

Number of learners: 144
Age range: 3-7
Date of inspection: June 2017

Information about the school

Cwmaber Infant School is in the village of Abertridwr in Caerphilly local authority. There are 144 pupils aged three to seven on roll. This includes around 36 pupils in the part-time nursery class. The school has four full-time classes. Around 32% of pupils are eligible for free school meals, which is higher than the average for Wales (19%). There are a very few pupils looked after by the local authority.

The school identifies around 22% of pupils as having additional learning needs. Very few pupils have a statement of special educational needs. Very few pupils come from ethnic minority backgrounds or speak English as an additional language. No pupils speak Welsh as their first language.

Context and background to sector-leading practice

Cwmaber Infants School is a caring, vibrant and welcoming community where all pupils and staff are valued equally. All pupils have access to every aspect of school life. There is an inclusive ethos that supports all pupils and adults well.

Pupil voice is actively encouraged by all members of staff in order to develop genuine ownership of school life and initiatives. The school follows Article 12 of the United Nations Convention of the Rights of the Child, which states “when adults are making decisions that affect pupils, pupils have the right to say what they think should happen and have their opinions taken into account”. The headteacher leads the School Ambassadors, who are chosen carefully in order to include the pupils who are most likely to benefit from the responsibility of making whole-school decisions regarding the school environment and learning activities. Pupils are able to choose which committees they wish to represent and as an infant school the roles have been undertaken by pupils in Year 1 and 2.

Description of nature of strategy or activity

Staff actively promote pupil voice and decision-making. Pupils have a positive impact on the quality of school life. Pupils take responsibility for improving their school seriously. They have roles to improve playtimes, promote the use of Welsh and develop pupils' understanding of environmental issues. Digital Leaders consider ideas for developing the Digital Competency Framework (DCF) and the E-Safety committee works hard to ensure that pupils are safe whilst online. Year 1 pupils have participated in the Lead Creative Schools interview process. All pupils have voted on which 'fun time Friday' enrichment activity they wish to take part in.

School Ambassadors

The excellent work of the Ambassadors helps to inform the headteacher of pupils' views on a range of issues. They have made suggestions for the improvement of the playground with a new climbing wall and buddy bench, Viking boat and many different line markings. Pupils have also taken time to look through catalogues at meetings to choose numeracy and literacy resources for use at break times and lunchtimes.

One of the suggestions from the Ambassadors was to have school branded coloured lockers to help keep the corridors tidy. They worked with the headteacher and business manager to discuss the cost of the lockers and how these would be funded. The Ambassadors are very proud of the improvements that they have made to their school.

Eco council

The eco council helps to develop pupils' awareness of sustainability and healthy living, with membership drawn from Year 2 pupils. Year 1 pupils join the committee in the summer term, when they review the eco-code and the previous year's action plan in order to create a new one for the following academic year. They also feed back to governors on a regular basis. The eco council conducts termly 'learning walks' around the outdoor spaces, canteen and classrooms, in order to monitor and review these areas, raising questions such as, 'is there any litter?', and 'is the area bright and colourful?'

During an eco council meeting, a problem relating to parents parking outside the school was highlighted. The pupils discussed this further and they decided that they wanted to tackle the problem. They wanted signs to stop the parents parking and asked the local Road Safety Officer to come in to school to help them with ideas for their signs. They also contacted the local schools liaison officer and received cones to place outside the school to stop people parking on the zig-zag lines. A competition was held and the winning posters were displayed on a sign outside the school. The pupils made leaflets and handed them to the parents parking on the lines. They came to school early and monitored the parking on the lines, before and after the signs went up. They saw a large reduction in the number of people parking on the yellow lines. The committee continues to complete random checks.

Learning Walks and School Development Plan(SDP)

The School Ambassadors and the eco council conduct termly 'learning walks' around the school, in order to monitor and review areas. They discuss priorities, make valued suggestions for the SDP and from this create a child-friendly SDP to be displayed around the school. The Ambassadors have presented the child-friendly SDP in assemblies to share with the rest of the school.

Healthy Helpers

Healthy Helpers support the school's commitment on wellbeing and developing healthy attitudes and lifestyles. The Healthy Helpers give out stickers for healthy lunchboxes, monitor snack time and distribute healthy eating leaflets, which they have designed themselves. When the weather is suitable, pupils are able to eat their packed lunches outside in designated picnic areas monitored by Healthy Helpers and staff.

