



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: Significant improvement

Risca Community Comprehensive School

**Pontymason Lane
Rogerstone
NP11 6YY**

Date of visit: December 2023

by

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

Outcome of visit

Risca Community Comprehensive School is judged to have made insufficient 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 increasing the level of follow-up activity.

In accordance with the Education Act 2005, His 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 to show how it is going to address the recommendations.

Estyn inspectors will re-visit the school following receipt of the action plan, to ensure that it is suitable and likely to bring about the required improvements. Inspectors will visit the school again, in a further four to six months' time, to monitor progress in addressing a sample of the recommendations. Under the provisions of Section 39 (9) of the Education Act 2005, every annual report to parents prepared by the governing body under Section 30 of the Education Act 2002 must include a statement on the progress made in implementing the action plan.

The Education (Induction Arrangements for School Teachers) (Wales) Regulations 2015 state that an induction period may not be served in a school requiring special measures i.e. as described in grounds 6 or 8 in section 2 of the School Standards and Organisation (Wales) Act 2013 (1). The presumption is that schools requiring special measures are not suitable for providing induction for newly qualified teachers, other than in exceptional circumstances. Therefore, schools requiring special measures should not normally appoint a newly qualified teacher (NQT) to their staff.

Progress since the last inspection

R1. Strengthen self-evaluation processes so that leaders at all levels have an accurate view of the school's areas for development and can plan for improvement precisely

Following the core inspection in September 2022, there was a period of instability at the school, particularly at senior leadership level. In the months following the core inspection, the school made very little progress in addressing the recommendations. A new headteacher has been in post since September 2023. He has created an interim leadership team and made a few changes to leaders' roles and responsibilities, though it is too early to measure the impact of these developments. In addition, performance management arrangements for the last academic year have not been strong enough to support improvements in important areas of the school's work.

The school has begun to strengthen self-evaluation processes and made a few improvements such as addressing issues in relation to site safety and working to improve pupils' behaviour and attitudes to learning. Despite recent developments in

leadership, there has not been enough impact on pupil standards, the quality of teaching, provision for the progressive development of skills, or whole-school attendance.

The school has provided a range of professional learning opportunities to help improve leaders' capacity to monitor and quality assure their areas of responsibility. In addition, there have been a number of professional learning opportunities for staff on some areas of provision. However, professional learning has not focused well enough on the aspects that require immediate and substantial improvement. Furthermore, leaders have not provided enough reflection time following training or time for staff to plan for and implement what they have learnt. Processes to evaluate the impact of professional learning on pupil standards and the quality of teaching are underdeveloped.

The majority of heads of faculty have identified accurately through their faculty improvement plans a few areas requiring improvement. However, in general, they have too narrow an understanding of the specific strengths and areas for development in their areas of responsibility.

The school has adopted a 'monitoring, evaluation and review' (MER) policy and set out its quality assurance and monitoring activities across a large part of the current year. There are many quality assurance events planned across the year but there is a lack of clarity around the rationale for these. Faculties have also produced their own calendar of monitoring activities. These vary in number, type of activities and focus across faculties and do not always correspond with whole-school arrangements and focus areas.

Leaders have conducted whole-school quality assurance reviews of teaching and learning since the core inspection and have collaborated with external partners in this work. These reviews and subsequent written reports have been helpful in enabling leaders at all levels to start to identify a few areas for improvement in teaching, such as questioning. However, findings from whole-school reviews do not match with findings of the inspection team during the monitoring visit regarding pupil standards and the quality of teaching. School evaluations of teaching are too generous, and leaders do not take account of the comprehensive evidence available to them when evaluating teachers' practice. There is insufficient evaluation in the reports of pupils' standards in skills and how well they develop subject knowledge and understanding.

There are fortnightly line management meetings between senior leaders and middle leaders. There are common agendas for these meetings and discussions focus broadly on important aspects such as teaching and attitudes to learning. However, discussions are often too wide or superficial and do not focus deeply enough on other specific aspects that require attention, such as pupil standards, provision for skills and curriculum development. Senior leaders have initiated appropriate support and helpful coaching sessions for a very few identified weaker teachers. It is too early to evaluate the impact of this support.

The governors continue to support the school's work and are beginning to develop in their role as critical friends. Although they now receive more pertinent information about the school's work, which helps them understand the weaknesses, they still do not provide enough challenge. A few faculties are beginning to introduce pupil voice

activities to help inform their provision, but overall, processes to seek the views of parents and pupils on the quality of the school's work remain underdeveloped.

R2. Improve the effectiveness of teaching to provide sufficient challenge and ensure progression

Since the core inspection the school has developed a range of whole-school professional learning intended to improve the effectiveness of teaching and provided staff with a range of useful opportunities to share good practice. It has introduced a weekly teaching and learning briefing and offered individual support where necessary. However, these strategies have not focused closely enough on the impact of teaching on pupils' learning and had little impact on improving teaching and learning across the school.

