



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

**Cwmbran High School
Ty Gwyn Way
Fairwater
Cwmbran
NP44 4YZ**

Date of visit: February 2024

by

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

Outcome of visit

During spring 2024 we undertook an enhanced monitoring visit to Cwmbran High School. This visit was undertaken because the school has been in follow up during the whole of the current inspection cycle. This visit allowed inspectors to evaluate the school's progress against all recommendations and evaluate aspects in line with a Section 28 core inspection. Following discussions with the school and local authority we have published this report so that parents can access our more detailed evaluation.

Cwmbran High 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 maintaining the level of follow-up activity.

Estyn will re-visit the school in around four to six months' time to monitor progress against 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. Improve the standard of pupils' skills, particularly their writing, and numeracy

The school has recently taken a variety of suitable approaches to strengthen leadership, the quality of teaching and the provision for the development of pupils' skills. Many of these strategies are at an early stage, and it remains the case that, overall, pupils do not achieve as highly as they should. However, improvements to provision and leadership are beginning to have a positive impact on the progress that pupils make.

In around half of lessons, pupils make at least suitable progress in developing their knowledge, understanding and skills. In a few instances, where teaching is well planned and appropriately challenging, pupils make good progress, for example when they develop their understanding of Christian attitudes to war in religious studies. However, in around half of lessons, pupils' progress is hampered by low expectations and lack of challenge. A minority of pupils show suitable recall of prior learning, which helps them to build on their understanding. However, too often pupils do not recall well enough what they have learned in previous lessons.

The majority of pupils participate willingly in discussion work, both as a whole-class activity and in pairs and small groups. A minority express themselves suitably clearly, using subject vocabulary appropriately. A very few express themselves thoughtfully and maturely, using a broad vocabulary. However, a minority are reluctant to contribute verbally or offer only brief, underdeveloped responses, especially when teachers' questioning does not challenge them sufficiently.

In general, pupils retrieve relevant information from texts suitably in order to answer questions. A minority infer meaning successfully from a variety of texts, although they require support from their teachers to do so. Overall, pupils' reading skills are starting to show improvement, and they are beginning to develop a greater range of reading strategies. However, they do not yet use them with sufficient independence to support their learning consistently.

Around half of pupils write with appropriate clarity, for example when explaining the causes of the First World War or how plants adapt to their environment. A few structure their extended writing successfully and a very few write at length with fluency and sophistication. However, around half of pupils regularly make careless basic errors, especially in their spelling. These pupils do not proof-read their work carefully enough, and their writing is too often brief and underdeveloped.

The majority of pupils have suitable number skills. For example, they calculate fractions and percentages confidently. In a few instances, pupils are beginning to apply these skills to different contexts, such as when they re-arrange formulae when calculating voltage, resistance and current in science. However, due to a lack of suitably challenging opportunities, pupils do not in general develop their numeracy skills across the curriculum well enough. Many pupils construct graphs suitably and extract basic information from them, but only a few carry out suitable interpretation or analysis. Pupils develop their digital skills appropriately, for example when using IT to design a mobile phone.

In Welsh lessons, around half of pupils are able to provide basic verbal responses to questions. A few are beginning to write more extended sentences and paragraphs, although in general pupils are over-reliant on support from their teachers. Overall, pupils lack confidence in communicating in Welsh due to a lack of opportunities to speak the language.

When given the opportunity, pupils use their thinking skills suitably, for example when using tree diagrams to calculate the probability of events. In art, pupils develop their creativity well. They develop their ideas with skill, imagination and enthusiasm.

R2. Improve the behaviour and disrespectful attitudes of a few pupils in a minority of lessons

This academic year, the school has refined and strengthened its pastoral leadership structure. This includes the creation of 'Heads of Phase' roles as well as the appointment of staff with specific roles to work with disengaged pupils and monitor pupils' attendance. This is helping the school to take a more strategic approach to this aspect of its work, and is beginning to have a positive impact on pupils' well-being.

