



Arolygiaeth Ei Fawrhydi dros Addysg a Hyfforddiant yng Nghymru
His Majesty's Inspectorate for Education and Training in Wales

A report on
Bryncelynnog Comprehensive School

**Penycoedcae Road
Beddau
Pontypridd
RCT
Rhondda Cynon Taf
CF38 2AE**

Date of inspection: March 2023

by

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

About Bryncelynnog Comprehensive School

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| Name of provider | Bryncelynnog Comprehensive School |
| Local authority | Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council |
| Language of the provider | English |
| Type of school | Secondary |
| Religious character | |
| Number of pupils on roll | 1319 |
| Pupils of statutory school age | 1134 |
| Number in sixth form | 185 |
| Percentage of pupils eligible for free school meals over a three-year average (The national percentage of pupils eligible for free school meals over a three-year average in Secondary is 20.2%) | 15.1% |
| Percentage of pupils identified as having additional learning needs (a) (The national percentage of pupils identified as having an additional learning need in Secondary is 17.8%) | 8.0% |
| Percentage of pupils who speak Welsh at home | 1.8% |
| Percentage of pupils with English as an additional language | 0.5% |
| Date of headteacher appointment | 01/09/2006 |
| Date of previous Estyn inspection (if applicable) | 01/02/2016 |
| Start date of inspection | 20/03/2023 |

Data reported is sourced from the latest available Pupil Level Annual School Census. These figures may be slightly different to those observed during the inspection. Further information is available from the Welsh Government My Local School website: mylocalschool.gov.wales

- a. The term 'additional learning needs' is being used to describe those pupils on the SEN/ALN register of the school.

Overview

Ysgol Bryn Celynnog Comprehensive School is a caring environment where staff work productively to promote the school's vision of 'nurturing success'. The headteacher shares her vision effectively and has led with commitment to improve pupils' outcomes in examinations in both Key Stages 4 and 5.

Most pupils feel safe and free from bullying as part of the caring community, where senior leaders collectively promote a positive culture of safeguarding. The school provides a range of support for pupils' well-being and to assist them with their learning. However, the strategic leadership of well-being and pastoral support is not clear enough. As a result, leaders do not plan strategically or consider the impact of their work to support pupils' well-being and behaviour and additional learning needs well enough. In addition, work to improve attendance has not had a sufficient impact, particularly for pupils eligible for free school meals, or in reducing persistent absenteeism.

In lessons, most teachers have positive relationships with pupils and foster a calm learning environment where pupils generally engage well. The majority of teachers plan engaging activities that provide pupils with at least a suitable level of challenge. Many teachers ask suitable questions to test pupils' recall and understanding of tasks. As a result, in lessons, many pupils make suitable progress and the majority make good progress in their subject knowledge and understanding. However, the majority of pupils do not make enough progress in developing their skills. This is generally because teaching focusses too heavily on exam preparation and not enough on helping pupils to apply their knowledge and understanding in suitable contexts, or because lessons do not challenge them sufficiently.

Overall, pupils in sixth form make strong progress and have positive attitudes towards their learning. They engage well in lessons and are keen to improve their knowledge, understanding and skills. Pupils in these year groups take on active leadership roles and enjoy looking out for younger pupils in the school.

The school provides a generally suitable curriculum for its pupils. This includes a suitable offer of vocational courses for GCSE and A level. However, the curriculum narrows for pupils in Year 9. This, together with too great a focus on examination technique, limits their opportunities to develop their skills. Overall, the provision for the progressive development of pupils' skills is not sufficiently planned or coordinated.

Leaders are committed to improving pupil outcomes and to ensuring that all pupils enjoy attending Bryn Celynnog Comprehensive School. Senior and middle leaders work productively together to track and monitor pupils' progress and consider appropriate interventions to help those at risk of underachieving. Although they engage in a range of self-evaluation activities, they do not evaluate the quality of teaching and learning sufficiently. This means that they have too positive a view of these important aspects and therefore do not plan for improvement in them precisely enough.

