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

Gwernyfed High School
Three Cocks
Brecon
Powys
LD3 0SG

Date of visit: October 2022

by

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

Outcome of visit

Gwernyfed 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 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. Improve the progress that all pupils make in lessons, including in the development of their literacy and numeracy skills and Welsh language development

Many pupils recall previous knowledge appropriately and apply this suitably to new learning. In the few instances where teaching is effective, pupils make strong progress. However, in a majority of cases, pupils make limited progress from their starting points as a result of low expectations or over-direction by teachers.

Most pupils listen respectfully in lessons and many offer assured verbal responses on familiar topics. On the whole, they express themselves clearly. However, a few do not listen with sufficient attention or lose interest in their learning. A minority of pupils offer only brief verbal responses and are not challenged to improve them. In a few instances, pupils articulate their views very clearly and coherently, for example when pupils make links between exploitation by clothing companies today and attitudes apparent in 'An Inspector Calls'.

Many pupils read fluently and locate information confidently. A minority of pupils infer meaning and draw conclusions from basic text well. They use evidence appropriately, for example when considering mood and atmosphere in narrative text. In general, pupils do not have sufficient opportunities to apply a broad enough range of reading strategies independently across the curriculum.

A majority of pupils write clearly and accurately. They structure their writing effectively and use a broad range of vocabulary. A few pupils write well for an appropriate range of purposes and audiences. For example, more able pupils use persuasive techniques convincingly when sharing their views about nuclear power with the Mayor of Springfield. However, a minority of pupils do not develop their writing well enough and provide only brief responses to tasks. This is as a result of low challenge or a lack of worthwhile subject specific opportunities.

Many have suitable numeracy skills and use the four operations confidently. They work well with fractions, decimals and percentages and more able pupils apply these skills to more complex situations, such as calculating compound interest. Many pupils draw suitable graphs and a minority interpret them well and draw relevant conclusions. In general teachers do not provide a suitably challenging range of opportunities for pupils to apply their wider numeracy skills in appropriate subjects across the curriculum. As a result, pupils do not make sufficient progress in their numeracy skills.

Many pupils show a very positive attitude towards learning the Welsh language. In Welsh lessons, they develop their language skills well and make sound progress. For example, when they discuss holidays and hobbies using the past tense. This is a notable improvement since the core inspection. The school now offers a range of worthwhile opportunities for pupils to enjoy and develop an empathy and passion for the culture and heritage of Wales.

R2. Improve attendance overall and the attitudes to learning of a few pupils

Since the core inspection, leaders have strengthened approaches to improving attendance. The data manager uses the school's systems effectively to identify patterns and trends for attendance overall as well as for individual pupils. As a result, progress leaders have beneficial information to use when tackling attendance issues.

Where appropriate, staff put in place suitable support and engage promptly with pupils and their families. Consequently, all groups of pupils are attending school more regularly this year compared with last year, when the COVID-19 pandemic had a negative impact nationally on school attendance. In particular, following specific and targeted interventions by the school, many of the pupils who were persistently absent last year have begun to attend more regularly.

Pupils' attitudes to learning have improved notably since the core inspection. Nearly all pupils behave well in lessons and around the school. These pupils engage warmly with visitors and discuss everyday topics readily in conversation. Overall pupils have particularly positive attitudes to Welsh culture, living in Wales and their opportunities to participate in a range of sports.

R3. Strengthen the quality of teaching and assessment

Since the core inspection the school has introduced a range of strategies aimed at improving teaching and assessment. However, the approach lacks clarity and direction and has not had sufficient impact on classroom practice or on the progress of pupils in lessons.

A few teachers plan engaging lessons that challenge and enthuse pupils. They adapt the pace of their lessons beneficially in response to the progress pupils make. These teachers use their subject knowledge well to extend and deepen pupils' understanding, knowledge and skills. In these cases, pupils make strong progress.

