

**INSPECTION UNDER SECTION 10 OF
THE EDUCATION (SCHOOLS) ACT 1996**

**SIRHOWY
INFANT SCHOOL**

**King Street
Tredegar
Blaenau Gwent
NP22 4PA**

SCHOOL NUMBER:677/2071

DATE OF INSPECTION: 25 – 27 February 2002

BY

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REGISTERED INSPECTOR No: W086/16177

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CURRICULUM NOMENCLATURE AND KEY STAGES

A new nomenclature to describe pupils progress through school was introduced in 1989. This system of numbering year groups from the start of compulsory schooling to age 18 is intended to ease communication among schools, governing bodies, parents and LEAs and emphasise the importance of continuity.

The term “Reception” (R) is applied to the year group of pupils in a primary school (not a nursery class) who attain the age of 5 during the academic year “Year 1” (Y1) is applied to the year group of pupils who attain the age of 6 during the academic year and so on to Y13 the year group who attain the age of 18 during the academic year:

	R	Y1	Y2	Y3	Y4	Y5	Y6	Y7	Y8	Y9	Y10	Y11	Y12	Y13
Years	4-5	5-6	6-7	7-8	8-9	9-10	10-11	11-12	12-13	13-14	14-15	15-16	16-17	17-18

Key stage 1 of the national curriculum consists of Y1 and Y2; KS2 of Y3 to Y6; KS3 of Y7 to Y9; KS4 of Y10 and Y11 (which is the final year of compulsory education).

GRADE DESCRIPTIONS

The five-point grading scale used to represent the main judgements in this report is as follows:

1. Very good: many good features, some of them outstanding.
2. Good: good features and no major shortcomings.
3. Satisfactory: good features outweigh some shortcomings.
4. Unsatisfactory: some satisfactory work but shortcomings in important areas.
5. Poor: many shortcomings.

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1. CONTEXT

The school and its priorities

Sirhowy Infant School serves an area of the small town of Tredegar. The school comprises four buildings on a steeply sloping site. At the time of the inspection there were 95 full time equivalent pupils in the school. The number of pupils in reception and KS1 classes have remained fairly stable over the last three years, but the number in nursery has varied considerably. Pupils are drawn from a well-established residential area which is economically disadvantaged. Over half the pupils are entitled to free school meals, significantly above the all-Wales average.

The intake of pupils has a large proportion of less able children, with approximately ten per cent identified as requiring special educational needs (SEN) support, including one who has a statement of SEN. There are no natural Welsh speakers and no pupils from an ethnic minority background.

The school has an appropriate mission statement and aims to enable all children to achieve their full potential through provision of a balanced curriculum, encouraging respect for all, and making positive links with parents and the community. The school development plan aims to involve parents further in teaching mathematics, to improve standards in writing, improve information technology resources, develop a behaviour policy and develop the library area.

The school was last inspected in March 1997. Since then, a new head teacher has been appointed: his contract is to spend three sessions a week at Sirhowy Infant School.

2. MAIN FINDINGS

The main findings of the report

- Sirhowy Infant School is a caring, happy school with many strengths. Pupils receive a good quality education.
- For children under five, the educational provision, taken overall, is appropriate and promotes the desirable outcomes for children's learning.
- Standards in the early years in the six areas of learning are as follows:

	Nursery	Reception
Language, Literacy and Communication Skills	Very good	Good
Mathematical Development	Good	Good
Personal and Social Development	Very good	Very good
Knowledge and Understanding of the World	Very good	Good
Physical Development	Very good	Good
Creative Development	Very good	Good

- In KS1, standards of achievement in the subjects of the National Curriculum (NC) are:

	KS1
English	Satisfactory
Mathematics	Good
Science	Good
Welsh Second Language	Good
Design and Technology	Good
Information Technology	Good
History	Good
Geography	Satisfactory
Art	Good
Music	Good
Physical Education	Good
Religious Education	Good

- In KS1, pupils' standards of achievement in the key skills across the curriculum are:

	KS1
Speaking	Good
Listening	Good
Reading	Satisfactory
Writing	Satisfactory
Numeracy	Good
Information and Communication Technology	Good

- The school recognises the need to work on pupils' handwriting and presentation skills in order to help raise standards in reading and writing.
- Provision for the development of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is very good. The school has a positive ethos, relationships are warm and kindly and pupils respond positively to the high expectations for both achievement and behaviour. Pupils' personal and social skills are promoted effectively and they have a good awareness of their own and other's cultures and faiths.
- Pupils' standards of behaviour and attitudes to learning are very good. They are attentive and persevere in class work and are friendly and courteous to all.
- Attendance levels are satisfactory. Registration is carried out promptly and the school has worked hard to achieve a significant improvement in attendance and punctuality.
- The quality of teaching was satisfactory or better in almost all lessons. It was good in a fifth and very good in half of the lessons or sessions observed. Work is carefully planned, and most lessons proceed at a good pace. Teachers are skilled at questioning pupils in order to develop their thinking and extend their learning.

However, there is an over-reliance on worksheets which limits the type of responses pupils can make to their learning.