In the lessons observed during this visit, most teachers have sound subject knowledge. They have positive working relationships with their pupils and manage classroom behaviour effectively.

In around half of the lessons seen, teachers provide clear instructions and explanations. These teachers plan meaningful activities and adapt them appropriately to the needs and interests of their pupils. They monitor pupils' progress appropriately by circulating the classroom, or by using a range of questions to check pupils' knowledge and understanding.

In the few most effective lessons, teachers plan for progress in learning well. They closely match the challenge of the task to the ability of the pupils, adapting the learning to meet their needs. In general, they consider the development of pupils' skills and subject knowledge skilfully. These teachers ask probing questions to explore deeper understanding. This helps pupils in these lessons to make secure progress.

In around half of lessons observed, there are shortcomings that prevent pupils from making suitable progress. In these lessons, teachers do not plan carefully enough and set tasks that focus on what pupils will do rather than what they will learn. They set undemanding activities that do not challenge pupils well enough to improve their subject understanding and skills. In these instances, teachers often present for too long, over-scaffold tasks, or provide lengthy starter activities. As a result, pupils lose interest in their learning, do not make swift enough progress or develop their independent learning skills. Too often, teachers' questioning does not allow pupils to extend their responses. In addition, it does not probe or deepen pupils' understanding well enough or develop their thinking skills.

R3. Develop cohesive provision for the development of pupils' skills across the curriculum, particularly their literacy and numeracy skills

Since the headteacher's arrival in September and recent changes in leadership, there has been a more concentrated approach to developing pupils' skills. Opportunities for pupils to use and develop their literacy and numeracy skills are now coordinated by senior and middle leaders. These leaders have been working with various external partners to share strategies and ideas for the teaching of skills. They have provided staff with suitable training and resources. As a result, around half of

teachers are beginning to understand their role in developing pupils' literacy and numeracy skills in meaningful contexts.

The literacy co-ordinator and newly appointed numeracy co-ordinator have put suitable plans in place for the progressive development of pupils' skills. They have started to work with individual subjects to have an agreed skills focus and select specific aspects to develop in a way that is relevant for that subject.

Overall, planning to develop pupils' literacy and numeracy skills continues to be at an early stage of development. Since the core inspection, the pace of improvement has been far too slow and this has impeded pupils' learning and progress. The impact of teaching on the development of pupils' skills is limited.

The school is beginning to develop meaningful opportunities for pupils to practise their digital skills across the curriculum. For example, in physical education, pupils use digital equipment competently to analyse, evaluate and improve performances in gymnastics, netball and athletics. Since September, the school has started working with cluster primary schools on improving pupils' writing skills.

R4. Strengthen provision to improve pupils' attitudes to learning and attendance

Since September, the school has placed a substantial focus on improving pupils' attitudes to learning. Many pupils listen suitably to their teachers' instructions and complete the tasks set. Whilst the majority of pupils persevere in lessons, a minority remain passive and do not engage well enough with their learning. This is often due to mundane activities that lack sufficient challenge. Nevertheless, most pupils are courteous towards each other, staff and visitors and behave well in lessons and around the school.

Between the academic years 2018-2019 and 2022-2023, the school's rate of attendance fell by a much larger amount than that seen nationally. Last year it was well below that of similar schools. The high rate of persistent absence and the low attendance of girls and pupils eligible for free school meals are of particular concern.

Since September, the school has adopted new approaches to improve attendance. Leaders have recently reviewed the whole-school attendance policy, revised roles and responsibilities and focused on a range of appropriate strategies to improve whole school attendance. Leaders at all levels analyse data regularly to identify trends in the attendance of individuals and groups of pupils. The school has taken a sensible graduated approach to dealing with instances of poor attendance, including direct contact with families and support from external agencies. Leaders continue to work closely with the local authority education welfare officer to strengthen approaches to improving attendance. These include the use of assemblies, rewards, social media and communications with parents about the importance of good attendance. The rate of attendance this year shows a slight improvement compared to the same period last year. Despite the improvement in the overall rate of attendance, leaders understand that there is a need for further improvements in this area and have recently appointed a progress manager in Year 11 to add capacity to the school's work.

R5. Address the health and safety issues identified during the inspection

The school has addressed the health and safety issues identified during the core inspection.

As a result of the newly erected fence and gates being in place and operational, the school site is now secure. Barriers successfully restrict traffic flow during the day, kitchen staff no longer park in areas accessible to pupils and duty rotas have been refined to ensure appropriate supervision during break and lunchtimes.

Security for dual use with the leisure centre has improved significantly. Clearly visible signs now direct visitors to public changing rooms. The school and the leisure centre now have well-understood arrangements regarding use of the facilities.

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