Recommendations

- R1 Strengthen evaluation and improvement processes, including enabling pupils to have a voice about aspects of the school's work
- R2 Improve the strategic leadership of well-being and pastoral support
- R3 Strengthen the provision for and co-ordination of the progressive development of pupils' skills
- R4 Strengthen provision to reduce persistent absence and improve attendance, in particular, that of pupils eligible for free school meals

What happens next

The school will draw up an action plan to show how it is going to address the recommendations. Estyn will work with the local authority to review the school's progress.

Main evaluation

Learning

Many pupils, including those with additional learning needs (ALN), make at least suitable progress and the majority make good progress in their subject knowledge and understanding. In a few lessons, pupils make particularly strong progress, for example when they confidently expand brackets when working with algebra in mathematics. In a few instances, they make limited progress. A majority of pupils do not make sufficient progress in developing their literacy, numeracy and thinking skills in subjects across the curriculum. Often, this is because of shortcomings in teachers' planning or them not having high enough expectations of what pupils can do.

Most pupils listen with attention and respect to their teachers and peers. They share their views appropriately when responding to teachers' questions and use a suitable range of vocabulary. When teachers' questions challenge them to, a minority of pupils use a broad vocabulary to share their views, for example when considering different religious views on abortion. However, a few make only brief spoken contributions and lack confidence to engage in discussions about their work.

In English lessons, around half of pupils independently use their inference and deduction skills well, for example when they consider how homelessness is portrayed in the novel 'Stone Cold' and compare this with the short film 'Real Stories'. However, due to a lack of opportunities across the curriculum, pupils do not generally develop or apply their advanced reading skills well enough.

Most pupils write well for a suitable range of purposes and audiences, albeit in only a few subjects. They structure their writing appropriately and the majority write with secure technical accuracy. In a majority of subjects across the curriculum, pupils produce only brief pieces of writing. They rarely write at length or for a wide enough range of purposes because the focus of writing tasks is frequently to develop their examination technique. A minority of pupils continue to make frequent basic errors in their spelling, punctuation and grammar.

The majority of pupils have secure basic number skills and use the four rules competently. For example, they plan budgets for holding a school production, collect "like terms" in algebra or consider the reasonableness of their answers. They have a sound understanding of shape and measure and calculate the area of complex shapes confidently. The majority of Year 7 and 8 pupils draw basic graphs suitably. A similar proportion of older pupils accurately construct a suitably broad range of graphs such as when plotting changes in the resistance in a light bulb. However, only around half of pupils analyse their graphs sufficiently.

Opportunities for pupils to develop their thinking and creative skills are generally limited to a few subjects. Older pupils develop their digital skills suitably, for example when they produce animations and use spreadsheets to represent data. However, due to a lack of opportunities in subjects other than ICT, pupils in Years 7 and 8 do not develop their digital skills well enough.

Pupils in the specialist resource base “HQ” make strong progress in developing their communication, social, emotional and life skills. Many demonstrate strong prior learning, and they use subject terminology effectively when responding to teachers’ questions. By the end of Year 11, nearly all progress successfully to further education or training.

Many pupils make strong progress in their Welsh lessons and have a positive attitude towards learning Welsh. They construct a range of sentences well and independently, for example when describing hobbies and activities. These pupils write suitably at length and express simple opinions, supported with reasons. However, pupils’ use of the Welsh language outside of Welsh lessons is generally limited.

Overall, pupils in the sixth form demonstrate positive attitudes to and engage well with their learning. Many recall previous knowledge securely and apply this successfully in new and increasingly challenging contexts, such as when applying the principles of occupier’s liability to real-life scenarios. In general, pupils in the sixth form present their work confidently and respond promptly to teachers’ feedback, for example in public services when they write reports to reflect on the skills they have developed during work experience.

Well-being and attitudes to learning

Most pupils are proud to be part of the Bryn Celynnog Comprehensive School community where they are nurtured and feel safe. They behave well and are polite and courteous to members of and visitors to the school. These pupils value the school’s ‘Advocacy’ project and engage positively in assemblies that help develop their understanding of how to embrace diversity.

Many pupils sustain their concentration and engage positively with their learning. Occasionally, a few pupils lose focus and disrupt the learning of others while a minority show grit and resilience when given work that is particularly challenging. Many pupils respond promptly to teachers’ verbal feedback though a minority do not respond to written feedback suitably or take enough pride in the presentation of their work.

