Report of visit
Level of follow-up: significant improvement

Tasker-Milward V.C. School
Off Portfield Avenue
Haverfordwest
Pembrokeshire
SA61 1EQ

Date of visit: June 2014

by

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

The monitoring team

Robert Davies	Reporting Inspector
Jackie Gapper	Team Inspector
Hugh Davies	Team Inspector
Stephen Davies	Team Inspector

Outcome of monitoring visit

Tasker-Milward V.C. School is judged to have made insufficient progress in relation to the recommendations following the core inspection in March 2013.

As a result, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education and Training in Wales is increasing the level of follow-up activity.

In accordance with the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that special measures are required in relation to this school. The school will draw up an action plan, which shows how it is going to address the recommendations.

Estyn inspectors will re-visit the school in about three months' time to inspect progress against the recommendations.

Progress since the last inspection

Recommendation 1: Raise standards in key stage 4

This recommendation has not been addressed.

At key stage 4, performance across all headline indicators is lower than at the time of the core inspection. In most cases performance is considerably lower. Performance in the level 2 threshold including English and mathematics and average wider capped points score indicators is well below modelled expectations. For all headline indicators, performance in 2013 places the school in the bottom 25% of similar schools based on eligibility for free school meals. Progress made by pupils from key stage 2 to key stage 4 and from key stage 3 to key stage 4 in all indicators is very weak. It is significantly below the progress made by similar pupils across Wales.

Performance in all the core subjects at key stage 4 has declined since the core inspection, although the decline in science is more modest than in English and mathematics. Over the last three years, performance in English and mathematics has been below the median for three consecutive years. In 2013, performance in both these core subjects places the school in the bottom 25% of similar schools based on eligibility for free school meals. Performance in science has been relatively stronger over the same period; although in 2013 performance places the school in the lower 50% of similar schools based on eligibility for free school meals.

The difference between the performance of girls and boys has reduced since the last inspection due to the deterioration in the performance of girls in 2013. However, the gap between the performance of girls and boys in English in 2013 is greater than that of the family of schools due to the very weak performance of boys. Over the last three years the performance of pupils eligible for free school meals has been weak. In 2013 it is very weak.

Senior leaders have raised expectations in key stage 4 by setting more challenging targets in most headline indicators, although for 2014 the target for the level 2 threshold is not sufficiently challenging. Together with raising the expectations of

pupils' performance, leaders are tracking the progress of pupils more systematically in key stage 4 and there is better targeted support for individuals and groups of pupils.

At key stage 3 in 2013, performance across the headline indicators is improving strongly and it compares well with performance in similar schools. However, in English, standards in writing are noticeably lower than in the family of schools and nationally. Provisional data for 2014 indicates that performance has declined in all headline indicators except science.

In the majority of lessons, pupils listen well, are generally attentive and behave well. They engage in tasks purposefully and work well in pairs, groups and individually. Many pupils contribute readily in class discussions and are confident to ask questions for clarification. However, too often their responses in whole class discussions are brief and lack detail. In around half of lessons, pupils make effective progress in developing their subject specific skills and other skills, such as literacy and numeracy. In these lessons, many pupils demonstrate a secure recall of previously learnt work and apply their skills and understanding in new situations effectively. They demonstrate sound reading skills and are able to extract and infer information from a range of sources. In a few subjects, such as science, they use their numeracy skills effectively to support their learning. Pupils respond well to praise and instructions given in Welsh.

In a significant minority of lessons, pupils do not make as much progress as they should. In these lessons, pupils do not engage in tasks readily and do not take sufficient pride in their work. In addition, the quality of their written work is weak, often being poorly constructed, brief and written with too many spelling and grammatical mistakes. In a few lessons, pupils behave poorly and show disrespectful attitudes to their teachers and peers. This disrupts teaching and undermines the progress made by other pupils.

Recommendation 2: Improve behaviour of a significant minority of pupils

This recommendation has been partly addressed.

Since the core inspection, pupil behaviour has improved. Most pupils are orderly when moving around the school and many exhibit high levels of respect for the school, their teachers and their peers.

In the lessons observed during the monitoring visit, many pupils behave well. They show interest in their work and have a positive attitude to learning. Many pupils believe that the behaviour around the school has also improved since the time of the core inspection. However, a few pupils still do not behave well enough. These pupils often cause persistent low-level disruption in lessons and a very few show a lack of respect to their peers and staff. A few pupils arrive too late to lessons.

