

**Report of visit**

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

**Dylan Thomas Community School**

**John Street  
Cockett  
Swansea  
SA2 0FR**

**Date of visit: February 2013**

**by**

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



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**The monitoring team**

Sue Morgan	Reporting Inspector
Mark Evans	Team Inspector
Kevin Adams	Team Inspector

## **Outcome of monitoring visit**

Dylan Thomas Community School was inspected in February 2010. Following the inspection, performance declined and Estyn undertook two follow-up monitoring visits focusing on progress against the key issues identified during the Section 28 inspection. The outcome of the January 2012 monitoring visit was that the school had not made enough progress in these key areas. As a result inspectors judged that the school was in need of significant improvement.

In February 2013, Estyn undertook a third monitoring visit and inspectors judged that Dylan Thomas Community School had made sufficient progress in relation to the recommendations following the core inspection in February 2010. As a result, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education and Training in Wales is removing the school from any further follow-up activity.

The school has significantly strengthened its focus on improving standards, in particular on improving pupils' literacy skills. Data is used more effectively to identify, challenge and support where improvements are needed in pupils' performance. There is a comprehensive and closely monitored revision programme to support pupils in key stage 4. In 2011, the school made extensive changes to the organisation of the key stage 4 curriculum. This has increased pupils' option choices and provides individual pathways of support to address identified weaknesses in performance. These programmes are matched closely to the needs of individual pupils. As a result, pupils feel more engaged in their learning, standards have improved and attendance rates have increased significantly.

## **Progress since the last inspection**

### **Recommendation 1: Improve standards generally, particularly in the core subjects, and in the key skills of literacy and improving one's own learning and performance across the whole curriculum**

This recommendation has been largely addressed.

Since the core inspection in 2010, the school has made good progress in improving standards at key stage 3 and, in particular, at key stage 4.

In 2012, at key stage 4, performance in the level 2 threshold including English and mathematics increased by 15 percentage points and is now well above modelled expectations. Performance in the level 2 threshold increased by 30 percentage points and placed the school in the top half of similar schools in terms of free school meals entitlement. Pupils' progress from the previous key stages in both of these key indicators is better than expected. Despite a slight improvement, performance in the level 1 threshold remains below the family average and the school remains in the lowest quarter when compared with similar schools.

In 2012, the performance in each of the three core subjects individually improved. In both English and mathematics performance moved the school from the lowest quarter to the top half when compared with similar schools. However, despite a significant increase of 20 percentage points in performance in science, it remained in the lowest quarter when compared with similar schools.

At key stage 3, performance in the core subject indicator has shown steady and continued improvement and, in 2012, was above modelled expectations.

The school has implemented a range of strategies to improve pupils' literacy skills. Senior leaders have planned and delivered appropriate training to all staff and the development of pupils' literacy is a clear priority across the school. There is now more purposeful planning, particularly for the development of pupils' reading and writing skills. All pupils have literacy targets and are more aware of how to improve their written work. The school has a wide programme of targeted literacy intervention. The performance data of pupils involved in these programmes is scrutinised and tracked carefully. The majority of these pupils make good progress in developing their literacy skills.

There are well-planned opportunities for all pupils to gain Essential Skills Wales qualifications.

In lessons, nearly all pupils listen well and many communicate effectively when answering questions in class. Most pupils demonstrate positive attitudes to learning. However, in a minority of lessons, particularly at key stage 3, pupils do not make enough progress.

### **Recommendation 2: Increase levels of attendance**

This recommendation has been fully addressed.

Since the core inspection in 2010, levels of attendance have increased steadily. The overall attendance in 2010 was 84.4%, moving to 86.5% in 2011, and 88.1% in 2012. Attendance figures for 2011 and 2012 were both above modelled expectations. Figures for the autumn term 2012 show the improvements have been sustained and the school is implementing appropriate strategies to reach its target for 2013 of 90%. There has been a significant reduction in unauthorised absence rates.

Senior leaders and progress leaders make effective use of comprehensive data on attendance to target the pupils who need intervention and support. The school has maintained and strengthened its close collaboration with a variety of partners to support this work. The newly appointed pastoral support officers work effectively with targeted pupils and focus on improving their punctuality, attendance and attitudes to learning.

The school has worked well to improve communication with pupils and parents and give attendance a high profile. Pupils know their individual monthly attendance figures and these are shared termly with parents and carers.

**Recommendation 3: Embed the assessment for learning policy by eliminating the shortcomings in teaching and learning identified in this report**

This recommendation has been partly addressed.