- Classroom assistants, nursery nurse students and parent helpers are all positively involved with pupils, and make a valuable contribution to the learning process.
- Arrangements for assessment, recording and reporting are good overall. Information gained from statutory tests and commercial materials is used to assess pupils' progress and set targets for improvement. Assessment is used well to ensure that work is matched to pupils' needs. Reports to parents give basic information in KS1, but are more informative about children's achievements in the early years.
- The school provides pupils with a broad and balanced curriculum, which meets statutory requirements. In the early years, planning has a clear focus and includes clear anticipated outcomes for both spontaneous and structured play. Planning for these young children is of a very good quality.
- In KS1, staff work hard to promote the personal and social development of all pupils, and they achieve very good standards in this. Educational visits and visitors enhance pupils' learning experiences and contribute to the standards they achieve. Short term planning is clearly linked to schemes of work, but seldom identifies opportunities for developing key skills across the curriculum.
- The quality of personal support and educational guidance given to pupils is very good. The school provides a welcoming and supportive environment where realistic levels of teacher expectations ensure effective learning can take place within a positive and constructive atmosphere. The assistance given by midday supervisors and adult helpers contributes positively to the quality of provision.
- The quality of provision for pupils with special educational needs (SEN) is good. Procedures for the early identification of pupils with SEN are effective and thorough. Individual education plans set clear and realistic objectives that are suitably matched to pupils' needs. Pupils make good progress relative to prior achievement and are well integrated into class activities.
- Partnership with parents and the community, schools and other agencies is very good. Parents who responded to the pre-inspection questionnaire and attended the meeting indicated strong satisfaction with the provision made by the school. Recent initiatives in developing partnership with parents, both prior to entry to nursery and during their school lives, benefit the children in their approaches to learning.
- The school regularly hosts courses for parents in literacy, numeracy and computing, and parents bring younger children to session in the library twice a week. A small but active parent teacher association (PTA) organises social and fundraising events. Links with other local schools and agencies are very good.

- Partnership with industry is good. The school has fostered links with a number of local organisations and these enrich the curriculum.
- The quality of the school's self-evaluation and planning for improvement is good. The head teacher and staff analyse its position and progress critically and use this information, together with assessment data, to set challenging but realistic targets.
- The quality of leadership of the head teacher and deputy head teacher is very good. The school is committed to equality of opportunity for all, and this is evident in all classes, and in the provision for community involvement in the school.
- The school development plan (SDP) clearly identifies targets for the school and is regularly monitored and reviewed. The governing body carries out its duties effectively, and governors have designated curriculum responsibilities. Routine administration and organisation is very good, and overall the school is providing good value for money.
- The school is appropriately staffed for the number of pupils on roll. Staff development is well organised, aiming to support both the needs of the school and of individual members of staff.
- The school buildings are bright, clean and welcoming, and enhanced by good quality displays of pupils' work. Rooms are generally well organised and space used effectively. One classroom is in need of repair, but is to be replaced at Easter.
- A good range of resources supports teaching and learning. The school has identified shortages and is building resources effectively.
- The school has made good progress in addressing the key issues in the previous inspection report but, although standards in geography have improved, they are still only satisfactory.

3. EDUCATIONAL STANDARDS ACHIEVED BY THE PUPILS

3.1 Standards achieved in subjects and areas of learning

In the early years, children achieved good or better standards in almost all sessions observed. In two fifths of sessions, they achieved very good standards.

In KS1, pupils achieved at least satisfactory standards in all lessons observed. Standards were good in half, and very good in a fifth of lessons.

- Standards achieved by pupils in the nursery and reception classes were at least good, and often very good in all six areas of learning.
- In KS1, standards in English are good in speaking and listening, and satisfactory in reading and writing. In mathematics and science, standards are good.

- Standards in Welsh as a second language, design and technology, information technology, history, art, music, physical education and religious education, standards are good.
- In geography, standards are satisfactory overall.
- Pupils' attainment in English is below the national average, but is around the national average for mathematics and science.

3.2 Standards achieved in key skills across the curriculum

- In early years, pupils make appropriate progress and standards in the key skills are good. In KS1, standards in speaking and listening are good; in reading and writing they are satisfactory and in numeracy and in information and communications technology (ICT) they are good.
- Pupils with special educational needs (SEN) make satisfactory progress in the key skills commensurate with their stage of development.
- Pupils in KS1 have good listening skills: they respond well to stories in class and during collective worship and the majority listen courteously to teachers and to their peers. During circle time, pupils participate enthusiastically when encouraged to speak about their experiences and feelings.
- Pupils make satisfactory progress in their reading skills across the curriculum. At the time of inspection however, there was little observation of pupils independently reading other texts as sources of information.
- Pupils write for different purposes and begin to use specific subject related vocabulary across the curriculum. Written work varies in its quality of presentation.
- Pupils use their developing numeracy skills effectively in a variety of contexts. They use an appropriate range of mathematical vocabulary accurately when speaking about mathematics.
- Information and communications technology is used effectively throughout the curriculum and standards of achievement are good. Evidence in books and on displays suggests that the use of IT to support work in geography, history and mathematics is developing well, although technical difficulties prevented a range of skills being observed during the inspection. Pupils use listening centres independently.
- The school is aware of the need to devise appropriate strategies for key skills delivery and is in the process of amending schemes of work to include the development of key skills. Currently the inclusion of planning for key skills lacks consistency.

4. ETHOS OF THE SCHOOL

4.1 Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development

Provision for the development of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is very good.

- The school has clear aims reflecting a caring and positive ethos. The values of thoughtfulness and mutual respect are conveyed effectively through the curriculum and permeate all aspects of school life.
- Relationships within the school are warm and kindly and pupils benefit from a considerate and consistent approach by the staff who provide sound pastoral care. Good standards of behaviour and motivation shown by pupils result from the clear expectations of staff in ensuring that individual strengths are nurtured and respected.
- When taking part in collaborative activities, pupils show respect for each other and display a sense of fairness and consideration when sharing resources. Older pupils show developing self-reliance and self-discipline when carrying out tasks and instructions outside the classroom.
- Whole school acts of collective worship are planned using appropriate themes. Pupils participate enthusiastically in the singing of hymns and make an effective contribution in their response to stories and prayers. The ability of older pupils to reflect on their attitudes in relationship to others reinforces the sense of school community. Aspects of cultural diversity and racial harmony are positively promoted through the curriculum and in morning worship.
- During assemblies, initiatives such as the Good News book and the 'Proud to Present' scheme celebrate pupils' achievements and enhance their self-esteem.
- Pupils' social and personal skills are thoughtfully promoted through a range of learning experiences. During class discussions, older pupils express themselves honestly and coherently, while younger pupils learn the meaning of being special in relationship to themselves and others during their circle time activities. Social skills are further enhanced through contact with the community and through contributions made by visiting speakers, artists and performers.
- Pupils' awareness of the Cwricwlwm Cymreig is fostered and reinforced through annual celebrations and cross-curricular activities. Their understanding and awareness of other cultures and religions are well developed through their studies in religious education.