Most pupils feel supported by the school and believe their well-being is looked after effectively. They value the opportunity to ask for support online or in person and in the very few instances when bullying occurs, most pupils feel it is dealt with effectively. They say that they know where to access support should they require it.

Around half of pupils partake in a broad range of extra-curricular activities at break times and after school and have a positive attitude towards healthy eating. The ‘Pupil Engagement Project’ is a strength of the school helping pupils access a broad range of activities such as street dance and Thai cooking.

Pupils in the “Head Team” develop their leadership skills well. However, many pupils across the school do not feel that they contribute to school improvement. Currently, there is no school council, and this prevents pupils from sharing their voice appropriately to impact positively on the school’s work.

Although attendance rates are improving gradually, they remain low. The attendance of pupils eligible for free school meals is notably lower than that of other pupils and the number of persistent absentees is high.

Nearly all pupils in “HQ” feel safe in the base and their attendance is strong. Most of these pupils have positive attitudes to learning, engage successfully with tasks and behave well during sessions. A few learners appreciate the opportunities to take part in the interviews and selection process for new staff. Many pupils report increased confidence in communication and social skills.

Nearly all sixth form pupils are happy at school and have good relationships with their teachers and peers. Many appreciate the support and advice provided to help them make decisions about their future. They express themselves eloquently and engage with visitors maturely. They enjoy helping younger pupils feel safe when at school and assist with Year 11 options evening.

Teaching and learning experiences

Most teachers establish helpful classroom routines and manage pupils’ behaviour well. They foster positive working relationships and create a calm and purposeful learning environment that helps pupils to settle and engage positively in lessons. These teachers are good language models and support pupils suitably to develop their subject specific terminology.

Many teachers provide suitable explanations and instructions to support pupils’ understanding, particularly of how to answer examination style questions. They question pupils suitably to test their basic recall of facts.

The majority of teachers plan appropriately and provide pupils with a suitable level of challenge. They ensure that activities build sequentially to develop pupils’ knowledge and understanding effectively. They adapt the pace of their lessons in response to pupils’ learning. Where appropriate, teaching assistants provide valuable support.

In a few lessons where teaching is more effective, teachers motivate and inspire their pupils to learn. They have high expectations of what pupils can achieve and plan carefully for their learning. In these lessons, teachers model learning skilfully and offer helpful examples to ensure that pupils have a clear understanding of what excellent work looks like. They provide the right level of support and know when to withdraw this in order to develop pupils’ independence. These teachers use questioning skilfully to probe pupils’ thinking and develop their understanding. They support pupils well to make relevant connections to prior learning and support them to develop their long-term learning.

In a minority of lessons, teachers do not provide sufficient challenge and, as a result, pupils do not make enough progress. They often over-structure learning or plan tasks that simply keep pupils busy. This does not allow pupils to be independent or to develop their thinking and creative skills. Teachers’ questioning does not always probe pupils’ understanding well enough to help them to reflect on their learning. Overall, due to an overemphasis on developing pupils’ examination technique, teachers do not plan sufficient meaningful opportunities for pupils to develop or

extend their skills. As a result, pupils' literacy, numeracy and digital skills are not developed sufficiently.

Many teachers provide suitable verbal feedback during lessons. When providing written feedback, a few subjects make use of the beneficial 'learning step' tasks. These help pupils to address misconceptions and improve their work. However, the quality of written feedback is too variable. Teachers' comments are generally not precise enough to help pupils to improve their work and they do not identify literacy errors well enough.

Staff in the specialist resource base build strong relationships with their pupils. They create a calm and purposeful learning environment and use a range of effective teaching approaches to meet pupils' needs. For example, they explain new concepts carefully whilst maintaining high expectations. Most teachers question pupils effectively to provide opportunities for them to develop their communication and thinking skills. In a few cases though, staff provide too much support. Staff at 'HQ' regularly invite parents into the base to discuss pupils' progress and celebrate their successes.

