



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

Report following monitoring

Level of follow-up: Special measures

**Denbigh High School
Ruthin Road
Denbigh
LL16 3EX**

Date of visit: June 2023

by

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

Outcome of visit

Denbigh 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 Raise standards at keys stage 4, in particular for girls

In lessons, a majority of pupils apply themselves diligently and develop their knowledge, skills and understanding appropriately. They demonstrate secure recall of previous learning, such as the different rules for calculating angles in mathematics and apply this to inform further learning. However, a minority are too easily distracted, which hinders their progress.

A majority of pupils engage suitably in lessons and listen with sufficient attention. They are happy to share their ideas and answer the teachers' questions, though their responses are sometimes underdeveloped, and they use a limited vocabulary. This is often due to shortcomings in the way a few teachers use questions. A minority of pupils provide suitably developed verbal responses and a few use a rich vocabulary in well-developed responses. A few pupils prefer to remain passive in lessons and a few teachers often allow them to do so.

Recent improvements in literacy provision have resulted in around half of pupils now using inference and deduction independently to improve their understanding of texts. A minority are now also able to do so successfully in more challenging contexts. When given the opportunity, pupils develop their advanced reading skills appropriately, for example when summarising the ways in which countries can respond to deforestation.

In addition, a majority of pupils now produce writing that is technically secure. A few produce well-crafted writing that uses a wide, varied vocabulary and engages the reader successfully when, for example, writing an Everest diary entry and when discussing topics such as medical ethics and climate change. However, a minority continue to make common basic errors and use a limited vocabulary.

The majority of pupils recall basic number work well and apply the four number operations appropriately in calculations. Across the curriculum, a majority produce accurate graphs and analyse them sufficiently, although overall there are still too few meaningful opportunities for pupils to develop their numeracy in relevant subjects.

Improvements in the provision for Welsh have contributed to pupils making suitable progress in their Welsh language skills.

R2 Improve behaviour and attendance

The new headteacher has developed a clear and well understood vision for improving attendance and behaviour. He has strengthened leadership of this aspect of the school's work and empowered staff to realise this vision. This is having a positive impact on pupils' well-being and engagement.

The school tracks the attendance of individual and groups of pupils carefully and provides appropriate support for pupils and parents where needed. For example, the emotionally-based school avoidance (EBSA) programme supports pupils with barriers to good attendance. As a result, attendance has improved this year. However, the school recognises that attendance, particularly that of pupils eligible for free school meals, is still too low.

This year the school has strengthened the pastoral team, overseen by the new assistant headteacher. This is having a positive impact on pupils' attitudes to learning. Staff are taking increased responsibility for improving behaviour across the school, and, in general, form positive working relationships with pupils based on mutual respect. Most pupils arrive to lessons punctually and settle to their work appropriately. A majority listen respectfully to staff and their peers and participate suitably in group and pair activities, although a few do not maintain their concentration well enough. Overall, pupils' behaviour has improved notably since the time of the last core inspection.

The school has successfully refreshed its approach to rewarding and celebrating positive behaviour. Pupils are beginning to play an active role in decision-making regarding rewards and sanctions.

Pastoral leaders evaluate their support systems appropriately using a range of first-hand evidence. This helps them to identify pupils' needs and adapt provision. For example, the school provides alternative curriculum pathways for pupils in danger of disengagement. The 'Aspire' provision provides a calm and nurturing environment for vulnerable pupils. These strategies are helping to improve pupil engagement and reduce the rate of fixed-term exclusions.

R3 Strengthen the quality of teaching and the provision for skills

The school has continued to use a range of beneficial approaches to improve the quality of teaching. The 'Quality Enhancement' process feeds into the school's targeted professional learning programme, and this has given staff greater understanding of the specific aspects of their teaching that require development. Teachers are provided with helpful support and challenge to improve their classroom practice. Despite some variations, overall, these strategies are having a positive

impact on how well teaching supports pupils' progress and engagement, in comparison to the time of the last core inspection.

In most instances, teachers form positive working relationships with their classes. In the majority of lessons, teachers carefully plan sequences of activities that provide pupils with suitable challenge. They provide clear instructions and helpful explanations to pupils. These teachers are clear with their expectations and model well what success may look like. They use questioning appropriately to check pupils' recall of prior learning and provide helpful verbal feedback. In a minority of cases, teachers use questioning well to develop pupils' understanding.

In a minority of lessons where teaching is less effective, it is because teachers' expectations are too low. They do not plan activities that are suitably demanding or challenge pupils' lack of engagement sufficiently. They do not use questioning well enough to probe or develop pupils' thinking. As a result, pupils do not make sufficient progress or develop enough independence and resilience in learning.

The school has continued to strengthen its approach to providing pupils with written feedback. In the majority of cases, pupils receive suitable guidance to help them improve their work. However, there remains variation in how well teachers ensure that pupils respond meaningfully to their feedback.

During this academic year, the school has strengthened its strategies to improve pupils' literacy skills across the curriculum and now has a more coherent approach to this aspect of its work. For example, some departments have developed a helpful focus on improving reading skills such as summarising information. Overall, pupils now have a suitable range of opportunities to develop their literacy skills in different subjects. However, there is not a consistently effective approach to using feedback to improve pupils' literacy skills.

The school provides teachers with helpful guidance to help them develop a consistent approach to the development of pupils' numeracy skills. In a few relevant subject areas, a focus on improving pupils' ability to construct graphs accurately and interpret them meaningfully has had a positive impact on this aspect of pupils' skills. However, planning for the progressive development of pupils' numeracy skills across relevant areas of the curriculum remains at an early stage of development.

The school has strengthened its provision for Welsh appropriately. This is starting to have a positive impact on their proficiency with and attitude to the Welsh language.

R4 Strengthen leadership across the school, with a particular focus on the systems and arrangements to support pupil wellbeing

After his appointment last September, the headteacher rapidly gained a secure understanding of the school's strengths and areas for improvement. He addressed immediate priorities suitably whilst developing a long-term vision for the school that is well understood by most staff. He has provided clear strategic direction and has offered staff a well-considered balance of support and challenge. This has had a positive impact on staff morale and helped teachers and leaders to increase the pace of school improvement this year.

The senior leadership team has been strengthened through new appointments and the sensible reorganisation of roles and responsibilities. Senior leaders now hold middle leaders to account much more robustly and provide them with beneficial support for their role. Although there remains some variation, since the last core inspection, middle leaders have developed a clearer understanding of their roles in securing improvement and an increased capacity to raise standards.

Leaders at all levels use a suitable range of first-hand evidence to evaluate their work. They use a variety of data to identify pupil underperformance. In general, leaders focus well on identifying the impact of teaching on pupil progress. This has helped them to set clear improvement priorities and is starting to have a positive impact on the quality of teaching. Since the last core inspection, leaders at all levels have a more accurate view of the school's specific strengths and areas for improvement.

Leaders with pastoral responsibilities now work with a co-ordinated, strategic approach. They monitor pupil well-being and engagement closely and put suitable interventions in place. This has made this aspect of the school's work more effective, for example in improving pupil attendance, including that of pupils eligible for free school meals.

Governors are highly committed supporters of the school. They provide senior leaders with helpful challenge.

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