Many pupils behave well in lessons and around the school and are courteous toward their teachers, peers, and visitors. They organise and present their work suitably. However, a minority do not take sufficient pride and care in the presentation of their work.

The school is developing a range of suitable strategies to improve pupils' resilience and perseverance in their learning, and this is beginning to have a positive impact. The majority of pupils listen to their teachers and peers and persevere appropriately. However, a minority do not demonstrate sufficient perseverance when challenged in their learning or when required to work independently, nor do they listen attentively enough. These pupils are often too passive in their learning and do not engage fully in activities. Too often, pupils are too slow to settle to their work, especially written tasks.

The school has strengthened its processes for monitoring and improving attendance suitably, and this is starting to have a positive impact. Rates of attendance, including those of pupils eligible for free school meals, have improved when compared to the same point last year. However, the school recognises that attendance remains an important area for improvement. Fixed term exclusions remain high and have increased since last year.

The school provides suitable spiritual, moral, social, and cultural development for its pupils through, for example, regular themed assemblies. Pupils can access a range of after-school clubs such as the Korean club, Garage Band, and the LGBTQ+ club. The recently developed rewards system encourages pupils to contribute to the school's values of kindness, positivity, creativity, respect, and resilience. In addition, the newly created pupil values groups are exploring how pupils can contribute further to the work of the school.

The school has suitable arrangements for safeguarding pupils. Staff understand their role in this aspect of the school's work.

R3. Ensure that the literacy and numeracy framework is implemented fully

Recently, the school has taken a range of appropriate actions to strengthen this aspect of its work, including new appointments to senior and middle leadership roles. Leaders have refined whole-school approaches so that they are more strategic and coherent. As a result, staff now have a much clearer understanding of their role in developing pupils' skills alongside their subject knowledge and understanding. However, much of this work is at an early stage of development and the provision to support the progressive development of pupils' skills remains inconsistent and insufficiently developed across the curriculum.

Skills co-ordinators have conducted a series of worthwhile activities to evaluate the school's provision, and have focused their efforts purposefully on supporting staff to develop pupils' literacy and numeracy skills across the curriculum. They have started to work with colleagues from local primary schools to develop useful common approaches to supporting skills development. The recently established literacy advocacy group, which includes representatives from each department, provides a useful forum where staff can share good practice and develop whole-school approaches. Staff are provided with beneficial professional learning opportunities to support the development of literacy across the curriculum.

Leaders have prioritised the development of a culture of reading across the school. They have introduced a reading scheme to encourage Key Stage 3 pupils to read independently. Many pupils engage well with this strategy, and it is starting to have a positive impact on their reading skills and their attitude to reading. However, across the curriculum, reading activities are mostly limited to information retrieval and do not develop skills such as synthesis, evaluation and inference well enough. Current strategies to provide pupils with feedback on the technical accuracy of their writing are not applied consistently and do not have sufficient impact on the quality of pupils' writing. The school has recognised this and is developing new approaches to improve pupils' spelling, alongside a new writing framework. The school provides a range of suitable literacy interventions through its "I Ddysgu" provision to support those pupils with weak literacy skills.

Recent appointments have strengthened the teaching of mathematics, and the newly appointed numeracy co-ordinator is working purposefully with colleagues to develop a more cohesive approach to the progressive development of numeracy skills in appropriate areas of the curriculum. The school has also recently introduced a range of suitable group interventions to support those pupils with weak numeracy skills. However, overall, provision to develop pupils' numeracy skills across the curriculum remains underdeveloped.

R4. Address the shortcomings in teaching to ensure that pupils make good progress in all lessons

The school has sensibly streamlined its approaches to improving the quality of teaching to ensure there is a clear focus on those aspects most in need of development. Teachers are supported through an appropriate range of professional learning to develop their understanding of the school's approach. As a result, leaders and staff are beginning to develop a culture where teachers reflect on their own practice and are starting to explore new ideas and develop their own approaches. For example, teachers are working to develop a broader range of questioning techniques. Senior and middle leaders identify good practice through lesson observations, and this is shared with all staff in weekly meetings. However, it remains the case that the quality of teaching is too variable.

