



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

Gwernyfed High School

**Three Cocks
Brecon
Powys
LD3 0SG**

Date of visit: July 2024

by

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

Outcome of visit

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

In lessons observed and books seen during this visit, many pupils recall their prior knowledge appropriately and make suitable progress in their learning. A few make strong and sustained progress and apply their knowledge and understanding skilfully and maturely, such as when analysing the ways in which Shakespeare presents complex characters in 'The Tempest' and 'Macbeth'. A few pupils do not make enough progress and they do not develop their thinking or independent learning skills sufficiently well. In the main, this is due to shortcomings in teaching.

Most pupils listen carefully to teachers and peers. Many respond to questions well, answering in detail when asked probing questions. They use appropriate sentence starters, connectives and formal language when contributing in an extended manner. A few pupils are hesitant to participate in whole class discussions and struggle to express themselves fully when answering questions.

When reading, many pupils use appropriate strategies to locate relevant information from suitably challenging texts, such as when analysing Tennyson's poem 'The Kraken'. In their English lessons, many pupils highlight key features in written texts effectively and make helpful notes. They select relevant quotations and express their ideas about the impressions created suitably. More able pupils identify and evaluate the effect of a wide range of complex literary features accurately. When given the opportunity, a few pupils evaluate the usefulness of sources effectively. When given the opportunity, pupils read aloud with reasonable fluency and, in the best cases, with expression.

Many pupils structure extended pieces of writing effectively and write for a variety of audiences and purposes with a growing level of confidence as they progress through the school. They structure their writing suitably in paragraphs and apply their knowledge effectively, such as when they evaluate the government's decision to invest money in a UK space programme. More able pupils structure their writing well

and make good use of a range of linguistic techniques to engage the reader, such as when they write letters from multiple perspectives about life during the First World War. These pupils use a broad range of vocabulary in their writing. Across the curriculum, a minority of pupils make regular spelling errors. Even when the teacher has drawn their attention to these errors and the pupils have corrected them, the same errors often appear in pieces of writing at a later stage.

Many pupils recall basic number facts and use these suitably when working with the four operations. They apply them when calculating quantities such as mass, length, or when sharing money by a given ratio. In mathematics, many pupils can substitute into equations suitably and a majority can formulate simple linear equations of their own, such as to calculate the cost of employing tradespeople. A majority of pupils can identify alternate and corresponding angles on diagrams. Many pupils are able to use their numeracy skills across the curriculum, most often with prompts and guidance. For example, they calculate means and percentages suitably, such as when considering the mean growth of seedlings in soils of different pH values or the percentage change in employment sectors using the Clark-Fisher model.

As a result of the school's focus on graph work, many pupils draw graphs accurately including scatter graphs and line graphs. They label axes correctly, and many decide on the correct scales for their graphs independently. A majority of pupils interpret straight line graphs to draw suitable conclusions, such as when recognising a direct proportionality between force and extension when investigating Hooke's Law in science.

Many pupils have a positive attitude towards learning the Welsh language. Since there have been improvements in teaching, pupils now make suitable progress and demonstrate a good standard of accuracy when pronouncing basic Welsh words. They recall their prior knowledge and understanding of vocabulary and sentence patterns appropriately and can apply their understanding in increasingly challenging contexts. A few pupils make strong progress and can express themselves with an increasing level of fluency, using more sophisticated vocabulary to enrich their verbal and written responses. However, a minority of pupils struggle with the pronunciation of basic Welsh words and find it difficult to match Welsh words and phrases to English translations. Pupils benefit from some worthwhile opportunities to develop their understanding of the culture and heritage of Wales. They have opportunities to take part in Eisteddfodau and enjoy contemporary Welsh music.

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

Many pupils display positive attitudes, engage well with their learning and show resilience when they find work challenging. Most behave well in lessons and around the school and show maturity when talking to visitors to the school. They respond promptly to teachers' instructions, although a very few are too passive in lessons and are slow to start tasks. These pupils take pride in their work, presenting it in an

orderly way. A very few pupils do not persevere or complete enough work in the time available.

The school has developed a beneficial and responsive health and well-being programme, which contributes effectively to promoting good attendance and positive attitudes to learning. Leaders at all levels use a wide range of appropriate strategies to promote good attendance and to improve the attendance of pupils whose attendance is below the school target. The school has sought the views of pupils successfully regarding how best to celebrate positive behaviour. For example, they have introduced rewards such as 'The twelve days of Christmas' and a school trip for those with good attendance and high numbers of merits.

Senior leaders and pastoral leaders analyse attendance data and information thoroughly to explore why individual pupils have lower attendance. They arrange interventions based on the individual needs of pupils and work with a wide range of external partners to provide beneficial support to improve the attendance of vulnerable pupils. These strategies have started to have a positive impact on attendance across the school.

Between the academic years 2018-2019 and 2022-2023, the school's rate of attendance fell by a much smaller amount than seen nationally. Last year it was slightly above that of similar schools, although it remains below pre-pandemic levels. The attendance of pupils eligible for free school meals is well above the national average for this group of pupils. This year, the attendance of all groups of pupils has continued to improve, including the attendance of pupils eligible for free school meals.

R3. Strengthen the quality of teaching and assessment

The appointment of a new headteacher in 2023 has placed teaching and learning at the centre of the school's work. The school has strengthened its approaches to professional learning to improve the quality of teaching particularly. Leaders have successfully developed a culture, which enables teachers to collaborate and share their practice. Senior leaders provide valuable support to help staff develop teaching through focused professional learning sessions, opportunities to collaborate in pairs or triads, and mentoring and coaching. Recently, the school has developed beneficial opportunities for staff to plan lessons collaboratively. In addition, senior leaders empower middle leaders to take greater responsibility for improving teaching and learning within the school. This programme of professional learning is having a positive impact on the quality of teaching and pupils' standards and progress. For example, professional learning to help teachers develop pupils' literacy skills has had a positive impact on pupils' oracy skills.

