



*Rhagoriaeth i bawb – Excellence for all*

Arolygiaeth Ei Mawrhydi dros Addysg  
a Hyfforddiant yng Nghymru

Her Majesty's Inspectorate  
for Education and Training in Wales

**Report of visit  
Level of follow-up: significant improvement**

**Brecon High School  
Penlan  
Brecon  
Powys  
LD3 9SR**

**Date of visit: February 2014**

**by**

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

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**The monitoring team**

|               |                     |
|---------------|---------------------|
| Tony Sparks   | Reporting Inspector |
| Steffan James | Team Inspector      |
| Marc Belli    | Team Inspector      |
| Huw Collins   | Team Inspector      |
| Sue Halliwell | Team Inspector      |

## Outcome of monitoring visit

Brecon High School is judged to have made insufficient progress in relation to the recommendations following the core inspection in May 2012.

As a result, Her 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, Her 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 in about three months' time to inspect progress against the recommendations.

## Progress since the last inspection

### **Recommendation 1: Raise standards at key stage 3 and key stage 4, particularly in science, Welsh second language and the performance of boys**

This recommendation has been partly addressed.

Standards in key stage 3 have improved since the core inspection. However, in 2013, performance in nearly all key stage 4 indicators is lower than at the time of the inspection in May 2012.

At key stage 4 in 2013, performance improved in the level 2 threshold and in the capped points score, and is higher than at the time of the last inspection. Performance in the level 1 threshold and in mathematics has also improved slightly in 2013. However, standards have deteriorated in all other key indicators. Performance in 2013 places the school in the bottom 25% of similar schools based on entitlement to free school meals for all ten indicators compared to five in 2011 and seven in 2012. With a very few exceptions, the school's performance has been below the family average in all indicators for the past five years.

Performance in the level 2 threshold including English and mathematics is below modelled expectations in 2013. In order to improve outcomes many pupils were entered early for GCSE mathematics in November 2013. However, this strategy had limited success as only a very few achieved the level 2 qualification.

Pupils' progress from previous key stages is significantly below expectations. In the capped points score and in attendance, performance has been below modelled expectations in each of the last three years.

At key stage 3, in 2013, performance in the core subject indicator rose by 11 percentage points putting it higher than at the time of the last inspection. When compared with modelled expectations based on the proportion of pupils entitled to free school meals, performance in the core subject indicator is above expectations

after being below for the previous two years. However, it remains below the family average.

In 2013 the percentage of pupils attaining level 5 or above increased in English, mathematics and science. Performance in these three subjects now places the school in the lower 50% of similar schools, whereas they had placed the school in the bottom 25% of similar schools based on free-school-meal benchmarks for the previous two years. Performance in nearly all non-core subjects improved, although for six of the nine subjects the school remains in the bottom 25% of similar schools compared to eight in 2012 and six at the time of the last inspection.

In 2013, the difference between the performance of boys and girls at key stage 4 is greater than the family and national averages in every key indicator. In key stage 3, at level 5 or above, boys perform better than girls in English and Welsh first language but not in mathematics or science. In eight out of nine non-core subjects, girls perform better than the boys with the difference being greater than the family average; in five subjects the difference is also greater than the national average. There is no clear, strategic plan to address the underachievement of boys.

The performance of the small number of pupils entitled to free school meals in 2013 is significantly lower than that of other pupils at key stage 3 and key stage 4.

The proportion of pupils who achieved a level 2 qualification in science fell in 2013 after a slight rise in 2012. Performance in science is now lower than at the time of the last inspection and the school has remained in the bottom 25% of similar schools for each of the last three years. Girls perform significantly better than boys. In 2013, the difference in their performance is much greater than the family and national averages. At key stage 3, performance at level 5 or above improved by 12 percentage points and now places the school in the lower 50% of similar schools, but it remains below the family average. Performance at level 6 or above also improved but from a lower base and the school remains in the bottom 25% of similar schools, as well as for performance at level 7 and above. The performance of boys and girls is similar at level 5 and above but at level 6 and above the difference is significantly greater than the family and national averages.