4.2 Behaviour and attitudes

Standards of behaviour and attitudes are very good.

- Pupils are friendly and courteous to each other and to adults. They chat quietly with each other during lunch.

- In the classroom they are attentive and persevere at their work, they move from one task to another with ease. They are willing contributors to class discussion.
- Staff are consistent in reinforcing a caring and inclusive ethos throughout the school and pupils respond positively both in their own classes and in whole school activities.
- The school extensive policy on behaviour is applied sensitively and consistently. Pupils respond positively to rewards systems that promotes self esteem

4.3 Attendance

Overall, attendance is satisfactory.

- Pupils' average attendance for the last three full terms is 90.5%.
- Registration is carried out promptly at the start of each session, and absences are codified appropriately.
- Registers are monitored regularly and systematic follow up procedures are in place with close and effective support from the Education Welfare Officer.
- The school has worked hard to achieve a significant improvement in attendance and punctuality since the last inspection and the Head teacher is aiming for a 1% improvement for the next year.

5. QUALITY OF EDUCATION

5.1 Teaching

The quality of teaching was satisfactory or better in almost all lessons and sessions observed. It was good in 20% and very good in 50% of lessons.

- Most teachers have high expectations of pupils, readily offering praise and encouragement. Work is usually suitably matched to individual needs and abilities. However, in a minority of lessons, expectations are low and work lacks appropriate challenge.
- In most instances, mutual respect exists between staff and pupils and class management and control are effective.
- The structure, pace and rigour of lessons are generally good with appropriate introductions and conclusions, and teachers spend time explaining clearly what is expected of pupils. Occasionally, time is not used effectively and there is a lack of opportunity for pupils to participate.
- Learning outcomes are generally clearly identified. In the best practice, these are shared with pupils who achieve them successfully.

- In most lessons, effective use of questioning encourages pupils to develop their thinking and extend their answers, but occasionally pupils are not given sufficient opportunity to answer independently.
- In some classes, teachers offer demonstrations of the skills being taught and share their own experiences with the class: this enriches the experience for all.
- Generally, there is an over-reliance on worksheets, which limits the types of responses pupils can make to their learning.
- Classroom assistants are well deployed and make valuable contributions to the learning process. Together with nursery nurse students and parent helpers, they are positively involved in activities, taking responsibility for individuals and groups engaged in a range of activities under the guidance of teachers.
- Teachers use pupils' artwork purposefully in the high quality displays that enhance the environment and stimulate learning across the curriculum.

5.2 Assessment, recording and reporting

Arrangements for assessment, recording and reporting are good overall.

- The school's assessment policy establishes guidelines for all members of staff: it outlines the various forms of assessment and when they occur.
- Information gained from statutory tests and commercial materials is used to assess pupils' progress. School assessment data is used to set targets for improvement, and is compared with national data.
- In the early years, children are assessed on entry to nursery, and again when they progress to reception. Careful observation ensures that work is well matched to children's needs. Meticulous records are kept of children's achievement in the six areas of learning, and reports to parents are informative and helpful.
- In KS1, assessment opportunities are identified in long-term planning, although these are not always evident in weekly planning. Teachers employ a variety of assessment strategies, including focused tasks, observation, discussion and questioning.
- At the end of the key stage, reading records analyse pupils' achievements and areas for development.
- Marking is undertaken as pupils finish their work, but it is often superficial: number and letter reversals are not identified, nor are short term targets set for pupils.

- Parents are invited to discuss their children's work formally three times a year, but informal discussions take place informally as children are collected from school.
- Reports to parents in the early years provide good information about children's abilities and achievements.
- Reports to parents in KS1 provide some written information on how children are achieving, but the tables containing teacher assessment of achievement and attitudes to learning are difficult to interpret.

5.3 Curriculum

The school provides its pupils with a broad and balanced curriculum, which meets statutory requirements.

- The quality of provision for children in the early years is appropriate to their needs and children make good progress towards the Desirable Outcomes for Children's Learning.
- Planning for children in the early years has a clear focus and includes clear anticipated outcomes for both spontaneous and structured play. It is of very good quality.
- Parents take home storybooks and number bags which help them understand the work which is being undertaken in the early years.
- In KS1, the curriculum is well planned and organised to ensure that appropriate time is allocated to all subjects. There are schemes of work in place for all areas of the NC and religious education.
- Short term planning is clearly linked to schemes of work: literacy and numeracy sessions are planned weekly and other work planned on a fortnightly basis. Teachers are beginning to evaluate their work and pupils' achievement, but this would benefit from further development.
- Long term planning is beginning to identify key skills: these and Y Cwricwlwm Cymreig need further development in short term planning.
- The school works hard to promote the personal and social development of all its pupils, and they achieve very good standards in this.
- Educational visits and visitors to the school enhance pupils' learning experiences and contribute to the standards they achieve.
- Pupils take their reading books home regularly, and other home/school tasks in Y2 help parents to understand the work being undertaken in school. Workshop days when parents are invited to work with their children also give them insight into the curriculum.

5.4 Support, guidance and pupils' welfare

The quality of personal support and educational guidance given to pupils is very good. Procedures for dealing with the general welfare of pupils are sound.

