



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

**Cefn Saeson Comprehensive School
Afan Valley Road
Cimla
Neath
SA11 3TA**

Date of visit: October 2024

by

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

Outcome of visit

Cefn Saeson 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 which shows 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 leadership, by improving the rigour and precision of self-evaluation and the effectiveness of improvement planning in particular

Following the core inspection, the school was slow to respond to the findings highlighted in the report. More recently, the headteacher and his senior team have refocused their work. They have demonstrated a renewed commitment to improving leadership, attendance, teaching and addressing issues with the curriculum. Despite this, progress against the recommendations has been limited.

The headteacher has recently reassigned senior leaders' responsibilities. The team has been extended through the temporary appointment of additional associate members. However, the workload across the team is inequitable, which hinders the strategic leadership of important aspects of the school's work. A few individual senior leaders have too many responsibilities. In addition, significant areas of the school's work have been allocated to temporary associate members, rather than ensuring strategic continuity through the permanent senior leadership team.

Leaders have reviewed the school's self-evaluation and improvement processes and there is now a sharper focus on pupil progress. Leaders carry out a range of appropriate activities to gather first-hand evidence from lesson observations and learning walks, speaking to pupils and looking at their work. Middle leaders are now involved suitably in evaluation and improvement activities. They undertake their responsibilities conscientiously and identify priorities that are broadly in line with the whole school priorities.

Senior leaders have introduced detailed systems to monitor important aspects of the school's work, which have created a consistency of approach. However, too often these systems are over-complicated and do not result in clear findings. This makes it difficult for leaders to recognise precisely enough what has improved and which aspects have not progressed well. As a result, leaders have an overly positive picture of many aspects of the school's work.

There is a lack of rigour in leaders' evaluation of the development of pupils' literacy and numeracy skills. This makes it difficult for leaders to identify precisely enough the specific skills that need improvement. For other priorities, such as attendance, the school does not analyse or evaluate the available evidence well enough.

The school has broadly appropriate plans to address its priorities. However, findings from self-evaluation do not feed well enough into these plans for improvement. In addition, the school does not identify with sufficient precision targets against which to evaluate progress. Overall, planning is insufficiently strategic, and does not drive improvement or consider well enough the impact of the school's work over time.

Performance management targets are appropriate and leaders hold staff suitably to account. Line management arrangements have been reviewed, however, there remains too much variation in how effectively these processes are carried out. Pastoral staff have regular, helpful catch-ups but are not strategically line managed.

Staff have access to a range of useful professional learning activities to support their teaching and leadership, along with appropriate opportunities for sharing good practice. A few teachers have benefited suitably from support and mentoring to improve their leadership skills. However, professional learning is not focused clearly enough on the specific aspects that require immediate and substantial improvement. Teachers are attempting diligently to adopt the plethora of strategies and ideas. Despite this, these activities are not having enough impact on improving pupils' learning.

The Governor School Improvement Committee (GSIC) is very supportive of the school. Governors are provided regularly with a broad range of information about the actions the school has taken, though this is not always clear enough to enable them to challenge leaders appropriately. They are beginning to develop a suitable understanding of the school's strengths and areas for improvement against each recommendation, although they do not ask sufficiently precise questions.

R2. Improve the processes and strategic planning to improve attendance

The school has adopted new approaches to improving attendance. These approaches helpfully include increasing the capacity of the school-based attendance

and well-being team, the appointment of an attendance and well-being officer, and improving the rewards system. In addition, the school has sensibly reviewed its attendance policy. Pupils now have a greater awareness of the importance of attending school. In general, attendance rates have improved since the core inspection, when they were notably low. However, the attendance of pupils, including those eligible for free school meals, remains an important area for improvement.

The school's approach to improving pupils' rates of attendance remains insufficiently strategic. Leaders at all levels do not evaluate sharply enough the impact of strategies to improve attendance, and this limits their ability to plan precisely enough for improvement. They still do not use all available data, including the data for different groups of pupils well enough, and targets for improvements in attendance of individual pupils are unclear. There is also an insufficient focus on levels of persistent absence, which limits the school's ability to identify and support these pupils early enough.

R3. Improve the effectiveness of teaching and assessment

In general, leaders have a better understanding of the effectiveness of teaching and assessment than at the time of the core inspection. They have started to adapt their professional learning to respond to findings from quality assurance activities, though this has not had sufficient impact on improving teaching and assessment. There is a suitable programme of support for some individual teachers in need of additional guidance. However, there is a proliferation of strategies to improve teaching and assessment. As a result, there is a lack of clarity around this aspect of the school's improvement work and this is creating confusion and hindering teachers' ability to plan effectively for lessons.