In Welsh second language, performance at the end of key stage 3 improved slightly in 2013 but was still below expectations. In key stage 4 the percentage of pupils gaining a level 2 qualification improved significantly compared with 2012 and is slightly better than in 2011. However, the school's performance is still below the average for Wales and also below expectations based on pupils' ability.

New appointments have strengthened and stabilised the Welsh department. Provision for Welsh second language is now well planned, and both standards and the quality of teaching were good in the lessons observed. However, staff absence has had a negative impact on the progress of the current Year 11 pupils.

Pupils do not make good enough progress in around half of the lessons. Although many pupils write with enthusiasm, the technical accuracy of their work is not of a high enough standard. A minority of pupils have missing or incomplete work in their books.

## **Recommendation 2: Improve attendance**

This recommendation has been partly addressed.

Following the core inspection, attendance has improved from 90.2% in 2011 to 92.6% in 2013. However, this still places the school in the bottom quarter of similar schools based on entitlement to free school meals and below expectation. Unverified data for the Autumn Term in 2013 shows a further, clear improvement to 94.6%. This currently exceeds the whole school target of 93.8%. Current attendance for Year 7 to Year 10 is above the school target for this period but Year 11 attendance has fallen below the target by 0.2%.

The senior leader responsible for attendance has introduced a number of effective strategies to improve attendance. These include a clear attendance policy and raising awareness of the importance of regular attendance amongst pupils, staff and parents. The newly formed 'Attendance Working Group' is beginning to have a positive impact on attendance by analysing attendance data and, planning and monitoring interventions to improve attendance. The school has developed an effective tracking system that gives staff accurate data on pupil attendance. The senior leader and attendance staff use this data effectively to monitor whole school attendance and to target support for those pupils with poor attendance records. Attendance figures are distributed weekly to year tutors and recorded in pupil planners. This raises the awareness of all pupils and staff of the importance of regular attendance.

The attendance team use the attendance data appropriately to target support for a group of pupils with poor attendance, particularly those with attendance below 80%. The attendance of this group of pupils is monitored closely by the school and the attendance team work well with parents to improve their attendance. The school has introduced appropriate daily alert systems to notify parents of any unreported absences. This is beginning to have a positive effect on improving the attendance of most groups of pupils.

## **Recommendation 3: Increase the challenge of teaching to match that in the best lessons**

This recommendation has been partly addressed.

Recently, senior leaders have put in place a range of suitable strategies to improve the quality of teaching. These include increasing staff awareness of good practice, creating a teaching and learning toolkit to support staff and using a consistent structure for the planning of lessons. However, these strategies have not yet been successful in improving the quality of teaching and outcomes for pupils.

The senior leadership team and middle managers observe lessons on a regular basis. These observations focus upon teaching methodology but do not consider carefully enough the impact of that teaching upon pupils' learning. Consequently, many observations are overly generous in their judgements and do not identify precisely the aspects of teaching which remain in need of further development. When shortcomings are identified, senior and middle leaders do not always provide

the well-focused and sustained support needed to bring about sufficient improvement.

In a minority of lessons, teaching is well planned and activities allow pupils to make good progress. However, in around half of lessons, there is insufficient challenge for pupils of different abilities and the pace of learning is too slow. In these lessons, the expectations that teachers have of their pupils are not high enough and pupils do not make the progress they should.

The leadership team has conducted an audit of schemes of work to identify opportunities for the development of all pupils' literacy and numeracy skills. However, the implementation of the national literacy and numeracy framework, in particular planning for the progression of pupils' skills, remains underdeveloped.

#### **Recommendation 4: Improve the quality and consistency of marking and feedback given to pupils**

This recommendation has been partly addressed.

Since the core inspection, senior managers have placed a greater emphasis on monitoring and improving the quality and consistency of marking and feedback given to pupils. They carry out regular book scrutiny through senior team monitoring and whole-school book reviews. However, these reviews often focus on the frequency of marking and feedback rather than on how well it helps pupils to improve.

The quality of the marking and assessment in a few subjects is detailed and supportive and provides pupils with clear guidance on how to improve their work. However, the school does not make enough use of this good practice to raise the quality of marking and feedback across all subjects. In many cases, pupils do not complete their work or take action on the teachers' recommendations, particularly with regard to punctuation and spelling.