- The school provides a welcoming and supportive environment where realistic levels of teacher expectations ensure effective learning can take place within a positive and constructive atmosphere.
- Pupils' work is imaginatively displayed and photographic and other records of special initiatives and events reflect the value placed on their efforts.
- Staff are sensitive to the needs of their pupils and show concern for their welfare and safety. Pupils in return are happy, secure and show developing confidence and independence in response to teacher expectations. Routines in early years are very well established.
- There are procedures in place for child protection, guidelines are provided for staff and overall responsibility is conscientiously undertaken by the head teacher or deputy. They are fully aware of the correct procedures necessary to implement the policy. The school needs to ensure that the deputy headteacher is afforded training for this aspect of school. Contacts with external agencies are sound.
- There is an appropriate policy for personal and social education (PSE). This is promoted successfully as an integral part of the whole curriculum and is very well taught throughout the school. Sex education is promoted sensitively within the context of cross-curricular themes and gives appropriate emphasis to respect for oneself and others.
- Documentation is well presented, is regularly communicated and is informative to pupils and parents. Parents are welcomed into the school to discuss their children's work at any time. School reports are issued annually and in addition, two Parents Evenings are held within the year. More clearly defined statements on annual school reports would be pertinent in enabling parents assist in their child's progress. Appropriate use is made of pupil records to monitor individual pupils' progress and development.
- The school has an appropriate Health and Safety Policy which is reviewed annually by the governing body. Accident and emergency procedures are clearly addressed in the appropriate policies. Policies are in place for dealing with bullying and behaviour management.
- The assistance given by mid-day supervisors and adult helpers contributes positively to the quality of provision. Their roles are clearly understood and they undertake their responsibilities effectively. The outside play areas are well supervised and pupils are caringly supported.
- The school has a secure access system to ensure as far as possible the safety of pupils and staff during the school day.

5.5 Provision for pupils with SEN

The quality of provision for pupils with special educational needs (SEN) is good. Twelve pupils are identified by the school as requiring SEN support. One pupil has a statement of special educational needs.

- The school has established a clear policy which provides procedural and administrative arrangements which meet the requirements of the Code of Practice.
- The SEN co-ordinator (SENCO), working in partnership with the SENCO from the neighbouring primary school, plan effective provision which is well documented and fully supports the needs and requirements of pupils with SEN. The learning programme is sensitively supported by members of the teaching staff who regularly praise and encourage pupils. Positive interaction between support teachers and class teachers ensure that pupils make good progress. Good relationships have been established with outside agencies.
- Procedures for the early identification of pupils with SEN are effective and thorough. One pupil with specific difficulties is well supported by a full time learning assistant. Parental comments in the pre-inspection meeting indicated appreciation of the efforts made by the school in this direction.
- Individual Education Plans (IEP's) set clear and realistic objectives that are suitably matched to pupils' needs. These are regularly monitored by the SENCO. Pupils make good progress relative to prior achievement and are well integrated into class activities.
- The school makes every effort to maintain and strengthen both formal and informal lines of communication with parents, and although parents do not always attend for reviews they are kept fully informed of their child's progress.
- During the current absence of the SENCO an appropriate overview of SEN provision within the school is maintained by the headteacher. There is a link governor with designated responsibility for SEN who is very supportive and visits the school on a regular basis.

5.6 Partnership with parents and community, schools and other institutions

Partnership with parents and the community, schools and other agencies is very good.

- Parents are well informed of the life and work of the school and an approachable staff listen and act on comments and concerns. Recent initiatives in developing partnership with parents of pre-school children such as the Number Bags and Treasure Box used in the nursery will benefit the learning of children at the beginning of their school life. Aided by Community Education funding, the school has organised courses for parents in numeracy, literacy and computers, and parents with very young children attend early learning sessions hosted by the school.

- Parents are encouraged to take part in school activities and many assist in work in the classroom including listening to pupils read and accompanying school visits. A small but active PTA organises social and fund raising events.
- Representatives of community organisations are regular visitors to the school to speak to pupils and ministers from a number of denominations often take assemblies. Pupils support a number of charities during the year such as Children of Bosnia and Comic relief.
- Having the same head teacher for both the infants school and the primary school to which pupils transfer ensures that transition links and curricular links are well established.
- The school receives good support from local agencies such as the LEA, Social services and Health authority.
- Partnership with a local college and nearby institute of education provides placement for practical training for student teachers and nursery nurses.

5.7 Partnership with industry

Partnership with industry is good.

- Effective partnership with industry, including a large retail outlet, local transport company and an environmental organisation, systematically enriches the curriculum particularly the study of minibeasts in science.
- Extra funding has also been gained from donations from local business.

6. MANAGEMENT

6.1 Quality of self-evaluation and planning for improvement

The quality of self-evaluation and planning for improvement is good.

- The school critically analyses its position and progress and uses this information to plan the way forward.
- Assessment data is used constructively by the head teacher and forms the basis for setting challenging but realistic targets. Target setting is mainly qualitative.
- The school is aware of its strengths and those areas which require development: it strives to improve its provision for pupils through setting whole school and class targets.
- Subject leaders for English and Mathematics evaluate their areas through observing colleagues teach. All subject leaders examine children's work and discuss achievement with colleagues.

- There is a comprehensive SDP which is relevant to the school's needs and circumstances. It clearly outlines achievements and has identified priorities in order to effect further improvements.

6.2 Leadership and efficiency

The quality of leadership of the head teacher and deputy head teacher is very good.

- A warm, welcoming and caring ethos permeates the school and all pupils are confident, happy and safe. The school is committed to equality of opportunity for all and this is evident in all classes, and in the provision for community involvement in the school.
- The head teacher is fully aware of the strengths and areas for development of the school and is keen to improve and maintain high standards. He monitors all aspects of school life effectively, and is ably supported by the deputy head teacher.
- All staff have job descriptions which identify their roles and responsibilities. Subject leaders regularly review curriculum planning and moderate samples of pupils' work.
- The SDP is a well constructed document which clearly identifies targets for the school: these are appropriately costed and regularly monitored and reviewed. Budget setting clearly relates to the school's objectives for development.
- The governing body carries out its responsibilities effectively, constantly reviewing progress. Governors have designated curriculum responsibilities, which they are working hard to develop. Many support work in classes regularly.
- The governing body evaluates the effects of major spending decisions in conjunction with the head teacher and staff.
- Routine administration and organisation is very good: overall, the school is providing good value for money.