In most instances, teachers develop positive working relationships with pupils. They know their pupils well and provide a supportive and purposeful environment which

enables pupils to contribute to lessons. Most teachers have sound subject knowledge and are effective language models. They explain subject specific terminology effectively, for example when discussing juxtaposition and persuasive techniques in English lessons. These teachers circulate the classroom to monitor pupils' learning and encourage their engagement. In addition, these teachers have appropriate expectations of how pupils present and complete their work in their books. Many teachers have clear expectations of pupils' behaviour for learning. They have established classroom routines that help pupils to transition effectively between activities and challenge off task behaviour promptly. These teachers question pupils purposefully to check for understanding and plan valuable opportunities for pupils to use their literacy and numeracy skills in subjects across the curriculum. They manage paired and group work effectively, encourage active listening skills and provide worthwhile opportunities for pupils to develop their verbal skills. In addition, many teachers plan engaging opportunities for pupils to write at length in subjects across the curriculum.

In a few particularly effective lessons, teachers are passionate about the topics they are teaching. They have notably high expectations for learning and plan activities that build sequentially on each other to ensure that pupils make strong progress. These teachers plan skilfully to support the development of pupils' subject knowledge and understanding whilst ensuring that they have purposeful opportunities to apply and develop their cross-curricular skills in meaningful contexts. In these lessons, teachers question pupils thoroughly to probe their understanding and to challenge them to think independently. This enables them to apply their learning to increasingly complex contexts well. In the very best examples, teachers make effective use of 'pitstops' and plenaries to check for pupils' understanding and to plan for the next steps in learning. This instant and timely feedback has a significantly positive impact on the standards pupils achieve.

In a few instances, teachers do not plan activities well enough to allow pupils to develop and apply their knowledge and understanding. Tasks are repetitive, lack challenge or do not engage pupils in their learning well enough. As a result, pupils lose interest and do not make as much progress as they could. In these lessons, teachers do not always question pupils well enough. For example, they answer questions for pupils or do not probe their answers sufficiently to develop their understanding. In a very few instances, teachers do not manage pupils' off-task behaviour well enough.

In general, teachers provide suitable 'What Went Well' (WWW) and 'Even Better If' (EBI) comments on pupils' work. When given an opportunity, pupils respond appropriately. In addition, teachers mark suitably for literacy, although the impact of this work is not always clear, particularly where pupils continue to misspell words that have been corrected in previous tasks.

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

Since her appointment, the headteacher has set out clearly her high expectations for all areas of the school's work. She has communicated these expectations explicitly and has been successful in accelerating the pace of improvement, supported ably by her senior team. Her strong leadership has inspired confidence amongst staff and pupils who are proud and happy to belong to the school community. Staff feel appreciated and are keen to learn and grow in their roles. Together with the governing body, the senior team have established a focused vision for improvement that places better outcomes for all pupils at the centre of the school's work. This vision is communicated clearly and is understood well by staff, who now demonstrate a strong sense of purpose and teamwork. This helps the school to implement effectively a range of well-considered strategies to raise pupil outcomes, improve teaching and strengthen leadership. Leaders recognise that raising standards remains a key priority for the school, including a sustained focus on improving pupils' literacy, numeracy and digital skills.

Leadership roles across the school have been reconfigured to best suit leaders' skills and experience. Middle leaders are developing a much clearer understanding of their roles and have been given beneficial support to improve their effectiveness. This includes participation in the 'Accelerated Improvement Board' where middle leaders engage in professional dialogue to constructively challenge and support each other with respect to common priorities. Line management now focuses appropriately on raising standards and improving teaching, in part through embedding the school's 'Quality Framework'. Performance management is based securely on the school's priorities and on building the capacity of staff to contribute to them. As a result, leaders are now, in general, holding staff to account for their work suitably, although in a few cases there remains some variation in how effectively leaders carry out their responsibilities.

Quality assurance processes have been streamlined and strengthened and are now more closely focused on the impact of provision on pupil outcomes. Through careful mentoring, the headteacher has enabled the senior team and middle leaders to gather a clearer and accurate view of the school's strengths and areas for development, which is used to refine activity and sharpen priorities. Leaders use an appropriate range of data to identify pupil underperformance, and to analyse other important aspects, such as attendance. In a very few instances, quality assurance is more limited due to a lack of expertise within the leadership team, although the school has worked with local schools to add strength to their evaluations. Overall, leaders are able to demonstrate the impact of their actions, for example on pupil progress and on attendance.

The headteacher has identified and nurtured talent amongst the staff. The professional learning programme focuses closely on strengthening leadership and

developing more effective classroom practice. There is a helpful coaching programme in place, which supports middle leaders well to lead their teams effectively. Governors have improved significantly their understanding of the school's main strengths and areas for development by engaging in a range of valuable activities with staff and pupils. They have also undertaken helpful self-review activities to build their capacity to act as critical friends and provide the headteacher and senior team with constructive support and challenge.

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

The school has taken appropriate action to address the health and safety concerns raised during the core inspection. Ensuring the safeguarding of the school site has been an important focus and this continues to be reviewed and evaluated weekly. The Health and Safety sub-committee of the governing body conducts a comprehensive site review at least once every term.