In lessons observed during the visit, most teachers have secure subject knowledge. Many have developed positive working relationships with their pupils and use suitable classroom management strategies to deal with disengagement where necessary. The majority of teachers provide helpful, clear explanations and use appropriate questioning to check for pupils' recall and understanding. However, in the majority of lessons, questioning is not used consistently effectively enough to help pupils to develop their thinking. Around half of teachers plan resources that engage pupils appropriately and provide a suitable level of challenge. A minority monitor pupils' progress carefully and provide them with useful verbal feedback, addressing misconceptions where necessary.

A few teachers have high expectations of their pupils. They plan carefully structured lessons and demanding tasks which support a good pace of learning. In these lessons, teachers use questioning well to challenge pupils to develop their ideas.

Although there has been an improvement in some aspects of teaching, there continue to be shortcomings in around half of lessons. In these cases, teachers' expectations of what pupils can do are too low. As a result, they plan undemanding tasks or over-scaffold work, which restricts pupils' progress. In addition, there is too much tolerance of lack of engagement and passive learning.

In a few cases, teachers provide suitable written feedback to show pupils how to improve their work. However, this is too variable within and across subjects. In general, pupils' response to feedback is inconsistent and expectations of how or when to respond are not sufficiently clear.

R5. Improve the consistency in the work of middle managers, particularly in planning for improvement

The headteacher is leading the school strategically and steadily through a systematic process of improvement. He has worked with the school community to refine the vision for the school, so that the ambition to 'strive, achieve and believe' is well

understood and shared by all, and the work of the school is underpinned by clear values.

Working closely with his senior team, the headteacher is managing change carefully, creating an atmosphere of trust and collaboration where processes are transparent and fair. There is now a sense of stability, which is helping staff to remain positive and enthusiastic about further improvement. However, despite this important work to build the foundations for improvement, leadership is yet to have a sufficient impact on important aspects, particularly, teaching, learning and skills.

The senior team has been strengthened through new appointments and a redistribution of duties. Roles and responsibilities are clear and senior leaders are mutually supportive and understand the complementary nature of their work. This collaborative approach to leadership is creating a strong sense of teamwork.

Senior leaders are supporting middle leaders to develop their skills well. They are providing valuable opportunities for them to develop their leadership skills, through modelling leadership behaviours and providing developmental opportunities such as pairing individuals to support one another. As a result, middle leaders now have a stronger understanding of their roles and are more involved in a wide range of self-evaluation and improvement activities. A helpful middle leader handbook provides a comprehensive guide to the responsibilities of curriculum middle leaders, helping them to reflect on the effectiveness of their departments and to ask challenging questions of themselves. Refined approaches to line management meetings complement this. As a result, middle leaders are developing a more realistic evaluation of their work and senior leaders are holding them to account more robustly. However, this aspect of the school's work is at an early stage of development and, overall, there remains too much variation in the way that middle leaders carry out their roles.

Staff development is supported well by a wide range of suitable professional learning opportunities. There is a developing culture of continuous improvement. There are frequent, valuable opportunities to discuss learning and teaching, for example in academic committee meetings where middle leaders discuss whole-school ambitions and share effective practice across departments. Leaders have refined arrangements for performance management beneficially to address improvement priorities and to support individual professional development.

The school is beginning to establish stronger links with parents, partner primaries and the local community. Communication is becoming more effective, and this is helping to share information and to build relationships.

There has been a careful and incremental process to ensure that the school has appropriate and effective governance. The governing body has been reconstituted and is now ready and able to challenge and support the school. The school manages its finances suitably, directing spending towards the school's priorities.

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