6.3 Staffing, accommodation and learning resources

Staffing, accommodation and learning resources are good overall.

- The school is appropriately staffed for the number of pupils on roll. Teachers provide the school with a range of skills and experience.
- Staff attend a variety of in-service courses (INSET) and report on them to colleagues at school-based INSET sessions. Staff development is well organised, targeted and evaluated. Staff serve the school well and are valued for their contributions.

- Learning support assistants provide well-focused help for both pupils and teachers, and make good contributions to pupils' learning. Voluntary helpers also make a valuable contribution in classrooms.
- The school is bright, clean and welcoming and maintained well by the caretaker. Good quality displays enhance the working environment and reflect the value placed on pupils' work. Appropriate measures have been taken to restrict access to buildings to keep pupils and staff safe.
- Rooms are generally well organised and used effectively. Both school and community make good use of the library groups. One classroom is in need of repair, but is to be replaced by a demountable building at Easter. There is evidence of water penetration in the hall.
- A good range of resources supports teaching and learning. The school has identified shortages in subjects such as geography and is building them effectively. However, there is no large equipment for physical education, as there is nowhere to store it.
- The school is used well by a variety of community groups both in term time and during the holidays. Parents and older siblings are encouraged to join in with arts projects during school holidays, and these are well attended.

7. SUBJECTS AND AREAS OF LEARNING

Standards achieved by pupils

Provision for the under-fives

For children under five, the educational provision, taken overall, is appropriate and promotes the desirable outcomes for children's learning.

In the nursery, pupils achieve very good standards commensurate with their age and ability, in language, literacy and communication skills, personal and social development, knowledge and understanding of the world, physical development and creative development. In mathematical development, they achieve good standards.

In the reception class, pupils achieve very good standards in personal and social development, and good standards in the other five areas of development.

Good features

- Planning for the early years has clear learning objectives and covers a broad spectrum of experiences. The quality of relationships is very good and the learning environment is well organised and thoughtfully managed. Routines are well established and children are secure, happy and gaining in confidence.

- Learning in the nursery is supported by very good use of resources, many made by nursery staff. Singing, story-telling and music activities particularly benefit from this.
- Children are given appropriate activities, which they enjoy. The shared area between classes is used very effectively to provide additional experiences with large apparatus and other activities.
- Children enjoy choosing books and handle them correctly. Younger children understand that words and pictures carry meaning.
- Reception children are making good attempts at reading: some are able to read words, and most can relate words to the pictures. The most able are beginning to read words accurately and predict what will happen in the story.
- During circle time activities children listen carefully: they are encouraged to contribute, to share their ideas and respect the ideas of others. Children in reception are able to explain that, although everyone is different, all are special.
- Their personal and social skills are very good in both classes. They are able to share and take turns in whole class or small group sessions, and show increasing independence when exploring the environment. They show care and respect for other children and adults.
- Children are working and playing together co-operatively. They respond positively to adult input in role play, and this input is developing their skills in many areas, particularly language and building relationships with others.
- Younger children are able to sort and match and can make and recognise pattern. They are able to count and tally to five and understand concepts such as 'more' or 'taller'. They are able to go on a 'shape walk' round the classroom and identify rectangles accurately.
- Children in reception are able to match and continue patterns, and can match numerals to appropriate groups of objects. They recognise and name common two-dimensional shapes.
- In both classes, pupils are adept at handling computer programmes. They use the mouse accurately to point and click to complete games programmes. Nursery children can change the programmes and begin to explain what they are doing. Children in reception use the cursor and mouse buttons quickly and accurately, and have produced pictures.
- Children manipulate construction toys well and are keen to share what they have done with each other and with adults. They choose writing and mark-making activities frequently, and handle pencils, crayons and scissors effectively.

- In physical education sessions, reception children move well, making good use of the space available. Children in both classes make good use of balance boards and large plastic construction, showing good co-ordination.
- Children experiment confidently with colour when painting, and are beginning to predict what will happen when two colours are mixed. Nursery children handle dough and clay well, and understand that different techniques are needed for different media.
- They enjoy music-making activities. Children in the nursery sing confidently and have a wide range of appropriate songs and rhymes, including some in Welsh. Whole group sessions are lively and happy occasions when children choose instruments confidently, and understand how to play them. They are able to name some untuned percussion instruments.

Shortcomings

There are no major shortcomings.

English

Standards in speaking and listening are good. In reading and writing standards are satisfactory.

Good features

- Throughout the key stage pupils develop good listening skills. They respond sensibly to teachers' questions and follow instructions appropriately. They listen intently to stories and to each other in class discussions. They use their listening centres purposefully and independently.
- When speaking, pupils express themselves with growing confidence. They collaborate sensibly in paired and group discussions, know the importance of taking turns and are eager to share their thoughts and ideas with visitors. Older pupils in their history lessons initiate questions to visitors with developing clarity and confidence, they select appropriate subject related vocabulary when describing washdays of long ago. In circle time, pupils express themselves clearly when describing first hand experiences.
- Pupils enjoy reading and are keen to share their books with adults. They are familiar with the use of titles and can talk about the author and illustrator. They extend explanations when describing the difference between fiction and non-fiction books and can retell favourite stories in their own words. Most are aware of the importance of punctuation and some read with appropriate expression applying their phonic skills to unfamiliar words.
- Pupils' independent writing is progressing satisfactorily. As they move through the key stage, pupils begin to plan and structure their work logically, incorporate punctuation in a meaningful way and make good attempts to spell unfamiliar words. They use word books to support their learning.

