



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

A report on

**Brynmawr Foundation School
Intermediate Road
Brynmawr
Blaenau Gwent
NP23 4XT**

Date of inspection: October 2019

by

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

About Brynmawr Foundation School

Brynmawr Foundation School is an 11-16 mixed comprehensive school in Blaenau Gwent local authority. The school became grant maintained in 1992 and assumed foundation status in 1999.

There are 699 pupils on roll, compared with 751 pupils at the time of the last inspection in 2013.

The school serves Brynmawr and the surrounding area. About 22% of pupils are eligible for free school meals, which is above the Wales average of 16.4% for secondary schools. A very few pupils come from minority ethnic backgrounds and English is spoken as the first language in nearly all pupils' homes.

Nearly 21% of pupils are on the school's special educational needs register, which is just under the national average of 22.9%. Around 2% of pupils have a statement of special educational needs compared with 2.2% for Wales as a whole.

The headteacher took up his post as temporary headteacher in September 2018. He became the substantive headteacher in April 2019. The senior leadership team consists of the headteacher, one deputy headteacher, three assistant headteachers and one business manager. None of the current team was in post at the time of the last inspection.

Further information is available from the Welsh Government My Local School website at the link below.
<http://mylocalschool.wales.gov.uk/Schools/SchoolSearch?lang=en>

Summary

Since 2018, the headteacher has worked positively with staff and pupils to create stability following a period of uncertainty and change. He has instigated a programme of change across the school that focuses appropriately on strengthening leadership at all levels and developing teaching. Staff are engaging enthusiastically in professional learning. However, these changes have not had a sufficient impact on important areas of the school's work such as teaching and pupils' standards. Although pupils make strong progress in a few lessons, in a majority of lessons, many pupils do not make enough progress.

The school has a supportive and inclusive ethos. Many pupils are confident in their social interactions. However, many pupils are not suitably resilient or motivated in their lessons, and this hinders their learning.

Inspection area	Judgement
Standards	Unsatisfactory and needs urgent improvement
Wellbeing and attitudes to learning	Unsatisfactory and needs urgent improvement
Teaching and learning experiences	Unsatisfactory and needs urgent improvement
Care, support and guidance	Adequate and needs improvement
Leadership and management	Unsatisfactory and needs urgent improvement

Recommendations

- R1 Improve pupils' standards across the school, including their literacy and numeracy skills
- R2 Improve pupils' behaviour and their attitudes to learning
- R3 Improve the effectiveness of teaching to motivate, engage and challenge pupils to make good progress in lessons
- R4 Strengthen leadership at all levels to improve leaders' ability to identify areas for development and to plan effectively for improvement

What happens next

In accordance with the Education Act 2005, HMCI 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 will monitor the school's progress on a termly basis.

Main findings

Standards: Unsatisfactory and needs urgent improvement

In a majority of lessons, pupils of all abilities generally do not make enough progress. They do not recall or use prior learning well enough, nor do they develop their skills sufficiently, particularly in literacy and numeracy. This is an important shortcoming.

In a few lessons, many pupils make strong progress. For example, in drama, Year 11 pupils work productively to devise dramatic pieces that develop their subject skills and their understanding of Brechtian style theatre.

A minority of pupils listen well to the teacher. However, a majority do not listen with sufficient attention and miss information and instructions that would benefit their learning. In many lessons, many pupils are reluctant to enter into discussion or to answer questions about their work. They are often diffident or unsure, and offer only limited verbal responses. In a few lessons, a few more able pupils speak fluently, using a wide range of vocabulary.

In a few classes, at key stage 4, many pupils analyse and respond to more complex texts well. For example, they identify that a poet uses particular words and phrases to help elicit sympathy from the reader. They comment thoughtfully on contentious issues and ideas, using the text to support their opinions when, for example, commenting on the poor and violent treatment of black people in the United States in the past. Many pupils have a useful range of strategies to extract information and ideas from simple texts. However, a majority are careless in transferring and assimilating information derived from their reading into their own work. In general, many pupils struggle with inference and deduction.

At key stage 4, a few, more able pupils produce effective creative writing, with vivid description and a wide vocabulary. They produce writing that is technically correct and structured suitably, which engages and sustains the reader's interest. However, a majority of pupils make frequent basic errors in spelling, punctuation and grammar. They do not express their ideas clearly, draw upon a suitably wide vocabulary, or use the full range of punctuation to clarify meaning strongly enough.

Overall, pupils do not develop their numeracy skills sufficiently in suitable contexts.