Pupils and staff understand well the sanctions that are applied for specific incidents of misbehaviour. These include the use of detentions and, in more serious cases, the removal of pupils to a 'Remove' room, where they complete work under the

supervision of specialist staff.

The school's fixed-term exclusion policy has helped reduce the level of poor behaviour. However, rates have increased between 2013 and 2014 when compared with 2012 to 2013.

The school has taken appropriate action to address bullying effectively. Due to consistent implementation of the anti-bullying policy and procedures, incidents of bullying have decreased significantly. Many pupils state that they feel safe in school and that almost all incidents of bullying are dealt with promptly.

Recommendation 3: Improve the co-ordination and planning for progression in developing literacy and numeracy skills

This recommendation has been partly addressed.

Since the core inspection the school has made appropriate progress in implementing the national literacy and numeracy framework through mapping opportunities for developing literacy and numeracy skills. A majority of subjects have updated their schemes of work and lesson plan with specific reference to literacy strands to plan for progression in these skills. A few subjects have also undertaken similar work in linking to numeracy expectations. However, a minority of subject schemes of work still refer to provision from the skills framework for communication and application of number and in general subject leaders have not considered carefully enough the age-related expectations of the literacy and numeracy framework (LNF).

Planning for progression in literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology (ICT) skills is underdeveloped in the key stage 3 skills lessons. The school has recently revised its programme of skills lessons to consider a more appropriate delivery of literacy and numeracy, as well as increasing the number of English and mathematics lessons in Year 7 and Year 8 from September 2014.

While the school has audited literacy and numeracy provision, this has not yet had a positive impact in improving the quality and range of pupils' literacy and numeracy skills. Several staff have lead roles for the co-ordination of different aspects of skills: as literacy and numeracy co-ordinators, leading the skills department, co-ordinating literacy within the skills department, co-ordinating Essential Skills Wales skills qualifications and managing interventions for weak basic skills. However, the strategic oversight of skills and the accountability for skills development in the school is less robust, particularly in quality assuring and monitoring the developments in skills. Skills teachers and the literacy co-ordinator are beginning to assess key stage 3 pupils' writing from tasks set in skills lessons. However, this moderation of the quality of pupils' written work is based on English National Curriculum subject levels, rather than using the age-related expectations of the LNF.

The school's lesson observation forms have been revised recently to include reference to planning for literacy and numeracy within the LNF and a few teachers have suitable literacy or numeracy targets following these observations. Book scrutiny forms used by senior leaders also highlight aspects of skills when judging assessment and provision, such as literacy or numeracy targets, opportunities for

extended writing or making secretarial corrections. However, there is little evaluation of the quality of literacy and numeracy skills in pupils' work or in assessment of literacy and numeracy from teachers' marking.

The school has maintained a valuable focus on literacy and numeracy in developing training through whole-school training days and through the literacy and numeracy working groups. One literacy group has started to introduce a reading strategy, which a very few teachers have trialled successfully in lessons to develop pupils' higherorder reading skills. Another group has had recent training on developing talk for writing approaches to provide smoother transition for pupils from primary schools who are familiar with this approach. However, there is not a sharp enough focus on improving pupils' written accuracy across subjects.

Staff from the working groups have raised awareness of numeracy skills through the development of a numeracy week and mathematics teachers have clear links to subject departments to offer beneficial support in developing or clarifying numeracy tasks. These are recent developments and they have not had an impact on improving numeracy standards across the curriculum.

Since the core inspection, the school has improved its recording and analysis of progress from reading interventions to show that many pupils with weak basic skills benefit from improved reading ages following the intervention programmes. Recently, the school has introduced an on-line reading assessment tool to track the progress in reading comprehension of key stage 3 pupils. It is too early to judge the impact of this on improvements in standards of reading.

Recommendation 4: Improve the quality of teaching and assessment and reduce the variation across the school

This recommendation has been partly addressed.