The school began to implement Curriculum for Wales in September 2022 after several years of planning and experimenting with different approaches. In a few areas, for example in the creative arts, teachers are beginning to design engaging learning experiences to explore cross-curricular links meaningfully.

While teachers in a minority of subjects provide suitable opportunities across the curriculum for pupils to practise their literacy, numeracy and digital skills, the provision for the progressive development of pupils' skills throughout the school is not sufficiently planned or coordinated.

The school has clear processes for tracking pupils' progress and identifying those with weaker skills. There are tailored interventions which enable the majority of these pupils to make suitable progress.

The school has an enquiry-based personal and social education (PSE) programme that involves relevant experts from the community. This programme supports pupils' health and well-being positively alongside their social and emotional development. However, teachers do not plan enough opportunities across the curriculum for pupils to learn about the history and experiences of Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic or LGBTQ+ people. In addition, opportunities for pupils to develop their understanding of the local area and of Welsh culture, history and language skills outside of Welsh lessons are underdeveloped.

The school provides an appropriate range of academic and vocational courses at Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form. However, the curriculum at Key Stage 3 narrows for all pupils in Year 9 when they begin their option choices. This limits these pupils' access to a broad range of subject areas and impedes their skills development. The sixth form curriculum is strengthened by a beneficial partnership with another local school. This enables sixth form pupils to have access to a broader range of courses. Staff provide pupils with appropriate impartial guidance about their next steps during transition points. The support they provide for sixth form pupils who are applying for higher education is a notable strength.

Staff organise a wide range of extra-curricular activities, such as jazz and chess clubs, as well as sport and subject clubs. The curriculum is enriched further by a variety of trips and activities, including visits to Cardiff Museum, Llangrannog, Harry Potter World and Auschwitz.

Care, support and guidance

Bryn Celynnog Comprehensive School provides a calm and nurturing environment where pupils generally feel supported and cared for by staff. Staff provide a wide range of bespoke support to meet its pupils' personal development, well-being, social and emotional, and additional learning needs well. However, roles and responsibilities for the strategic leadership of well-being and pastoral support are not clear enough. As a result, the school does not plan or evaluate precisely enough to improve important aspects of this work.

Leaders and staff plan a range of appropriate support for pupils, for example, learning coaches, a cognitive behavioural therapist, and the school's nurture provision supports targeted pupils appropriately to develop their confidence and self-esteem. Pupils benefit from opportunities to build their confidence and self-esteem, such as the "Flourish" and the Youth Engagement Project. The school also works with a wide range of external partners to enhance its work. This includes working well with the educational psychology service, CAHMS as well as the speech and language therapy service to support the most vulnerable.

A clear process enables staff and parents to refer pupils to the ALN and well-being teams for support. Pupils can also self-refer to the team. This allows the team to assess their needs and identify and provide relevant support. A well-being button on the school's monitoring system enables leaders to respond quickly to social, mental health and emotional concerns and to provide helpful support for these pupils.

All pupils with ALN in the mainstream school and the specialist resource base have one-page profiles that helpfully summarise their needs, wishes and how staff can best support them. The IDPs of those pupils who have them contain clear targets and identify appropriately the additional learning provision. Person-centred planning is developing well and considers the views of pupils, parents and other stakeholders. Annual reviews are used thoughtfully to reflect on progress and plan for future support needs. In addition, the school works well with external agencies to provide specialist support for those pupils who require it.

The school has recently revised its specialist provision for pupils with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties at risk of exclusion. This provision allows these pupils to access a worthwhile curriculum combining mainstream subjects with courses provided externally.

Staff monitor appropriately the progress of ALN pupils on intervention programmes who attend mainstream. However, target setting and tracking systems for ALN pupils' attendance and progress are underdeveloped, particularly for pupils without IDPs. This hinders the school's monitoring of their progress and evaluation of its provision. In addition, leaders do not use all sources of information, such as data on well-being, behaviour and exclusions well enough to identify precisely the areas for improvement such as its universal and targeted offer for pupils.

