



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

**Brynmawr Foundation School
Rhydwr
Brynmawr
Blaenau Gwent
NP23 4XT**

Date of visit: November 2023

by

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

Outcome of visit

Brynmawr Foundation 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. Improve pupils' standards across the school, including their literacy and numeracy skills

In lessons, many pupils make sound progress in developing their knowledge, understanding and skills. They recall prior knowledge confidently and apply this well to new contexts. A few pupils make exceptional progress in lessons, although a few learners make limited progress overall.

Most pupils listen well to teachers and to each other. Many engage well with teachers' questions and express their ideas clearly in class discussions. A minority of these pupils provide extended verbal responses, successfully conveying their thinking and reasons, particularly when prompted by their teachers to expand their answers. However, a minority of pupils' verbal responses are too brief.

Many pupils demonstrate a secure understanding of the texts that they read. They use a range of approaches to identify different writing techniques and select information competently, for example to justify their opinions or interpretations or to write summaries. A majority of pupils infer meaning accurately from text. A minority provide thoughtful interpretations of meaning, combining their prior learning with evidence from the text, such as when analysing the writer's intent in the poem 'To My Father' by the Carmarthenshire poet Tony Curtis.

Many pupils write well at length in English and across the curriculum. These pupils write with a clear sense of purpose and increasing confidence in adapting language to suit their audience. They explain their ideas clearly, using subject terminology accurately where appropriate. Many pupils' writing is broadly technically accurate. The majority of pupils explain their ideas using increasingly engaging language. However, there are weaknesses in the writing of a minority of pupils. In these cases, pupils do not write at sufficient length, they do not structure their writing appropriately or have a secure enough understanding of how to express their ideas to suit their audience. Others make frequent technical errors or have weak handwriting.

In relevant contexts across the curriculum, including mathematics, many pupils use the four rules of number competently. They can convert accurately between units, and many are confident when converting fractions to decimals in mathematics. The majority of pupils use data skills well, such as when collecting, recording, presenting and interpreting their practical science experiments or analysing employment trends in Blaenau Gwent and Cardiff from stacked bar graphs and charts. Many pupils

produce accurate graphs and charts. However, a few pupils do not apply their basic times tables securely.

Generally, pupils are developing well their confidence in speaking Welsh in Welsh lessons. With support, many pupils construct short sentences in Welsh using suitable vocabulary. A few more able pupils can write extended phrases and justify their opinions securely. Overall, however, pupils' Welsh language skills remain underdeveloped.

R2. Improve pupils' behaviour and their attitudes to learning

Since the core inspection, the school has strengthened its approaches to supporting pupils' behaviour, well-being and engagement in learning. This is having a positive impact on pupils' attitudes to learning.

Nearly all pupils are punctual to lessons. Nearly all teachers develop positive working relationships with pupils and manage classroom behaviour effectively. As a result, most pupils engage well and persevere with their learning. They listen attentively to their teacher's instructions and settle readily to their learning. They engage well with classroom discussions and are willing to contribute when asked questions or given opportunities to discuss in pairs.

Nearly all pupils are courteous towards each other, staff and visitors to the school. Most behave sensibly during breaks and lunch and when moving around the school.

Pastoral leaders have further strengthened their approaches to monitoring behaviour and attendance. Pupils receive timely intervention and support when required. The school has evaluated and developed further its approach to supporting pupils' behaviour by providing a sensible, staged response to meet their needs. This includes beneficial provision with a specialist teacher to help pupils re-engage with their learning.

The school has further strengthened the leadership opportunities for pupils. The 'change and create' programme allows pupils to take on leadership roles by leading assemblies and organising charity events. Pupils also benefit from a new house system with rewards for good behaviour, progress and engagement in learning. This work is contributing well to improvements in pupils' confidence, attitudes to learning, and a sense of community in the school.

Between the academic years 2018-2019 and 2022-2023, the school's rate of attendance fell by a larger amount than that seen nationally. Last year it was below that of similar schools, although the attendance of pupils eligible for free school meals was similar to the national average for this group of pupils. Since the beginning of this academic year, the rate of attendance has improved compared with the same period last year, including for pupils eligible for free school meals.

R3. Improve the effectiveness of teaching to motivate, engage and challenge pupils to make good progress in lessons

The development of teaching continues to be a key focus for self-evaluation, professional learning, and priority planning within the school. Senior leaders continue to drive improvements in teaching successfully. They have developed middle leaders

to become more confident and competent in reviewing teaching and bringing about sustainable improvements.

