully-inclusive community where diversity is recognised and celebrated. Pupils are encouraged to reflect on their own beliefs and values as well as those of others.

The school actively promotes equal opportunities and all pupils have equal access to all areas of the curriculum and extra-curricular provision. The school offers a safe and welcoming environment for all learners.

The accommodation on both sites is in good condition and sufficient for the number of pupils. The school buildings and outside areas are well planned and maintained to a good standard. The classrooms, particularly in the Foundation Phase, have been decorated to provide a stimulating and interactive learning environment. Resources are of good quality and well matched to pupils' needs.

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

The headteacher has a good understanding of the needs of the school. He leads by personal example and sets the tone for staff and pupils by his commitment and professional manner. He communicates his vision effectively and together with the new senior management team is establishing a clear direction for the school. A range of evidence, particularly data, is used well to identify areas of strength and those for development. Performance management systems are in place and contribute effectively to individual professional development and school improvement.

The governing body is well informed and supportive. Statutory requirements are met and members participate in budget decisions and have opportunities to contribute to school self-review. However, their monitoring role is less well developed.

The school responds positively to national and local initiatives. The philosophy of the Foundation Phase is becoming well established with children benefiting from remodelled learning areas and an innovative curriculum. The School Effectiveness Framework has been incorporated into planning for improvement and the senior management team has introduced appropriate initiatives which are improving pupils' writing skills particularly in upper key stage 2.

Improving quality: Good

Self-evaluation processes and procedures offer the headteacher and senior staff an accurate picture overall of what is needed for the school to develop further. All stakeholders are fully involved and robust systems ensure that a range of evidence, including a detailed analysis of data, is used well to enhance provision and improve standards. The school improvement plan is appropriately linked to the outcomes of the self-evaluation process.

Subject leaders, many newly assigned, produce three year development plans with outcomes reviewed annually to monitor progress. The positive impact on standards

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and provision in current areas of review, such as physical education, ICT and the Foundation Phase, is evident. Subject reports include targets for improvement but monitoring at times is not sufficiently focused on pupils' work to ensure progression and continuity in aspects such as oracy and writing.

Training for teachers and support staff is clearly linked with the school's identified priorities and there is a well-established learning community in the school that enables staff to share knowledge and expertise. Good professional working links exist with the cluster schools and teachers contribute to local authority and local learning networks in aspects such as reading development.

Partnership working: Good

Provision is significantly enhanced by productive partnerships. The school recognises the importance of pre-school experience and makes every effort to engage parents/carers before pupils enter the school through a range of programmes. A variety of transition activities is well-established and addresses both the curriculum and pupils' wellbeing, ensuring that they are well prepared for transfer to the secondary school. There are good working relationships with support services and the local cluster of schools. Participation in joint projects, such as developing the provision for physical education, has extended the professional knowledge of staff and enhanced provision for pupils.

This is a community school with regular use of school facilities by local groups. Visitors to school and visits into the local area and further afield effectively extend the range of experiences offered to pupils and support the learning.

Resource management: Good

Teachers and support staff are deployed effectively through the school and teachers' subject expertise is used well to enhance pupils' learning. The school meets the requirements for workforce remodelling, and the appropriate allocation of teachers' planning, preparation and assessment time supports curriculum development initiatives. All staff collaborate in planning and receive appropriate training. Support and ancillary staff contribute well to the efficient working of the school. The accommodation on both sites is in good condition and is used effectively. Good resources support learning across the curriculum.

The headteacher manages the budget well and works hard to access additional grants to maintain and extend provision. Identified priorities are resourced appropriately. The school provides good value for money.

Appendix 1

Stakeholder satisfaction report

Responses to parent questionnaires

Just under a third of the parents/carers completed the questionnaire and all express overall satisfaction with the school. Nearly all parents make very positive responses about the provision made for pupils. They say that their children like being there and that they feel their children are safe at school. They believe that their children make good progress and that they, as parents, are kept well informed. They add that they feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions, suggestions or a problem. They add that children receive sufficient additional support in relation to their learning needs and that pupils in the school behave well. Nearly all parents/carers believe that the school treats children fairly and with respect and that they are appropriately prepared to move on to their next school.

Responses to learner questionnaires

Most pupils in key stage 2 completed the questionnaire. All state that they feel safe, enjoy school and know who to turn to for help and guidance. Nearly all believe that they are doing well. There is agreement that the school teaches them how to keep healthy and to live healthier lifestyles. Nearly all believe that there are enough resources to enable them to learn well and that homework helps them improve the standard of their work. Nearly all pupils feel that other pupils behave well at all times.

Appendix 2

The inspection team

Dorothy Morris	Reporting Inspector
Christine Phillips	Team Inspector
Helen Adams	Lay Inspector
Richard Lloyd	Peer Inspector
David Rowlands	School Nominee

Contractor

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Year groups and key stages

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

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

Primary phase:

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

Secondary phase:

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

The four key stages cover the following year groups:

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