- ICT is used appropriately to support pupils in reading and writing activities.

Shortcomings

- Use of alternative reading sources, including reference books for research purposes, needs further development to link with the development of pupils' skills in writing.
- Insecure formation of letters impinges on the standards of handwriting and has an impact on the presentation of work in books.
- Over use of worksheets across the curriculum restricts extended responses and impacts on standards achieved in pupils' independent written work.

Mathematics

Standards achieved in mathematics are good.

Good features

- Pupils use appropriate mathematical language and the majority respond readily to questions. During their oral work, pupils tackle problems with increasing confidence: many are beginning to explain their thinking and describe the methods they have adopted.
- Younger pupils can build and write number sentences to ten confidently. They count on and back from 20 and have a clear understanding of concepts such as 'less' and 'taller' or 'shorter'. They recognise the signs for plus and minus.
- Older pupils are able to add and subtract mentally to 20 and above. They recognise number patterns and can identify missing numbers accurately. They are able to identify odd and even numbers.
- Younger pupils are able to identify different coins, and add them to 50p: more able can add and subtract larger amounts of money. More able pupils can add purchases together, and identify how much change they would have.
- Older pupils can count confidently in 2's, 5's and 10's, and are beginning to have an awareness of other multiplication tables. They can identify numbers which are greater or less than others, and find the difference between them. Most able pupils are beginning to be able to 'share': an early aspect of division.
- Pupils are using their numerical skills to produce graphical representations in subjects such as science and design and technology.
- Pupils make good progress in their understanding of shape. Younger pupils are secure in their understanding of common two- and three-dimensional shapes. Older pupils can identify the features of different shapes and are achieving well in identifying different polygons. They are able to explain features of symmetry,

and recognise the lines of symmetry in pictures.

Shortcomings

- A significant number of pupils reverse numerals when recording.
- Pupils are slow in mental recall of number bonds.

Science

Standards achieved in science are good.

Good features

- Pupils' knowledge and understanding of science and their ability to use scientific terms and vocabulary are developing well.
- Pupils have good recall of investigations undertaken in both Y1 and Y2. They can explain what they did, what they predicted and whether they were right.
- Oldest pupils recognise that certain conditions have to be in place to make investigations fair.
- Pupils in Y1 are enthusiastic about their investigations with magnets and are able to offer simple explanations for the phenomena they observe.
- Pupils in Y2 are able to explain the life cycle of plants and show that they understand the ways in which seeds are distributed.
- Y2 pupils can describe the insulating properties of different materials used to muffle sound. They produce interesting theories about electricity and the use of batteries and are able to recognise what makes a circuit complete.

Shortcomings

- Over-reliance on worksheets means that pupils have few opportunities to develop their skills in recording or making tables and graphs for their results.

Welsh second language

Standards in Welsh as a second language are good.

Good features

- Pupils make good progress in learning basic vocabulary and are able to follow simple instructions and commands. Pronunciation is good.
- Younger pupils respond to greetings and can ask as well as answer simple questions relating to getting to know each other. They know their colours and can relate these to objects.

- Older pupils are increasingly confident in responding to a variety of questions relating to their likes and dislikes. They pose their own questions with developing confidence when describing where they live, relating answers to their studies on housing in geography.
- When answering questions related to the weather, pupils can vary their responses using a range of appropriate vocabulary and phrases and engage in simple dialogue.
- Pupils develop appropriate reading skills. They can read simple questions on flash cards and display understanding of basic textual material.
- Pupils' writing skills are developing through labelling drawings such as parts of a house and copying simple sentences based on given patterns by the teacher. Older pupils have recorded peer responses to a survey on toys.
- Welsh is used regularly during registration and in some instances throughout the school day. Pupils make good progress in using simple extended responses and do so with increasing confidence.
- Cross-curricular work including topic linked visits to historical sites, attractive displays, participation in Welsh prayers in assembly and at the end of the school day and annual celebrations, contribute significantly towards creating a Welsh ethos in the school.

Shortcomings

- Pupils' writing skills, while showing progression, are currently under-developed.

Design and technology

There was no design and technology being taught during the period of the inspection. However, planning is of good quality, showing good links with other subject areas. Examination of pupils' work and discussions with both pupils and the subject leader indicate that pupils generally achieve good standards overall.

Information technology

Only one information technology session was observed in Y1, and the computer in Y2 was not working. However, portfolios of annotated work, display on the walls and discussion with pupils indicate that pupils are achieving good standards overall.

Good features

- Pupils have a sound grounding in computer skills in the nursery and reception classes.
- Pupils in Y1 are able to use the computer for drafting written work and recording their work in English. They are aware of the use of the key to provide upper case letters, use the space bar and backspace competently, and are aware of where

punctuation is to be found on the keyboard.

- Y1 pupils use paint programmes effectively to illustrate their work. They are able to use a modelling programme to identify body parts when working in science.
- Pupils in Y2 have drafted questions on the computer for a visitor to a history lesson, and had prepared to print them out when the computer broke down.
- Y2 pupils set up a database of the types of houses they all live in and are able to interrogate this.
- Pupils throughout the school use listening centres competently and are able to explain their function.

Shortcomings

- The unreliability of current equipment means that pupils are deprived of opportunities to use information technology.

History

Standards in history are good.

Good features

- Pupils throughout the key stage show a good understanding of the difference between the present and the past in their own lives and in the lives of others. They use appropriate vocabulary and terminology to compare and describe the passing of time.
- Older pupils' understanding of chronology is further developed in the use of time lines to sequence events in their own lives and in the life of a visiting speaker. They are able to comment on similarities and differences and place them in context.
- Effective use of artefacts and class displays relating to grandma's washdays enables pupils distinguish between past and present. They recall interesting detail of their topic-related visit, offer opinions confidently and explain the use of artefacts using appropriate subject related vocabulary.
- Pupils demonstrate an understanding of why events happen and the resulting consequences in their empathetic diary accounts of the Great Fire of London.
- Older pupils compile their own questions for visiting speakers. They are interested, listen well and initiate their own extended responses.
- Most pupils understand that they can find out about the past from a range of historical sources including photographs, museums, television programmes and adults recounting childhood experiences.