Nearly all teachers have built strong working relationships with pupils and have secured calm and productive classroom environments. They are confident in their subject knowledge. Most plan lessons appropriately to support pupils' progress in learning and cross-curricular skills and to provide them with an appropriate level of challenge. Most use teaching strategies identified as key to the 'Brynmawr Way' with increasing confidence. For example, they use a range of approaches to developing pupils' speaking and discussion skills and beneficial questioning strategies to explore pupils' understanding and assess learning.

Many teachers plan learning activities that build well on each other and challenge pupils effectively to make strong progress from their starting points. Across the curriculum, many teachers provide relevant and beneficial opportunities to help pupils develop their literacy and numeracy skills. For example, they focus effectively on subject terminology, develop pupils' oracy skills and sequence learning activities successfully to support pupils' extended writing skills. They use helpful approaches to meet learners' individual needs, such as targeted questions on mini-whiteboards, one-to-one support or extension tasks. Overall, many teachers have high expectations of pupils' progress and ensure an effective pace for learning.

In the majority of cases, teachers demonstrate precisely the quality of work they expect from pupils by using either examples, clear success criteria or modelling the writing process effectively. They question skilfully to probe pupils' understanding, extend their learning or verbal responses, and ensure that pupils have suitable time to respond.

The most effective teachers plan very well-structured and engaging lessons. They target questions to specific pupils to give them a high level of challenge from their starting points, and listen carefully to pupils' responses before probing and extending their learning further. However, in a few lessons, there are shortcomings in teaching. In these cases, teachers plan activities that do not secure strong progress in learning, or they do not adjust the pace of teaching to match pupils' learning or support pupils with additional learning needs well enough.

Many teachers provide beneficial verbal feedback to pupils in lessons to help them to improve their work. Their written feedback to pupils explains what to improve helpfully. However, a minority of teachers' written feedback does not explain how to improve well enough. Particularly in these cases, pupils do not respond well enough to teachers' comments to improve the quality of their work.

R4. Strengthen leadership at all levels to improve leaders' ability to identify areas for development and to plan effectively for improvement

Since the core inspection, the headteacher and his senior team have focused successfully on their vision for improving teaching and learning, pupils' engagement and aspirations, and building leadership capacity at all levels. This work has had a significant impact on the quality of teaching, pupils' attitudes to learning and leaders' ability to plan robustly for improvement.

Senior leaders are now more strategic in their work. Following the headteacher's model of considered support and challenge, they have set a clear direction for school improvement and have successfully secured a shared sense of purpose amongst all staff.

Line management arrangements have been carefully revised so that senior leaders work well with middle leaders to build their leadership capacity through modelling rigorous but supportive accountability processes. These arrangements help ensure that leaders at all levels clearly understand the school's priorities and their contribution to the school's progress. Overall, many middle leaders are developing well their capacity to lead their departments and year groups, and now demonstrate a strong understanding of strengths and areas for development in their areas of responsibility.

A clear whole-school self-evaluation cycle considers a wide range of first-hand evidence. Senior leaders evaluate of the quality of provision and its impact on pupils' knowledge, skills and progress precisely. These activities are carried out with middle leaders, which helps ensure that subject skills are balanced well against whole-school teaching and learning priorities. This approach is also helping to build the capacity of subject middle leaders to evaluate provision accurately and provide any support, professional learning or challenge required. Pastoral leaders also monitor attendance, behaviour and attitudes to learning closely.

Overall, department improvement planning has improved further since the last monitoring visit. The departmental priorities identified through whole-school and departmental self-evaluation align well with strategic priorities. Many middle leaders determine meaningful and relevant actions and select appropriate teaching strategies to address any shortcomings and work well with senior leaders to monitor progress closely. They discuss their findings regularly in their team meetings and use this process to refine their actions in a responsive and timely way.

Despite these improvements, there remain inconsistencies in a few middle leaders' evaluations of the quality of provision. They occasionally rely too heavily on assessment information, do not evaluate the impact of teaching on pupils' progress precisely enough, or do not draw upon the most pertinent evidence to monitor quality.

The headteacher has a secure understanding of the strengths and areas for development in leadership. Leaders receive general and targeted professional learning to improve their leadership skills, supported where appropriate by external partners. There are also valuable opportunities for staff to take the lead on strategic priorities and enhance their leadership experiences further. However, the bespoke professional learning offer for pastoral leaders is not fully developed.

Arrangements for managing the performance of staff at all levels are robust. Staff are set meaningful targets that reflect well whole-school priorities for teaching and learning, pupils' well-being or leadership. Governors have a secure understanding of the strengths and areas for development in the school. They have supported the school well by providing beneficial guidance and relevant challenge.

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