Pupils develop their information and communication technology (ICT) skills well in only a very few subjects. For example, in design technology they use computer aided design to explore design solutions, and present their ideas effectively using a suitable range of graphics applications.

A few pupils develop their creative skills well, for example in art when investigating a range of imaginative sources to explore their ideas. However, generally, pupils do not practise their creative thinking often enough in subjects across the curriculum, and the development of creativity and thinking is often hindered by teaching approaches.

Many pupils develop their physical skills suitably in subjects such as physical education, for example when controlling the ball through dribbling and passing in football.

A majority of pupils make satisfactory progress in their Welsh language skills. They write basic sentences with suitable accuracy and develop their reading skills appropriately. However, many pupils provide short, underdeveloped verbal responses to questions. Many pupils do not develop their writing skills sufficiently, and make frequent basic errors in their grammar. Very few pupils use their Welsh outside of Welsh lessons.

Pupils' progress has declined over the past few years and in 2018 they made much less progress than expected. The performance of pupils eligible for free schools meals has fluctuated. Overall, pupils' performance does not compare favourably with that in similar schools.

At the end of Year 11, nearly all pupils progress to further education, training or employment.

Wellbeing and attitudes to learning: Unsatisfactory and needs urgent improvement

Pupils are confident that staff deal competently with any bullying that is reported. However, almost one-in-four pupils of those who completed the questionnaire do not feel safe in school. A minority of pupils do not behave well in lessons and around the school and a few are regularly late to lessons. Occasionally this disrupts their own learning and that of others.

A few pupils are ambitious, confident and capable, independent learners. However, many pupils do not demonstrate suitable motivation, concentration and perseverance throughout their lessons to ensure that tasks are completed successfully. As a result, they make insufficient progress.

Many pupils have positive social skills and are confident and polite in their interactions with adults around the school. Many pupils show respect to visitors. For example, they open doors and say 'thank you' when doors are opened for them.

The school council has a valuable understanding of the rights of the child, and has worked purposefully to develop a 'pupil manifesto' that is displayed in every classroom. A few pupils, who are part of the school council, have worked on an appropriate range of initiatives linked to healthy choices and the environment. This includes increasing the number of water fountains, reviewing the choice of healthy drinks in the canteen and introducing recycling bins. However, a majority of pupils do not have a good enough understanding of how to live a healthy lifestyle.

A few pupils deliver whole school assemblies throughout the year on key issues linked to the development of pupils as ethical, informed citizens. Themes include mental health awareness, hate crimes, young carers and the work of the Show Racism the Red Card organisation. Many pupils engage positively in local, national and global charity events throughout the year. However, apart from through the school council, pupils do not develop their leadership skills well enough.

Many pupils participate eagerly in the annual school production, most recently 'Grease'. Pupils engage enthusiastically in a range of extracurricular activities. Levels of participation in sport and drama clubs are high.

Pupils' attendance has mostly been above expectations over the last four years.

Teaching and learning experiences: Unsatisfactory and needs urgent improvement

In a majority of lessons, teachers explain tasks usefully, and in a few provide useful models to help pupils organise their work. In these lessons, most pupils are aware of what teachers expect. A few teachers use an appropriately diverse range of approaches to help pupils to improve their skills and understanding. For example, in English, teachers introduce supplementary resources that complement the class text well. This allows pupils to make useful links between a range of writing on a similar theme. In a minority of lessons, teachers build positive relationships with pupils and a few teachers create a very productive learning environment.

In a majority of lessons, learning is over-directed by the teacher. This means that pupils do not explore ideas well enough or deepen their understanding. Teachers spend too much time talking, at the expense of engaging pupils in the learning. In many lessons, teachers question pupils simply in order to recall basic information. A very few expect, or ask for, more than short, simple responses. They do not use questioning well to probe and test pupils' understanding. As a result, pupils do not develop their thinking or verbal skills well enough. In around half of lessons, teachers have too low an expectation of pupils and do not challenge weaker work. Many teachers do not tailor work to pupils' individual needs carefully enough. They do not challenge more able pupils, and do not support pupils who need help well enough. As a result, in a majority of lessons, pupils make insufficient progress.

A majority of teachers monitor pupils' work in lessons beneficially. They offer encouragement and praise, and a minority help pupils to understand appropriately where their work needs strengthening. Most teachers provide pupils with written comments on their work, which helps pupils to identify where they need to correct misspelt words or edit inaccurate punctuation. However, in only a few cases does feedback identify and explain well enough how pupils can improve the quality of their work. As a result, pupils do not always understand their strengths, or what they need to do to make their work better. Overall, feedback does not have enough impact on improving pupils' work.