- Good use is made of visits and visiting speakers to enhance pupils' understanding and assist their interpretation of historical knowledge.

Shortcomings

- Opportunities for pupils to communicate their knowledge and understanding of historical events through writing about the past in different forms could be further developed.

Geography

During the inspection one lesson of geography was observed. However, on the basis of work in books and talking to pupils, standards were judged to be satisfactory.

Good features

- Pupils make satisfactory progress in developing an appropriate geographical vocabulary which more able pupils apply in a variety of relevant contexts.
- Early mapping skills such as the drawing of simple plans and routes, the use of local maps, symbols and keys and the use of co-ordinates to locate features in the surrounding areas are developed progressively. Some younger pupils are able to identify items as well as their own position on a plan of the classroom.
- Older pupils have a sound knowledge of their immediate environment; they can follow directions on a map of their journey from home to school and can locate features from aerial photographs. They show good understanding of direction.
- Awareness of the area is strengthened through visits to the locality where pupils identify features seen near the school and far away. They record their findings.
- In their studies of different kinds of houses and homes pupils identify relevant features, have a good understanding of how land and buildings are used and use appropriate vocabulary when writing advertisements for selling property.
- Pupils use ICT appropriately when looking at different houses and pose questions to investigate data.

Shortcomings

- A number of pupils are insecure in placing their own locality in the context of Wales and other places.
- The use of worksheets for colouring purposes restricts opportunities for pupils to develop their skills in making their own plans.
- Pupils need more opportunities to provide individual responses to geographical enquiries.

Art

Standards achieved in art are good.

Good features

- Pupils' work is carefully displayed and valued throughout the school, and contributes to standards achieved across the curriculum.
- Pupils use a variety of media effectively: they use pencils, pastels, paints and crayons to produce effects of colour, line and tone.
- Pupils are able to understand colour mixing, and are able to add white paint to produce lighter tones of colours.
- In Y1, pupils are able to produce a variety of different effects when using different materials to weave: they use wool, paper, fabric and cellophane to work on this new skill.
- Pupils use ICT to produce illustrations and are able to use techniques such as colour filling and spray painting to provide different effects.
- When working with a visiting artist, pupils are able to produce large tissue paper constructions and mobiles. They are now working hard on producing small mosaics which will be used to make a picture of the school.

Shortcomings

- There are no major shortcomings.

Music

Standards in music are good

Good features

- Pupils enjoy singing. They can memorise and repeat musical patterns and songs. Words are enunciated clearly and they perform loudly or softly as requested.
- As a result of listening to taped music relating to their topic on travel, younger pupils improvise special effects on percussion instruments with sensitivity and control. They listen well to each other and display a good sense of rhythm.
- Older pupils show good standards when using body percussion to keep a regular beat. They recognise and describe changes in tempo, dynamics and pitch and copy them in response to hand-signals.
- Pupils improve their performing skills when working out ways of selecting instruments to enhance performance. They are able to keep time when conducting and collaborate in pairs to appraise their own and others efforts.

- Opportunities for pupils to perform in school events and annual celebrations provide enriching experiences and have a positive effect on pupils' standards in music.

Shortcomings

- At the beginning of the key stage, pupils need opportunity to develop independence in their music making by selecting instruments to explore different sound sources.

Physical education

Based on observations of one games lesson and one dance lesson standards were judged to be good.

Good features

- Pupils are appropriately dressed. They listen well and respond to instructions. They are aware of the need for rules and recognise the importance of safety.
- Pupils have a good awareness of space and know how to adapt their actions in contrasting fast and slow movements and when changing direction.
- Older pupils co-operate well during their traditional dance activities. They respond to musical stimuli, display well co-ordinated clapping and marching movements and remember the sequence of patterns in dance routines. They use space well and work effectively in groups
- Younger pupils are able to work as a team. Some demonstrate good levels of control and accuracy when rolling a ball and retrieving objects.
- Pupils throughout the school participate in weekly swimming lessons. They respond enthusiastically and make good progress.

Shortcomings

- Further use of evaluation would enable pupils refine their skills. More opportunity is needed for pupils to make simple judgements on how to improve their efforts.
- Lack of storage space limits the acquisition of large apparatus which would provide pupils with further challenges.

Religious education

Standards achieved in religious education (RE) are good.

Good features

- Appropriate emphasis is placed on Christian values and beliefs. The school provides a very good sense of community in which good values are shared and caring relationships are promoted successfully: pupils understand the importance of these to daily life.
- Pupils are introduced to relevant stories from the Bible and are made aware of the difference between right and wrong.
- Pupils are focusing on the belief that, although we are all different, we all have different talents and should be valued for them.
- Visits to local churches and visits by Christian ministers enhance pupils' knowledge and understanding of Christian worship and ceremonies.
- Y2 pupils are able to discuss the purpose of the font in church with insight and understanding about the spiritual aspects of joining the Christian community. They give a good account of attending a christening ceremony.
- Pupils are able to identify abstract 'wishes' for a new baby in sensitive and touching terms: they wish for things such as happiness, being polite, kind and caring.
- Pupils are introduced to other faiths such as Islam and the Jewish faith through discussion of celebrations and festivals of light.

Shortcomings

- There is a lack of religious artefacts to support teaching and learning.

8. SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

8.1 Progress since the last inspection

The last inspection report of February 1997 identified seven key issues for action:

- to raise standards in geography;
- to improve attendance and punctuality;
- to develop a more meaningful partnership with parents and encourage them to take a more active part in the life of the school;
- to ensure that standards of teaching and learning are monitored effectively;
- to accord a greater managerial role to the deputy head teacher;
- to arrange a more equitable distribution of curriculum responsibilities;
- to attend to a number of safety issues.

