

**Report following monitoring**

**Level of follow-up: Special measures**

**Brecon High School**

**Penlan  
Brecon  
Powys  
LD3 9SR**

**Date of visit: November 2025**

**by**

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

## Outcome of visit

Brecon High School is judged to have made sufficient progress in relation to the recommendations following the most recent core inspection.

As a result, His Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education and Training in Wales is removing the school from the list of schools requiring special measures.

## Progress since the last inspection

### **R1. Improve standards at key stage 4, including those of more able pupils**

Since the core inspection, the school has continued to raise its expectations of what all pupils can achieve through continuous work on improving the quality of teaching and learning. This is reflected well in the positive trajectory of end of Key Stage 4 outcomes over the last three years. During this period, the performance of more able pupils has improved notably, as has that of boys. Girls' outcomes have also improved, albeit more modestly, but those of pupils eligible for free school meals remains too variable.

The attitude to learning of many pupils seen during this visit continues to be positive and they benefit clearly from the well-understood routines that support learning in their classrooms. These pupils arrive promptly, settle well and generally remain on task. During their lessons, these pupils usually make at least the progress expected. The few pupils who make limited progress often struggle to retain concentration and lapse too easily into off-task conversation. Shortcomings in teaching, particularly the level of challenge, often contribute to this.

The school has continued to focus on developing pupils' oracy skills. Many pupils engage well in paired discussions and are comfortable in sharing their thoughts and ideas. The majority use a suitably broad vocabulary confidently, though the minority who have a more restricted vocabulary often lack confidence and make limited verbal contributions.

Many pupils read a suitable range of texts and images successfully to extract information, although opportunities for them to develop their more advanced reading skills remain too variable. There are notably more instances of pupils' using inference and deduction confidently in suitably challenging contexts, such as considering the siting of a local hill fort and Dickens' presentation of characters and life in the Victorian workhouse.

Many pupils produce extended writing that is mostly technically secure and structured logically. This includes discussions about why it took so long for Wales to be conquered and explanations of photosynthesis. The school has made teachers' marking for literacy more consistent and robust, though a minority of pupils continue to make careless basic errors in their writing including punctuation, sentence construction and spelling, including that of topic-specific vocabulary.

In many cases, pupils demonstrate sound basic numeracy skills and can interpret scientific graphs effectively. Generally, they are secure in their understanding and application of number properties to calculate averages and ratios, and convert between units such as tonnes and kilograms. However, a few pupils have difficulty recalling prior knowledge accurately. This includes confusing the rules for squaring and cubing and relying on memorised facts or formula triangles rather than a deeper understanding. The majority of pupils show confidence in their mental arithmetic, drawing graphs precisely, and using scientific equations correctly, such as when calculating power. They also work confidently with more complex concepts, including the resolution of forces and calculations involving speed, distance, and time.

In Welsh medium lessons, many pupils respond readily and with confidence when questioned and demonstrate appropriate standards when writing extended prose. Many older pupils demonstrate an appropriate understanding of mutations, however, too often they use English terms in lessons instead of learning and using the correct subject-specific vocabulary in Welsh.

## **R2. Improve attendance**

Since the core inspection, the school has taken a range of appropriate actions to improve pupils' attendance. Whilst overall attendance remains below pre-pandemic levels, rates of attendance increased well between 2023-2024 and 2024-2025 and are above the national average.

The highly committed pastoral team works beneficially with pupils, families, and external agencies to support the attendance of individual pupils. They monitor and analyse data carefully and provide targeted support for priority groups. This includes the 'Booster programme', the Year 11 'Return to Learn' programme, and the 'resilience day' which focuses on well-being and team building for Year 9 pupils identified as being below target for attendance. These interventions have had a notable impact on the attendance of these pupils.

The school promotes effectively the importance of good attendance. Weekly dialogue between pupils and tutors during registration periods has promoted greater awareness and encouraged pupil responsibility for their own attendance. These activities are monitored and evaluated effectively. Pupils value the various reward strategies that contribute well to improved attendance across the school. They include termly prize draws, the ‘advent challenge’, a virtual shop and weekly points leading to celebration letters and eligibility for trips. Pupil views have influenced these changes beneficially, helping to ensure that the incentives are meaningful and well-received.

Communication with families has strengthened through a more proactive and personalised approach. This includes termly celebrations and ‘nudge’ and improvement letters. The strengthened role of the attendance officer is key to effective liaison with families and early, supportive intervention involving local primary schools.

### **R3. Improve the learning experiences of pupils including the quality of teaching, the curriculum at key stage 4 and the provision to develop their skills**

Leaders have a better understanding of the quality of teaching and assessment than at the time of the core inspection. They have adapted professional learning appropriately to address key priorities for improvement, focusing on worthwhile ‘cultural norms’ and the ‘Brecon Seven’ approach to teaching. Valuable opportunities to observe colleagues during ‘Green weeks’, together with resources shared through the school’s ‘Impact Library’, contribute to a more collaborative and open culture. These developments have led to improvements in pupils’ learning experiences and quality of teaching across the school.

Nearly all teachers know their pupils well and build positive, respectful relationships that contribute strongly to a calm and supportive learning environment. Most have good subject knowledge and use terminology well to engage pupils in their learning. They use well structured, consistent routines to set clear expectations for behaviour within their classrooms. As a result, pupils demonstrate high levels of respect towards their peers, teachers, and visitors, which supports effective engagement in learning.