Since the core inspection in 2013, senior leaders have increased the focus on improving the quality of teaching and learning across the school. In particular, the school has revised its teaching and learning policy to strengthen key aspects in planning and classroom management. Overall the policy is a useful guide for outlining expectations in teaching and learning. As well as revising the teaching and learning policy, all staff have been involved in producing the Tasker Milward lesson map, which endeavours to highlight common good and excellent features of lessons. However, the lesson map lacks structure and is not refined enough in its current format to be a useful guide to assist teachers with their planning. Other strategies to promote the sharing of best practice in the school, such as the school's triads programme, where teachers work in threes to develop their teaching skills, are at an early stage of development.

Senior and middle leaders monitor lessons on a regular basis and lesson observations focus appropriately on both the standards that pupils achieve and the quality of teaching. The comments made by observers generally provide suitable guidance for teachers, and areas identified for improvement are beginning to inform subsequent observations. Leaders now have an appropriate overview and understanding of the aspects of teaching across the school that need greatest

improvement. These include areas such as increasing the level of pace and challenge in lessons and ensuring that lessons cater for the needs of all pupils. However, leaders' understanding of what constitutes good and excellent teaching is not precise enough. Lesson observations undertaken by leaders are too generous and do not link closely enough with the standard of pupils' work seen in lessons and books. Overall, strategies to improve the quality of teaching have not yet impacted consistently on classroom practice across the school.

In the majority of lessons teachers plan well and display good subject knowledge. In just over half of lessons, teaching is consistently good. In these lessons, teachers know their pupils well and have high expectations for standards of behaviour and progress in learning. Teachers use a range of well-planned activities that engage, enthuse and match the needs of pupils successfully. Further, they monitor the progress of pupils effectively and provide beneficial support and guidance to pupils where necessary. Importantly, they ensure that all pupils remain on task and make good progress throughout lessons. In addition, teachers create worthwhile opportunities for pupils to review and consolidate their learning.

In lessons where pupils make insufficient progress, activities do not cater for the needs of all pupils sufficiently and teachers do not ensure that pupils stay focused on their work. For example, in a few lessons pupils finish tasks quickly and then have little to do while they wait for the next activity. In other lessons, tasks are too difficult for the ability levels of pupils. As a result, pupils become disinterested and switch off from their work. In a few lessons, teachers' management of pupils' behaviour is not strong enough and pupils are disruptive and produce minimal or poor quality work.

Since the last core inspection the school has developed a common marking framework, which outlines clear expectations for the marking of pupils' work. Generally, marking is up-to-date and the implementation of the marking framework has increased the consistency of marking across the school, and there are a few areas of good practice. However, there is still too much variability in the quality of guidance given to pupils by teachers and too many pupils do not routinely act on advice or correct their work.

Through the use of its electronic tracking system, the school has improved its monitoring of pupils' progress in key stage 4. However at key stage 3, overall assessment and the monitoring of pupils' progress are weak. As a result, in many subjects pupils are unsure of how well they are doing, and leaders do not have full understanding of the standards of work achieved by pupils.

Recommendation 5: Improve the effectiveness of behaviour management and anti-bullying policies, ensuring that all staff implement them consistently

This recommendation has been partly addressed.

The school revised its Behaviour for Learning (BfL) policy in the second half of the spring term 2014 to set out clear expectations and guidance to pupils, staff and parents. Supporting documents for pupils, staff and parents clearly define consequences for specific categories of misbehaviour and provide guidance for the

operation of procedures linked to the operation of the policy.

Most staff have worked together well to support the operation of the revised BfL policy and associated activities. Appropriate staff training on classroom management, with a focus on re-engaging pupils, supports the application of the BfL policy well. However, a few teachers across the school do not apply the guidance rigorously and consistently.

Senior leaders support and encourage staff to consistently apply and support the new BfL policy through monitoring and tracking records, lesson observations and meetings of senior leader and heads of departments. Monthly reports inform senior leaders well of the number of referrals made by teachers and related behaviour issues. Senior leaders analyse these to identify main patterns related to pupils, classes and year groups, and gauge the impact poor behaviour is having in lessons. This process is beginning to identify appropriate training and support for staff.

The school manages incidents of bullying well. The school has developed a suitable anti-bullying strategy and introduced a range of procedures to tackle this problem. It has developed and established a useful log to record details of all bullying incidents. The school makes appropriate use of data and information from these logs to investigate and assist in reducing bullying incidents.

The monitoring and evaluation of attendance rates across the school are not sufficiently robust. In 2013, attendance is below modelled expectations and places the school in the lower 50% of similar schools based on free-school-meal eligibility.