The school provides a suitable and balanced curriculum, which broadly meets the needs of pupils of all abilities. There is a relevant range of learning pathways for pupils as they progress into key stage 4, where they can choose from an appropriate range of academic and vocational courses. The flexibility in these pathways enables all pupils to have sufficient freedom in their option choices. However, arrangements for physical education in key stage 4 do not ensure that pupils have weekly opportunities to partake in exercise.

The school offers an appropriate range of extra-curricular and after-school activities that support pupils' social development well. For example, pupils engage enthusiastically in the drama and music club production of West Side Story. The

school provides a few beneficial experiences to develop pupils' interests in their areas of learning. For example, art and drama students have the opportunity to visit art galleries and theatres in London.

There are suitable transition links with local primary schools. A collaborative literacy project has been developed to ensure a common understanding and shared expectations of pupil progress and opportunities. However, the school does not review pupils' achievement at key stage 2 robustly enough to identify paths to extend knowledge, understanding and skills.

There are worthwhile partnerships with local and national businesses that enhance learning experiences, for example workshops to encourage girls to follow careers in engineering and science.

The school provides very few worthwhile opportunities for pupils to learn about sustainable development and global citizenship through the curriculum and extra-curricular activities.

At present, the provision for literacy and numeracy skills across the curriculum is underdeveloped. Recently, the provision of all skills has been included in schemes of work, for all subjects, at all levels. However, most teachers do not include appropriate opportunities for the progressive development of skills within their lessons. As a result, the provision overall does not provide suitable opportunities to develop pupils' skills well enough.

Overall, there are very few opportunities for pupils to develop their Welsh language skills apart from in Welsh lessons. There are a few beneficial opportunities to extend pupils' use of Welsh through extracurricular activities such as trips to Llangrannog and Glan-Ilyn residential centres. However, the school does not promote bilingualism effectively, and does not plan purposefully enough to develop pupils' Welsh language skills.

Care, support and guidance: Adequate and needs improvement

Brynmawr Foundation School has a supportive and inclusive ethos. The pastoral transition arrangements with feeder primaries are effective and provide valuable support for the most vulnerable pupils.

The school has appropriate systems to identify pupils who are at risk of underachieving. They provide a suitable range of intervention strategies for these pupils, such as mentoring sessions and nurture groups. However, they do not monitor the impact of intervention closely or consistently enough, and it is too early to judge any impact on improving pupils' standards.

Pupils' attendance is monitored successfully and the school provides suitable interventions where required. These actions contribute beneficially to pupils' rates of attendance. However, the school's arrangements to track progress and other aspects of wellbeing are at an early stage of development. Leaders and teachers do not use the information they gather well enough to monitor pupils' progress, or to support improvements in behaviour and attitudes to learning.

The school provides pupils with appropriate advice and guidance to help them make informed decisions about their future learning and career choices. It uses worthwhile links with local businesses to support this work, for example curriculum vitae writing workshops.

Interim reports provide parents with useful information. However, in a minority of cases annual reports to parents do not contain sufficiently clear targets for improvement. In addition, communication with parents, and particularly those who do not have access to the internet or social media, is not effective.

The school has developed a new behaviour policy. There is a points system to record positive behaviour, constructive contributions to learning and incidents of poor behaviour in lessons. However, it is too early to measure the effectiveness of this in addressing the negative and disruptive behaviour of a minority of pupils in lessons and around the school, and on improving pupils' attitudes to learning.

The school provides suitable opportunities for pupils to work with outside agencies to support their personal, social and emotional development. It works productively with parents and outside agencies to provide appropriate guidance and support for the more vulnerable pupils. However, only a limited number of staff have had training to feel confident enough to support pupils effectively with a range of wellbeing issues, for example when implementing restorative practice interventions.

There is efficient identification of pupils with special educational needs (SEN). Individual development plans are appropriate and shared well with staff and parents. However, these plans are not used well enough in lessons. In addition, the school does not measure the impact of individual interventions robustly enough.

The personal and social education programme supports the moral, social and cultural development of pupils suitably and promotes diversity and equality appropriately. However, the use of tutor-led pastoral sessions to support the development of spiritual guidance for pupils is inconsistent.

The school's arrangements to promote healthy eating and drinking are appropriate. However, a majority of pupils do not have a sufficient understanding of healthy living and a minority continue to make unhealthy choices.

The school provides an appropriate range of extra-curricular activities, including educational visits. It offers a narrow range of opportunities to take on responsibilities and become active citizens within the school and wider community. These are available to all pupils. A few of these opportunities are particularly beneficial, for example pupils leading a sign language class in school for peers and staff.