Criw Cymraeg

Welsh is used incidentally throughout the day in all areas of the school. Criw Cymraeg promotes Welsh at playtimes and lunchtimes through organising games, to promote the use of Welsh and extend vocabulary. Members distribute Tocyn Iaithe to other pupils to reward the use of Welsh throughout the school day.

Digital Leaders

Digital Leaders contribute to the implementation of the Digital Competency Framework. The E-Safety committee provides pupil voice across the school and members have regular meetings to discuss how to keep safe on the internet. Internet safety is taken very seriously and parents' sessions are run. During these sessions, parental awareness of issues is increased and parents and their child / pupils work together to put into practice what has been learned, in order to improve internet safety and security.

Lead Creative Schools

First Year

Year 1 pupils were informed about the school taking part in the Lead Creative Schools Project and it was explained that a professional person would be coming to work with the pupils in the project to help them learn in a different way. The pupils made a list of questions to ask practitioners to find out about their skills as well as their personal likes and dislikes.

The pupils were given the opportunity to take part in a short workshop event during the interview before they talked to the applicant and asked their questions. This enabled them to have an idea of what the applicant could offer and how they would be learning during the project. The pupils were keen to engage and offer opinions as well as ask questions and, after the interviews, they discussed the process and voted on the applicant with whom they would most like to work. The staff listened to their comments and took them into consideration before making the final decision.

During the project, the pupils were encouraged to make choices about the stories they wanted to create regarding plot, situation and characters. The whole process required the pupils to make decisions and collaborate to come to a decision for the final product.

During and after the project, the pupils were asked what, if anything, they liked about the project and what, if any, impact it had made upon them. The way the pupils responded was mature and thoughtful and reflected the fact that the pupils knew that their opinions were valid and valued.

Second Year

The final year of the project will involve a new cohort, but the process will be the same in that the pupils will be involved all the way through the process in selecting the practitioners as well as the way the project will take place.

This year's project will take the form of a presentation depicting the changes and similarities of play over the last century. This decision was made following a visit to school by a local author who wrote about the things she played with in her childhood. After she read an excerpt of her book to the pupils, they were eager to ask questions and to find out more about the toys and games she played with and expressed an interest in learning about them.

Pupil voice

Each class teacher asks for the pupils' ideas when starting a new topic. A mind map is then created with the pupils about what they would like to learn. Ideas are taken into consideration when planning weekly activities and each week the pupils are asked for ideas about what they would like to be included in the enhanced areas the following week based on skills they have learned the week before.

Pupils complete a self-assessment using the traffic light colours and make comments about how they could improve their work. They also peer assess each other's work and the pupils help others to improve.

After-school clubs are run every half term and the school regularly sends out pupil questionnaires to find out which after-school clubs the pupils liked and disliked. The pupils complete their questionnaire at home with their parents. They then make recommendations about which other clubs they would like the school to run. Topic related questionnaires are also sent out and these ask the pupils what they liked best about the topic and what they would have liked to have done differently.

Future plans

The school is planning a new rolling program to help the pupils in becoming even more involved in the running of the school and in making decisions regarding the environment and learning activities. They have appointed a head / deputy head girl and boy from Year 2, and Ambassadors from Year 1. This will prepare the Year 1 pupils for their role in Year 2.

The school aims to introduce Year 1 pupils to the eco council in the spring term, and reception pupils in the summer term, again to prepare them for their future roles in the school. These pupils will be selected by their peers.

The school is developing a 'Cwmaber 25 Project', which aims to give pupils the opportunity to decide on activities and events that they wish to participate in by the time they leave Cwmaber Infants School at the end of Year 2. Each class will discuss which activities they would like and take a vote. The five most popular choices will be carried out for each class during the year. The project will then begin again during the new academic year.

Staff have undertaken training regarding 'Investors In Pupils' and intend to achieve the award by the Autumn Term 2018.

What impact has this work had on provision and learners' standards?

Staff have observed increased confidence and self-esteem from pupils, linked to engagement and enthusiasm, co-operation, responsibility and tolerance.

Proactive communication on committees has improved pupils' ability to participate in discussions and express their opinions thoughtfully and effectively, whilst being interested and sensitive to the opinions of their peers. Effective decision-making through pupil voice has had a very positive impact on the provision of learning and wellbeing. Pupil voice has enabled pupils to express their opinions, as they feel more involved in the decisions that affect their learning and the environment in which they are taught.

How have you shared your good practice?

Pupils have shared their work with the headteacher and governors, the feeder junior school, other infant schools and the cluster of local schools. Pupils will also share their experiences with the 'Peer Schools for the Sustaining Excellence Programme'.