The school has improved attendance and very few pupils were late during the inspection: the school is operating a first day response scheme. Parents responding to the questionnaire and at the pre-inspection meeting indicated that they were very happy with the school and their involvement in it. They attend consultation evenings

and workshops about subject areas and many help in school regularly. The parent-teacher association is becoming more active.

Subject leaders are examining pupils' work, and teaching and learning are being observed in the classroom for English and mathematics. The head teacher monitors teaching throughout the school, and is developing the subject leaders' role for other subjects. The deputy head's role has been redefined and she handles her new responsibilities confidently and competently. Curriculum areas have been redistributed, but with such a small staff, there is bound to be a heavy curriculum load on each member.

The accommodation issues have been addressed effectively. Geography standards have also improved, although they are still only satisfactory.

8.2 Key Issues for Action

In order to build on the progress made, the school and governing body need to:

- Improve standards in reading, writing* and geography;
- Reduce the number of worksheets used as these are impacting on standards pupils are achieving;
- Improve handwriting and presentation skills;
- Ensure that specific key skills are identified in short term planning.

* The school has identified writing as an area for development.

The inspection team thanks pupils, staff, parents and the governing body for the unfailing kindness, courtesy and co-operation shown throughout the inspection.

APPENDIX

A. Basic information about the school

Name of School	Sirhowy Infant School
School type	LEA Maintained
Age -range of pupils	3 - 7
Address of school	King Street Tredegar
Post-Code	NP22 4PA
Telephone Number	01495 722237

Headteacher	Mr B G Lewis
Date of appointment	May 2000
Chair of Governors/ Appropriate Authority	Mr P Griffiths
Registered Inspector	Mrs H R D Palmer
Dates of inspection	25 – 27 February 2002

B. School data as indicators

<i>Number of pupils in each year group</i>									
Year group	N (fte)	R	Y1	Y2	Y3	Y4	Y5	Y6	Total
Number of pupils	26	20	26	23					85fte

<i>Total number of teachers</i>			
	Full-time	Part-time	Full-time equivalent (fte)
Number of teachers	4	1	4.3

<i>Staffing information</i>	
Pupil : teacher (fte) ratio (excluding nursery and special classes)	23 : 1
Pupil : adult (fte) ratio in nursery classes	13 : 1
Average class size, excluding nursery and special classes	23
Teacher (fte) : class ratio	0.93 : 1

<i>Percentage attendance for three complete terms prior to the inspection</i>				
	R	KS1	KS2	Whole school
Term 1	88	93		90
Term 2	90.2	92		91
Term 3	88	92		90

Number of pupils excluded during 12 months prior to inspection.	0
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C. Results of national curriculum assessments and public examinations

National Curriculum Assessment KS 1 Results: 2001			Number of pupils in Y2: 21					
Percentage of pupils at each level								
			D	W	1	2	3	4
ENGLISH:	Teacher Assessment	School	0	5	38	57	0	0
		National	0	4	14	64	18	0
EN: Reading	Teacher Assessment	School	0	10	33	48	0	0
		National	0	4	14	57	25	0
	Task/Test	School	0	10	24	53	0	0
		National	0	4	14	56	26	0
EN: Writing	Teacher Assessment	School	0	10	33	57	0	0
		National	0	5	14	70	11	0
	Task/Test	School	0	10	24	61	5	0
		National	0	6	11	74	9	0
EN: Speaking and listening	Teacher Assessment	School	0	0	14	86	0	0
		National	0	3	12	64	21	0
MATHEMATICS	Teacher Assessment	School	0	0	19	57	24	0
		National	0	2	10	65	23	0
	Task/Test	School	0	5	0	72	24	0
		National	0	2	7	63	27	0
SCIENCE	Teacher Assessment	School	0	0	14	62	24	0
		National	0	2	11	70	17	0

Percentage of pupils attaining at least level 2 in mathematics, science, and either English or Welsh (first language)			
In the school:	58	In Wales	80

- 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

D. The evidence base of the inspection

Before the inspection, meetings were held with the staff, the governing body and the parents of pupils registered at the school. Six parents were present at the pre-inspection parents' meeting. Documents supplied by the school were scrutinised and 29 questionnaires returned by parents were analysed. A team of three gave six inspector days to the inspection, in the course of which formal observations were made of 32 lessons or part lessons. In addition, 61 formal notes were made of aspects of pupils' work and provision. Discussions with pupils from all age groups and abilities were undertaken, both inside and outside the classroom. A representative sample of pupils' work from all classes and for the whole academic year was scrutinised. Teachers' plans and records were examined. Inspectors considered the site, fabric and resources of the school. Discussions were held with the Head and with teachers, particularly about their subject management roles. Still within the context of the inspection, reporting back meetings took place with the Head, the staff and the governing body.

E. Composition and responsibilities of the inspection team

Name	Aspects	Subjects
Mrs H R D Palmer	1.0 Context 2.0 Main Findings 3.1 Standards of Achievement 5.1 Quality of Teaching 5.2 Assessment, Recording and Reporting 5.3 Curriculum 6.1 Self-evaluation 6.2 Leadership and Efficiency 6.3 Resources 8.1 Progress since the last Inspection	Early Years Mathematics Science Design and Technology Information Technology Art Religious Education
Mrs G Rees	3.2 Key Skills 4.1 Spiritual, Moral, Social and Cultural Development 5.4 Support and Guidance 5.5 Special Educational Needs	Welsh as a second language English History Geography Music Physical Education
Mr C Hewitt (Lay Inspector)	4.2 Behaviour and Attitudes 4.3 Attendance 5.6 Links with Parents, the Community, Agencies and Other Schools 5.7 Links with Industry	