Most teachers ask pupils to assess their own work and that of others. However, the purpose of these activities is not understood well by many staff and pupils. As a result, it does not have a significant impact on improving the quality of pupils' work.

#### **Recommendation 5: Increase senior and middle managers' accountability for improving standards and quality, through rigorous line management arrangements**

This recommendation has been partly addressed.

Since the core inspection, the school has introduced a number of suitable actions to help improve accountability for standards and the quality of teaching.

Line management meetings between senior and middle leaders take place each fortnight and there are common agenda items to ensure greater consistency. However, the meetings do not focus sufficiently upon improving teaching and learning.

The school has introduced suitable systems to identify accurately areas for development. However, the level of challenge with which senior leaders follow up identified shortcomings lacks sufficient rigour. This limits the school's ability to improve standards.

Since the core inspection, subject department meetings are held more regularly. Most departments have a clearer focus on raising standards. In these departments, middle leaders and classroom teachers are beginning to use data more effectively to track the performance of pupils. However, in the majority of departments there is still not enough focus on improving the quality of teaching to help raise standards.

Senior leaders are beginning to challenge underperformance more robustly. Lesson observations and book scrutiny are regular and leaders at all levels are involved in the process. This is beginning to help the school identify areas for improvement and training needs. However, the school has been too slow to challenge underperformance. As a result, there remain important shortcomings in both teaching and standards across the school.

Overall, the school has not made sufficient progress against this recommendation. At present, there remains too much variability in the quality of leadership at all levels to bring about improvements in standards and the quality of teaching.

**Recommendation 6: Improve the sharpness and clarity of improvement planning at all levels, using specific and measurable targets**

This recommendation has been partly addressed.

Since the core inspection there has been a great deal of activity to improve the use of data, evaluate practice in teaching and assessment and review progress against the recommendations. However, the quality assurance of these activities lacks rigour and the links between evaluation and planning for improvement are not secure.

The school has improved the use of data to set targets for pupils and departments. The performance targets in plans are specific. Pupils are aware of their targets and current progress, although they are less clear about what they need to do in order to improve. The tracking system has also helped the school to identify pupils in need of support. However, there is insufficient co-ordination of this support and in only a very few examples are clear success criteria, start dates, actions and end dates identified.

Planning at whole-school and subject level does not have clear strategic priorities to improve standards of teaching and learning. Self-evaluation activities are insufficiently focused on the standards and progress of pupils. The formats used for scrutiny and observation are largely about checking compliance with a wide range of expectations in relation to teaching and marking. They do not focus well enough on the impact on learning of these activities. Self-evaluation does not result in precise identification of areas for improvement in teaching and learning at whole school and subject level.

### **Recommendation 7: Plan to resolve the budget deficit effectively**

This recommendation has been fully addressed.

Since the core inspection, the school has effectively planned to resolve the budget deficit.

The deficit budget has been significantly reduced and spending is closely monitored by the headteacher and business manager. A five-year budget forecast identifies potential challenges in the future and the school is taking sound action to reduce these difficulties and minimise the impact on the curriculum.

The governors have supported the school well, making difficult decisions to resolve the deficit budget. They have agreed a plan with the local authority to resolve the existing financial challenges, which will result in a balanced position by the end of March 2014.

### **Recommendation 8: Meet statutory requirements for the daily act of collective worship**

This recommendation has been fully addressed.

Since the core inspection, the school has strengthened its arrangements in order to meet the statutory requirements for the daily act of collective worship.

The school has introduced a useful collective worship booklet, which defines the place of worship in relation to the school's legal responsibilities and outlines the school's processes for delivery. This includes a whole-school focus on a weekly themed 'thought for the day'. The booklet contains a range of appropriate age-related materials, which form tutors use well to provide pupils with the opportunity for daily prayer and reflection.

All staff have participated in professional development activities to support the delivery of the new materials. Senior staff monitor the revised arrangements robustly and challenge and support staff, where appropriate, in order to help staff improve their practice and ensure that the school meets its statutory requirements for collective worship.

As a result of the strengthened arrangements, the school now fully meets the statutory requirements for the daily act of collective worship.