A Strive To Achieve Respect (STAR) culture, which is a strategy to promote high levels of respect across the school, together with the use of weekly assemblies provides a worthwhile focus on respect and achievement. Many pupils are responding to this well.

Recommendation 6: Strengthen the link between self-evaluation and improvement planning

This recommendation has been partly addressed.

Self-evaluation, at school and departmental level, is developing appropriately in the school and is now part of its annual cycle and calendar of activities. First-hand evidence, particularly from year reviews, is used to inform planning suitably and to define school improvement priorities. The school is beginning to involve pupils and parents in the process of school self-evaluation through their contribution to these reviews.

Senior leaders have provided a useful template, which departments use to structure their self-evaluation activities and a majority of departments use this well. Middle leaders have received external training on self-evaluation and are increasingly confident in this process. In the best examples of departmental self-evaluation, there is a clear link between the findings of self-evaluation and the improvement planning that follows it. However, there is significant variation in the quality of departmental self-evaluation across the school. In the weaker examples, the template is not

followed or completed fully and the evaluation lacks rigour and is overly descriptive.

The school self-evaluation report is a detailed document that outlines the school's main strengths and areas for development. However, it provides a picture of the school that is too generous overall. In key areas of the school's activity, notably aspects of standards, attendance and the quality of teaching and learning, the school's self-evaluation overstates its strengths.

The school improvement plan for this year supersedes the previous three year plan and is a streamlined document that provides clear focus for the school in terms of its key actions and priorities. These priorities include relevant actions relating to recommendations from the core inspection report as well as those to address key performance indicators at the school.

Department improvement plans also address key school developmental issues, as well as areas identified within the department self-evaluation documents. There is a developing sense of school priorities. However, there is too much variability in the quality and rigour of department improvement planning. For example, a minority of plans are insufficiently clear in terms of precise actions, timescales and the personnel involved in leading and evaluating them.

Overall, the school has established a closer link between its self-evaluation and improvement planning activities. However, there is inconsistency in the quality of this process across the school and the outcome of these activities has not yet delivered improved outcomes in the main key performance indicators, particularly those at key stage 4.

Recommendation 7: Strengthen the partnerships with parents

This recommendation has been partly addressed.

The school is committed to improving its partnership with parents and the school improvement plan specifically addresses this aim. Views expressed by parents and pupils, from activities such as year reviews, indicate that the partnership with parents is improving and that they are forming a more positive view of the school.

Communication between the school and parents has improved. The introduction of initiatives such as the use of social networks, text alerts, newsletters and a designated 'bully button' on the school's new website have improved parental contact with the school, attendance at parents meetings and the anonymous reporting of instances of bullying or poor behaviour.

The school has begun to gather the opinions of parents more systematically, through parental involvement in year reviews and through a recent parental questionnaire. The school has suitable plans to increase its use of parental feedback and to incorporate it more systematically into its self-evaluation and improvement planning activities.

The development of a stronger partnership with parents is at an early stage of development. The school increasingly informs parents about aspects of its work and

asks them to comment on them, but it does not yet gather their views fully about key aspects of the school's development, such as what their children learn and how. Parental views have yet to impact significantly on school strategic priorities and development planning.

Recommendation 8: Make sure that pupils are able to contribute to decision-making at all levels

This recommendation has been partly addressed.

Since the core inspection, the school has continued to gather the views of pupils on aspects of school life through questionnaires as part of year reviews and departmental surveys. As a result, in a few areas, the evaluation of pupils' views is beginning to have a positive impact in informing policies on behaviour and anti-bullying, as well as in adapting schemes of work in a few subjects.

The school council and year councils are democratically elected and are beginning to improve the methods by which they collect items for discussion and disseminate decisions agreed by the school. They have increased the number of suggestion boxes around the school for pupils to highlight issues or concerns to senior leaders. Generally, pupils believe that senior teachers listen to the concerns of pupils. However, the role of associate pupil governors is underdeveloped.

Heads of year regularly interview selected groups of pupils to discuss matters relating to wellbeing, teaching and marking. In a few cases this has helped to inform reviews of pupils' wellbeing.

The school has recently written a pupil participation policy but this has not had an impact on ensuring that all pupils contribute to decision-making.

Recommendations

In order to maintain and improve on this progress, the school should continue to work towards meeting the inspection recommendations that have not yet been fully addressed.