The quality of teaching observed on the monitoring visit is similar to that seen at the time of the core inspection. Most teachers have positive working relationships with pupils and are very supportive of them. These teachers create a calm and purposeful learning environment and manage behaviour well. Many teachers have secure subject knowledge, though it is not strong enough in a very few cases. Many are good language models and use and reinforce terminology appropriately. They provide clear explanations and instructions and generally useful resources.

A majority of teachers in general plan helpful activities that build sequentially. In these lessons, the pace of learning and level of challenge is suitable, meaning that pupils make adequate progress and recall prior learning competently. A minority of teachers provide useful examples and model learning effectively. In a very few lessons, pupils make strong progress. In these instances, teachers pause and adapt lessons in response to pupils' progress or misconceptions, helping them to advance their learning.

In a significant minority of lessons, pupils make limited progress and struggle to recall prior learning. This is mainly due to shortcomings in teaching. A minority of teachers do not plan for progress well enough. Too often, they plan for completion of tasks rather than pupil progress and the development of their knowledge and skills. In these cases, the pace of the learning is too slow because activities do not provide appropriate and progressive challenge. Tasks are often repetitive or undemanding, meaning that pupils do not progress in a timely manner. In addition, these teachers

tend to give overly lengthy explanations or don't give pupils the opportunity to answer questions independently. In a few instances, teachers are too tolerant of low-level disruption and in a very few instances they do not manage pupils' disruptive behaviour well enough. In some subjects, the curriculum provision does not always sufficiently challenge pupils. At times, the topics or tasks limit the amount of progress pupils make.

Teaching assistants provide helpful support to pupils. In general, however, there are few examples of teachers adapting lessons to meet the needs of pupils of different abilities.

Many teachers use questioning suitably to check for basic understanding. In a few cases, teachers' questions probe pupils' understanding effectively and encourage them to extend their responses and deepen their learning. Overall, however, teachers do not use questioning well enough. In addition, teachers often ask repeatedly ask questions of the same pupils.

Many teachers circulate the class, offering suitable support to pupils, and the majority provide helpful verbal feedback. In general, teachers pay due attention to spelling, punctuation and grammar when assessing pupils' work. In a minority of cases, teachers provide helpful written feedback and guidance, which leads to pupils making improvements in their work, but overall assessment remains an area for improvement. There is confusion regarding expectations around assessment. For example, some teachers write more than pupils, but to little effect. Too often, comments are unhelpful or over-generous, rewarding modest efforts or basic completion of tasks. In addition, though teachers and pupils are increasingly using success criteria to frame learning, there is not a sufficiently robust understanding of how to form and use effective success criteria.

Expectations around pupils' response to feedback remain too variable. A minority of pupils' responses to assessment are very superficial or repetitive and there are too many unnecessary and perfunctory examples of self-assessment in pupils' books.

The school is starting to develop its provision to support pupils' literacy skills and there is increased emphasis on helping pupils to improve the accuracy of their spelling, punctuation and grammar. However, the planning for this provision is not sufficiently strategic and there is not enough focus in lessons on the progressive development of pupils' literacy skills. The provision to develop pupils' numeracy skills in relevant subjects across the curriculum is in the very early days of development.

R4. Ensure that all pupils have access to the full breadth of provision, particularly the provision for Welsh, English in Year 11 and PSE in Key Stage 4

Since the core inspection, the school has suitably strengthened the personal and social education provision for pupils in Years 10 and 11. More able pupils in Year 11 now have English provision until the end of their time in school.

There has been an increase in the curriculum time for Welsh language teaching across all year groups. The proportion of pupils studying Welsh language at GCSE has increased appropriately and the school has started to promote Welsh culture and heritage through the Siarter Iaith Senedd. However, the professional learning

opportunities offered to non-specialist teachers of Welsh to support these changes are limited. The development of the Welsh language skills of pupils and staff across the curriculum is too variable.

The school has secured a generally broad and balanced curriculum, although this narrows for pupils in Year 9 when they begin their option choices. This means that they do not have access to the full range of learning experiences across all areas of learning up until the end of Year 9. In addition, the provision sometimes includes aspects that are too advanced for pupils at their stage in life and learning.

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