Pupils in the specialist resource base follow bespoke timetables, which provide access to relevant provision and a wide range of mainstream subjects. Learning support staff from the resource base support pupils well in mainstream lessons. Leaders in “HQ” have enhanced their curriculum offer to ensure that pupils have access to meaningful opportunities, such as those to develop their life skills and financial awareness. Staff are beginning to create opportunities for outdoor learning. Staff in the resource base track pupils’ progress well, for example in their communication skills and health and well-being. However, self-evaluation of the quality of teaching in the specialist resource base and how well teachers in mainstream lessons meet these pupils’ needs is underdeveloped.

The school suitably fosters pupils’ moral, social and cultural values through close links with partner agencies, including the police, drug advisory services and the National Health Service. Staff have introduced a beneficial range of strategies to help pupils keep themselves safe online. Most pupils benefit from opportunities to explore their spiritual and ethical beliefs. The school has worked closely with Barnardo’s ‘Real Love Rocks’ pilot scheme to deliver the new RSE curriculum, and a ‘Thought for the Week’ programme ensures a weekly moral message for pupils on topics such as the plight of refugees.

The school has developed a wide range of thoughtful initiatives to help pupils understand issues relating to equality and diversity and how they can challenge stereotypical attitudes. Teachers act as advocates to support pupils suitably to develop an understanding of important societal issues. For example, they deliver assemblies focused refugees and Human Rights. However, the quality of PSE provision is too variable and does not provide sufficient opportunities to explore these important issues in lessons.

The school has established appropriate links with partner organisations to provide impartial guidance for pupils on their next steps, including with local employers through the Big Ideas Wales project and its work with Careers Wales.

Senior leaders have promoted a positive safeguarding culture where all members of the school community are aware of their responsibility to keep pupils safe. The headteacher leads a dedicated safeguarding team who ensure that any concerns are dealt with comprehensively and promptly. Governors have worked effectively with school staff to ensure that the site is secure, particularly during the construction phase of the new facilities for the sixth form. The school’s arrangements for dealing with any incidents of bullying are clear.

Leaders and pastoral support staff monitor individual pupils’ behaviour and attendance closely. The school is implementing a range of strategies to address poor attendance. For example, the school celebrates good attendance appropriately and is working with its partner primary schools to improve the attendance of year six pupils through an Easter Egg challenge. However, the school’s actions have had a limited impact on reducing the number of persistent absentees and improving attendance, particularly for pupils eligible for free school meals. Senior leaders do not focus sharply enough on these pupils, despite their attendance remaining lower than that of other pupils. In general, leaders do not evaluate the impact of strategies well enough to secure improvement. This is often because they do not use the information they collect strategically enough.

Leadership and management

The headteacher has a clear vision for the school focused on fostering personal success for pupils in a caring environment. The vision is understood well and shared by the school community. There is a strong sense of teamwork, mutual trust and respect across the school, and within this productive working environment, leaders and staff work together supportively to provide a caring and engagement environment for pupils.

There are valuable opportunities to nurture leadership, and succession planning is effective. As a result, the senior team is cohesive and committed to the school. This has supported the school to secure improvements in pupil outcomes and well-being. The headteacher is reviewing the school's leadership structure to support the school to develop its approach to Curriculum for Wales. However, recent changes to leadership responsibilities mean that in a few instances, the span of responsibilities for individual senior leaders is too wide. Furthermore, the arrangements for the leadership of well-being and pastoral care do not support strategic decision-making or planning in this area of the school's work well enough.

There is a suitable range of management meetings, processes and systems. These help leaders to hold staff to account appropriately and to maintain a suitable focus on the school's priorities. However, the school's quality assurance programme does not enable leaders to reflect well enough on the school's progress in improving important aspects, such as pupils' learning and the quality of teaching, well enough. Performance management arrangements are clear and appropriate. Staff appreciate the supportive conversations that they have with their line managers and benefit from the professional development that arises from these arrangements.

Middle leaders value the support that they receive from the headteacher and senior colleagues. They understand their roles well and carry out their responsibilities diligently. They work purposefully towards meeting the school's priorities such as developing approaches to Curriculum for Wales. Overall, they do not have a sufficient understanding of the quality of teaching and learning or the provision for skills in their areas of responsibility, or how they can secure improvements in them.