In many lessons, teachers plan learning effectively, building on pupils’ prior knowledge and focusing clearly on developing skills and understanding. They provide clear explanations and use strategies such as ‘turn and talk’ well to reinforce key concepts. Teachers also provide suitable thinking time to help pupils organise and share their ideas with confidence.

In lessons where pupils make particularly strong progress, teachers plan well-sequenced and suitably challenging learning experiences that meet pupils' needs successfully and promote deeper thinking. They monitor pupils' understanding carefully and adapt their teaching skilfully in response to pupils' progress. As a result, pupils engage enthusiastically in their learning, respond positively to high expectations, and demonstrate increasing independence and confidence in applying their skills.

In the few cases where pupils make limited progress, teachers' planning includes tasks that do not contribute sufficiently to the intended learning. At times, these teachers over-direct learning. Consequently, a few pupils lose focus and find it difficult to sustain their concentration throughout the lesson.

Most teachers provide helpful verbal feedback during lessons, offer individual support, and check the accuracy of pupils' work carefully. Many use questioning and resources such as mini-whiteboards well to gauge understanding and adapt teaching in real time for individuals or the whole class. Written feedback is generally appropriate, with many teachers providing helpful responses using feedback templates and specific follow-up tasks. Pupils are often given time to address this feedback during Focused Improvement Time (FIT), which increasingly supports progress when the feedback is precise and well targeted. However, a few teachers rely too heavily on peer and self-assessment which is often unhelpful.

The school's focus on pupils' oracy skills has resulted in more teachers addressing pupils' vocabulary development and using supportive classroom strategies such as 'turn and talk'. The key focus of this work remains on pupils' speaking skills, though expectations of their listening skills are not as clear. Although a little too variable, where teachers ask probing, very occasionally incisive questions, pupils are challenged to develop both their thinking and verbal skills suitably.

Most pupils spend considerable time reading for information, though there is now clear evidence of greater challenge in a broader range of subjects. A few, low challenge comprehension activities about the Globe theatre for example, continue to limit pupils' experience and use of more advanced reading skills, particularly at Key Stage 3. At Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form pupils benefit from frequently challenging opportunities to develop their inference, summary and evaluation skills in different contexts.

Many pupils benefit from worthwhile opportunities to produce extended writing. This aspect of provision has benefitted from teachers' more consistent address of technical accuracy.

There is clear strategic oversight and quality assurance of provision for developing pupils' numeracy skills across the curriculum. All staff have received helpful professional learning on topics such as graph analysis which has raised the level of numeracy work, especially in science. However, a few staff do not use numeracy tasks well enough to deepen pupils' subject understanding. Teachers now use personalised assessment data well to target intervention work. For Year 7 pupils, this includes successful peer mentoring by pupils in Year 12.

There are now a few worthwhile opportunities for pupils to use their digital skills in different subjects across the curriculum. This includes, in technology, using 3D design software effectively to design and produce moulds for handmade chocolates. Overall, the provision for the progressive development of these skills remains in the early stages of development.

Most recently, leaders have introduced professional learning opportunities to support staff who work through the medium of Welsh and to promote the use of the Welsh language more generally. This includes pupils in the sixth form delivering a session for teachers to encourage the use of Welsh in lessons and throughout the school. Currently, however, there remains limited use of Welsh outside of Welsh lessons. Whilst all teachers communicate and pupils respond confidently in Welsh-medium lessons, the language modelled by teachers is not always grammatically correct. The school has already identified these issues and has provided additional resources to strengthen provision.

Since the core inspection, the Key Stage 4 curriculum offer has improved. There is a broader range of subjects available, allowing nearly all pupils to follow their first-choice courses. The Key Stage 4 curriculum now meets the needs of nearly all pupils.

#### **R4. Improve the quality and impact of leaders at all levels including their ability to self-evaluate robustly and accurately to support effective school improvement**

The recent appointment of the interim headteacher to a substantive role has ended an extended period of instability in the school's leadership. During his time as an interim leader he has driven clear improvements to important aspects of the school's work, including self-evaluation and the support of pupils' well-being. His senior leadership team provide effective support in this work, which has generated a collegiate approach to school improvement and has had a notably positive impact on staff morale.

Senior leadership responsibilities are equitable and reflective of a clearly understood strategic vision for the school. Line management provides effective support for middle

leaders that links suitably to professional learning opportunities. In addition, the headteacher has made difficult decisions in holding staff at all levels to account and to help others understand their roles and responsibilities.

Middle leaders feel valued and appreciate their greater involvement in quality assurance processes. Many leaders have a more secure understanding of the school's strengths and those areas where the need for further improvement is greatest.

#### **R5. Provide robust financial management**

The school, governors and the local authority collaborate well to monitor expenditure closely. The school is projecting a surplus in-year budget following a period of greater financial stability.

The strengthened financial monitoring processes support this improved financial position well, although a significant deficit remains. Leaders take a measured approach to ensuring financial stability through thoughtful staffing decisions that cause minimal disruption to pupils' learning and staff well-being.

The pupil development grant and other grant funding remain embedded as part of the school's core budget, predominantly to support salaries within the staffing structure. Leaders continue to evaluate the effectiveness of this expenditure, particularly the impact on pupil attainment and experiences.

#### **R6. Address the health and safety issue raised during the inspection**

This recommendation was satisfied when the school moved to the new site.