The school has suitable systems in place to deal with any instances of bullying and arrangements for safeguarding meet requirements and give no cause for concern.

Leadership and management: Unsatisfactory and needs urgent improvement

Following a period of consistently poor outcomes, low staff morale and uncertain leadership, the newly appointed headteacher has embarked on a programme of change. This work is focused on improving leadership at all levels, addressing shortcomings in teaching, and making sure these aspects have a positive impact on

pupil standards in lessons. In the process of introducing a culture of high expectations, the headteacher is mindful of the need to gain the trust and support of staff and the school community, and this is having a positive impact on staff engagement and wellbeing.

The headteacher has set about establishing systems and processes to build the capacity of staff to improve pupil standards and wellbeing. He has appointed a new senior team and has restructured suitably the middle leadership. Roles and responsibilities have been reviewed, and senior and middle leaders are beginning to understand their accountability for pupil standards and wellbeing. However, leaders, overall, do not have a strong enough understanding of the strengths and areas for improvement in pupils' learning and in teaching. This limits their capacity to focus on actions that will have greatest impact. In many areas the changes made have not had a sufficient impact on pupil standards in lessons and over time, particularly in mathematics and science.

The composition and leadership of the governing body has been strengthened to increase its capacity to challenge. Governors provide useful and robust challenge in relation to budget and finance. They are increasingly willing to question and challenge other aspects of the school's work, for example when scrutinising a new behaviour policy. Governors are aware that they have a responsibility to scrutinise standards but do not have a sufficiently strong understanding of standards in lessons and the progress made by pupils.

Generally, senior leaders use a range of data appropriately to analyse and compare trends in performance. As a result, they are able to identify the departments most in need of support. However, the over-focus on outcomes at key stage 4 has limited leaders' evaluation of pupils' progress and standards in lessons.

The school has recently implemented a suitable calendar of self-evaluation and improvement planning activities. This is beginning to increase the range of first hand evidence that they gather about the school's work. Leaders have identified suitably the overarching aspects that require improvement. However, the culture of self-evaluation is in its early stages of development and leaders do not identify strengths or areas for improvement sharply enough.

The recently introduced faculty reviews have supported the school to begin to collect evidence about standards and teaching. These reviews include activities such as lesson observations, work scrutiny and pupil voice. In addition, leaders have introduced whole school book scrutiny to encourage all staff to engage in a professional dialogue about teaching and learning. However, these activities focus too heavily on routines instead of the impact that activities have on pupil progress. This prevents senior leaders from being able to draw accurate conclusions about the strengths and weaknesses in important aspects of the school's, work such as teaching. In addition, leaders at all levels are too generous in their evaluation of teaching and do not identify the most important weaknesses in teaching for individuals or at a whole school level. This is hampering their ability to prioritise and plan for improvement.

Middle leaders are beginning to engage in self-evaluation activities such as work scrutiny and learning walks. However, most middle leaders do not have a good

enough understanding of the features of effective teaching or progress. As a result, they have had limited impact in improving the quality of teaching or the standards that pupils achieve in lessons.

The school has recently introduced a timetable of professional learning. This has supported leaders to develop a culture where most staff feel valued. However, self-evaluation processes are not enabling leaders to plan professional learning opportunities sharply enough to secure improvements in the most important aspects of their work. In addition, they do not evaluate the impact of professional learning well enough. As a result, professional learning has not been successful in improving important aspects of teaching. For example, work on improving questioning has had limited impact on classroom practice.

The school has taken robust action to address the deficit budget and implemented a plan to reduce it significantly over the next five years.

Planning for the use of grant funding is broadly suitable. However, the pupil development grant is insufficiently focused on pupils eligible for free school meals. The school does not evaluate the impact of grant funding on pupil standards and wellbeing, apart from key stage 4 outcomes and attendance.

The provision of learning support assistance is low and a very few subjects have sufficient staffing levels to provide pupils with subject specialists. In many subjects, resources are insufficient to meet the needs of pupils. For example, in music there are too few instruments. The school does not have a library.

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, to listen to them read 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
- visit a broad sample of classes, 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' wellbeing, 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 (www.estyn.gov.wales)

Estyn evaluates a provider's effectiveness using a four-point judgement scale:

Excellent	Very strong, sustained performance and practice
Good	Strong features, although minor aspects may require improvement
Adequate and needs improvement	Strengths outweigh weaknesses, but important aspects require improvement
Unsatisfactory and needs urgent improvement	Important weaknesses outweigh strengths

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 going to press. Any enquiries or comments regarding this document/publication should be addressed to:

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