The school's revised policy for assessment, recording and reporting explains clearly what is expected of all teaching staff and also provides some appropriate guidance materials. Teachers' practice in lessons and in assessing pupils' written work consistently reflects the principles of this policy. In many lessons teachers give appropriate immediate feedback to pupils on their work. Nearly all teachers mark pupils' work regularly, identifying strengths and aspects that could be improved. While all teachers' comments are helpful, in some cases they do not provide sufficiently clear guidance to pupils about how to address the identified areas for improvement. There is also inconsistency in the extent to which pupils respond to teachers' comments. As a result, there is too much variation in the impact of assessment on improving the standard of pupils' work.

The school has implemented a sound range of strategies designed to improve teaching, including the dissemination of good practice and training for all teachers in the characteristics of good teaching. There are positive teacher-pupil relationships in nearly all lessons. Where teaching is good, the strengths commonly present are clear learning objectives, a variety of learning activities that provide an appropriate level of challenge for all pupils, skilful questioning, a brisk pace of learning, suitable attention to developing pupils' literacy skills and appropriate assessment of pupils' work. The shortcomings present in a minority of lessons, mostly at key stage 3, include insufficiently clear expectations, inappropriate timing and pace, activities that do not effectively engage all pupils and questioning that does not engage or challenge pupils effectively.

Leaders monitor the work of all teachers through lesson observations and the scrutiny of pupils' work. These processes enable them to identify many of the shortcomings present. However, there is variation in the extent to which lesson observations consider the impact of teaching on standards and progress, and in the identification of relevant shortcomings.

**Recommendation 4: Improve subject and individual target setting and the monitoring of pupils' academic performance**

This recommendation has been largely addressed.

The school has significantly improved its analysis of pupil performance data to identify weaknesses, support improvements and raise standards. Targets are used effectively at school, faculty and pupil level to challenge and raise expectations.

Senior and middle leaders analyse assessment data rigorously to monitor and review the progress of all pupils.

Senior leaders use a colour coding system well to identify pupils who are not making appropriate progress. This information gives the school a reliable overview of the performance of individual pupils and groups of pupils. Faculty leaders receive regular and detailed performance information. These packs contain useful analyses of pupil progress and attendance. However, the information is not used consistently in all faculties to set and monitor challenging targets for continued improvement.

The data is shared regularly with pupils who are well informed about their current and expected levels of achievement. The school has recently reviewed the role of the pastoral managers to enable them to focus more on curriculum issues and standards. They use the data well to monitor pupils' progress and support pupils at risk of underachieving.

All pupils are set targets to improve their literacy skills. They are recorded on the front of their work books and reviewed half-termly. However, targets are not always specific enough for the individual learner and are not effectively reviewed and updated.

**Recommendation 5: Refine the role of leaders and managers so that strategic priorities are clearly identified, inconsistencies in teaching and learning are eliminated and best practice is monitored and disseminated rigorously**

This recommendation has been partly addressed.

Following the monitoring visit in January 2012, the school reviewed the roles and responsibilities of all members of the senior leadership team and implemented revised arrangements from September 2012. These revised arrangements identify distinct roles and responsibilities and are appropriate in relation to the current situation of the school. Each member of the senior leadership team has a sound understanding their role. However, some aspects are not sufficiently clear, in particular the responsibility for developing the important area of teaching and learning across the school.

Line management arrangements are set out clearly in documentation and are understood by all staff. All middle leaders have regular meetings with their line manager. These meetings include discussion of relevant matters, giving appropriate priority to pupils' standards of achievement, and the minutes identify actions, responsibilities and deadlines appropriately. The fortnightly meetings between heads of core subjects and their line manager provide good opportunities to review the progress of pupils at key stage 4. However, there is some inconsistency in the arrangements for senior leaders to meet with the middle leaders they manage on an individual basis, and also on the focus and scope of these meetings. Some give a higher priority to teaching and learning but this focus is inconsistent.

Senior leaders with line management responsibilities for faculties participate in lesson observations and scrutinies of pupils' work. These processes facilitate the identification of strengths and areas for improvement, and the information gained forms a basis for planning to improve teaching and learning. Where leaders have identified shortcomings in teaching and learning within their subject they have implemented strategies to achieve improvement. However, due to an insufficient focus in some lesson observations on the impact of teaching on standards and progress, shortcomings in some areas, particularly at key stage 3, have not been identified well enough.

Leaders and managers have identified and disseminated good practice appropriately in relation to aspects of teaching, assessment for learning and the development of pupils' literacy skills across the curriculum. The work of the school's working groups plays an important part in the identification and dissemination of good practice.

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