The school manages its finances appropriately and ensures that spending is suitably focused on the school's priorities. The school pays due regard to reducing the impact of poverty on educational achievement through relevant actions in the school development plan and the suitable use of the Pupil Development Grant.

There are suitable processes in place for self-evaluation. These include biannual faculty reviews, and an appropriate range of opportunities to collect first-hand evidence. Heads of faculty and heads of department contribute to these processes appropriately. However, overall, self-evaluation processes do not identify precisely enough the strengths and areas for improvement in important areas such as learning and teaching. Leaders do not consider well enough how to address specific weaknesses in pupils' progress, or the relationship between learning and teaching. In addition, there is a tendency to focus too strongly on summative data at the expense of analysing pupils' progress in lessons and in their work. This means that leaders have too positive a view of these important aspects of the school's work. Overall, improvement priorities at faculty and whole-school level are too broad. This makes it

difficult for the school to address areas for development successfully. In addition, leaders do not use the full range of information available to them well enough to evaluate and plan for improvement. For example, they do not make sufficient use of attendance and exclusions data when considering pupils' well-being and attitudes towards learning or the impact of provision on pupils with ALN.

The school pays suitable attention to national priorities such as the implementation of ALN reform. However, the provision for the progressive development of pupils' skills is not sufficiently developed.

Senior leaders have developed a purposeful approach to professional learning. Development opportunities are suitably planned and aligned with the school's broad improvement priorities. The strong and well-established focus on developing leadership across the school has instilled a sense of ambition and commitment amongst staff. Many staff have accessed the wide variety of leadership programmes on offer and there is also a valuable student leadership programme available for older pupils. Many teachers have also taken advantage of the professional learning opportunities offered through the regional consortium and some members of the school community have led development work at a regional level. A comprehensive termly staff newsletter provides a useful overview of professional learning. The school is beginning to evaluate the impact of its professional learning offer. However, overall, professional learning has not had sufficient focus or impact on improving teaching and learning, including middle leaders' ability to identify specifically the strengths and areas for development in classroom practice.

Governors support the school well. They make effective use of the well-established structure to link to important parts of the school's practice and provision, and, as a result have a good understanding of the work of the school. They use their expertise well to support the school in areas such as financial management. Governors pay appropriate attention to the arrangements for pupils' healthy eating and drinking.

Evidence base of the report

Before an inspection, inspectors:

- analyse the outcomes from the parent and pupil questionnaires and consider the views of teachers and the governing body through their questionnaire responses

During an inspection, inspectors normally:

- hold a meeting with parents to hear their views on the school and its effectiveness
- meet the headteacher, governors, senior and middle leaders (where appropriate) and individual teachers to evaluate the impact of the school's work
- meet pupils to discuss their work and to gain their views about various aspects of their school
- meet groups of pupils in leadership roles, such as representatives from the school council and eco-committee, where appropriate
- visit a broad sample of lessons, including learning support groups and undertake a variety of learning walks to observe pupils learning and to see staff teaching in a range of settings, including classrooms, support groups and in outdoor areas
- where appropriate, visit the specialist resource base within the school to see pupils' learning
- observe and speak to pupils at lunch and break times and at a sample of after-school clubs, where appropriate
- attend assemblies and daily acts of collective worship
- look closely at the school's self-evaluation processes
- consider the school's improvement plan and look at evidence to show how well the school has taken forward planned improvements
- scrutinise a range of school documents, including information on pupil assessment and progress, records of meetings of staff and the governing body, information on pupils' well-being, including the safeguarding of pupils, and records of staff training and professional development

After the on-site inspection and before the publication of the report, Estyn:

- review the findings of the inspection alongside the supporting evidence from the inspection team in order to validate, moderate and ensure the quality of the inspection

Copies of the report

Copies of this report are available from the school and from the Estyn website (<http://www.estyn.gov.wales/>)

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

Every possible care has been taken to ensure that the information in this document is accurate at the time of publication. Any enquiries or comments regarding this document/publication should be addressed to:

Publications Section

Estyn

Anchor Court, Keen Road

Cardiff

CF24 5JW or by email to publications@estyn.gov.wales

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