Most teachers engage positively with pupils and lessons are conducted in a respectful and supportive way. In the majority of cases, teachers establish purposeful working relationships and create productive working environments.

When planning their lessons, the majority of teachers focus too heavily on tasks and activities rather than on learning. As a result, they do not build on pupils' knowledge, understanding and skills progressively. This is often because they do not take into account prior learning well enough or rely on repetitive tasks.

A minority of teachers do not provide sufficiently challenging experiences for pupils to use their skills independently or to consolidate their learning. This is often because they do not provide sufficiently clear explanations or adapt their teaching to respond to the progress pupils are making. As a result, pupils do not develop their independence or knowledge, skills and understanding well enough.

The majority of teachers, are good language models and encourage pupils to develop appropriate subject specific vocabulary. These teachers use questioning suitably to test recall, but they do not probe understanding or deepen pupils' learning well enough. Generally, teachers do not have sufficiently high expectations of pupils' verbal responses.

Overall feedback does not help pupils to improve their work well enough. A minority of teachers provide useful feedback that helps pupils improve their work. When appropriate, these teachers provide beneficial success criteria to support pupils to make progress. In general, pupils respond well to teachers' requests to improve their work and make sound use of these criteria to support their learning. However, many teachers are too generous in their verbal and written feedback. They do not identify areas for improvement well enough. For example, in a few instances, pupils simply rewrite their work more neatly without improving their content.

R4. Improve the quality and impact of leadership at all levels, particularly by strengthening improvement processes

Overall, since the core inspection, there has not been a clearly articulated strategic vision for improvement. Whilst there have been improvements in a few areas of the school's work, such as pupils' attendance, leaders have not had sufficient impact on improving important aspects, such as the quality of teaching and leadership. In the short time since he joined the school, the executive headteacher has begun to establish a more positive climate to underpin improvement.

The executive headteacher has redefined roles and responsibilities of senior leaders to enable a more equitable distribution of workload. In a few instances, responsibilities overlap and it is not clear who is accountable for important priorities, such as evaluating pupil progress and learning. In addition, senior leaders' skills are not always matched to their roles and responsibilities well enough and performance management targets are not sufficiently precise. As a result, they do not carry out their roles effectively.

Overall, senior leaders do not hold middle leaders to account robustly enough. Line management meetings are held regularly and have a set agenda, but they do not focus sufficiently on the quality or impact of teaching. In addition, actions from these meetings are unclear and do not help middle leaders to plan for improvement. Most middle leaders find it difficult to identify specific strengths and areas for improvement in their areas of responsibilities. Ineffective support and the lack of suitable challenge have limited the development of middle leaders.

The executive headteacher has very recently introduced a new approach to evaluation and improvement. This aims to change the focus from simply checking for compliance with school policies. However, leaders across the school do not distinguish between the features of teaching and learning well enough. In addition, they do not evaluate with rigour or precision or triangulate their findings well enough. As a result, they have an overly positive view of the school's work, in particular the progress they have made since the core inspection. In all aspects of the school's work there is too great a focus on checking that activity has taken place, rather than the impact it has had on securing improvements. This limits leaders' ability to recognise or improve important weaknesses in provision, such as the quality of teaching and assessment.

Senior leaders have put in place a wide range of professional learning, including from external partners, but this has had a limited impact. In the main this is because the range of support has been too broad and has not been focused enough on important areas for improvements. In addition, leaders have not worked effectively to plan, evaluate or coordinate this support.

Governors are supportive of the school and have recently begun to develop a more realistic picture of the strengths and areas for improvement in a few aspects of the school's work. However, as evaluation and improvement processes lack rigour and provide the school with an overly positive view, governors do not have accurate enough information about important aspects. Therefore, they are not able challenge or support the school well enough to secure improvements.

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

In the main, the school has addressed the health and safety issues identified at the time of the core inspection. A few challenges remain as a result of the building's protected status, but overall suitable risk assessments are in place. The safety and well-being of pupils are a high priority for school leaders and the governing body.

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