



Arolygiaeth Ei Mawrhydi dros Addysg a Hyfforddiant yng Nghymru
Her Majesty's Inspectorate for Education and Training in Wales

**Report following monitoring
Level of follow-up: special measures**

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

Date of visit: November 2016

by

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

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The monitoring team

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Outcome of monitoring

Brecon High School is judged to have made sufficient 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 removing the school from the list of schools requiring special measures.

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

Satisfactory progress in addressing the recommendation

Since the core inspection there has been an upward trend of improvement in standards.

At key stage 4, the level 2 threshold, including English or Welsh and mathematics has improved by over 12 percentage points since 2012. Performance in 2016 places it above modelled outcomes and in the upper 50% of similar schools based on eligibility for free school meals. Similarly, performance in the core subject indicator improved again in 2016 and places the school in the lower 50% of similar schools based on eligibility for free school meals. This is an improvement on the previous three years when performance placed the school in the bottom 25% of similar schools.

In 2016, performance in the level 1 and level 2 thresholds improved but both remain in the bottom 25% of similar schools. Performance in the capped points score also improved. It remains below modelled outcomes and places the school in the bottom 25% of schools based on eligibility for free school meals.

The entry rates and numbers achieving a level 2 qualification in Welsh have improved significantly. In 2012 79% of the cohort were entered for a Welsh qualification. In 2016 this has increased to 97% of the cohort. In 2016, 91% of pupils achieved at least a grade C in either Welsh first language or full course Welsh second language. This is a strong feature.

At key stage 4, boys' performance has shown strong improvement in most indicators since the core inspection. The gap between their performance and that of the girls in the school has narrowed. However, in most indicators boys and girls perform less well than boys and girls in similar schools.

At key stage 3, performance in the core subject indicator has improved well since the core inspection in May 2012 and has been above modelled outcomes for the last three years. Performance placed the school in the upper 50% of similar schools in 2014 and 2015 and in 2016 places it in the top 25%.

Most pupils have a positive attitude towards their learning and are eager to improve their work. Many pupils make suitable progress in a majority of lessons. They have strong recall of prior learning and apply this to new tasks well. Many show strong independent learning skills and sustain concentration well. They work successfully in groups and pairs.

Many pupils have sound reading skills. They glean relevant information from texts effectively. A majority of pupils infer meaning and make useful deductions from a wide range of source materials. The majority of pupils read aloud confidently.

Many pupils organise their written work well and write accurately. They have a wide and varied vocabulary and make appropriate use of subject specific terminology.

Many pupils are confident speakers and engage enthusiastically in class discussions and debates. They give considered and well-reasoned answers, and a few offer very mature and thoughtful responses. Many pupils are keen to pose questions and a few pupils ask very pertinent and intelligent questions. Most pupils listen well to each other and the teacher.

Most pupils have a strong command of basic numeracy and work through problems methodically. Most construct graphs accurately

Many write in Welsh with a good degree of accuracy and use different tenses appropriately. Many have good pronunciation and they speak Welsh confidently.

Recommendation 2: Improve attendance

Very good progress in addressing the recommendation

Since the time of the core inspection, attendance rates have improved very well. The school's attendance rate in 2015-2016 is 95.3% which is in line with modelled outcomes for a second consecutive year. The attendance rate places the school in the upper 50% of similar schools based on eligibility for free school meals.

The school has been successful in closing the gap in attendance between boys and girls. In 2016 for a second year running the attendance of girls is equal to that of the boys and higher than the average for girls in similar schools.

The attendance of pupils eligible for free school meals has improved well and is two percentage points higher than at the time of the core inspection.

Persistent absence has decreased significantly since the core inspection. For the last three years it has been lower than the average for the local authority and Wales.

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

Satisfactory progress in addressing the recommendation

Since the core inspection, the school has worked effectively to improve the quality of teaching. This has contributed to improvements in standards at key stage 3 and in most indicators at key stage 4. However, this has not had enough impact on pupil progress overall and, in a minority of lessons, the level of challenge remains too low.

The school has a suitable programme of quality assurance and professional development activities to support improvements in teaching. As a result, teachers are reflective about their work and share good practice regularly. However, the school's training programme does not focus precisely enough on the aspects of teaching most in need of improvement, such as providing an appropriate level of challenge for pupil of all abilities.

Many teachers have strong subject knowledge. They provide pupils with helpful support during lessons and foster positive working relationships. In the majority of lessons, teachers plan appropriately and provide activities that build successfully on pupils' prior learning. They question pupils effectively and match activities well to the needs and interests of pupils of different abilities. In these lessons, many pupils make suitable progress.

In a minority of lessons, teachers do not have sufficiently high expectations of what pupils can achieve. As a result, the level of challenge and the pace of the learning are not appropriate. In these lessons, teachers do not check pupils' progress and understanding thoroughly enough and therefore do not know when they are ready to move on. In these lessons, most pupils do not make enough progress.

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

Satisfactory progress in addressing the recommendation

The quality and consistency of written feedback to pupils have improved since the core inspection. This is having a positive impact on the quality of pupils' work and is beginning to improve standards.

Almost all teachers use the Feedback, Action, Response (FAR) approach to marking in a consistent and purposeful way. Most teacher 'action' comments give clear guidance on how pupils can improve their work and provide useful subject specific actions for improvement. However, when marking for literacy a minority of teachers pay due attention to technical accuracy but not enough to improving the content and effectiveness of the writing. .

Most pupils respond well to teacher action points and develop their work appropriately. However, a very few pupils merely confirm that they will address the point rather than demonstrate how they will improve. Where marking is effective, pupils and teachers engage in constructive dialogue about how work can be improved.

Although most teachers regularly ask pupils to assess their own work and that of their peers, the contexts are often inappropriate and success criteria not made clear. As a result, many pupils struggle to make worthwhile comments or set meaningful targets to improve.

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

Strong progress in addressing the recommendation

Since the time of the core inspection, the school has made considerable improvements to its arrangements for holding senior and middle leaders to account. This has supported improvements in important aspects of the school's work. This includes the attendance of pupils and, in 2015 and 2016 in particular, their performance in the indicators that include English or Welsh and mathematics. However, since the core inspection, by the end of key stage 4 pupils make variable progress in many performance indicators.

The senior leadership team provides a beneficial balance of support and challenge for each other and for middle leaders. Line management meetings are increasingly consistent in their address of standards, teaching and learning, and leadership. Common agenda and mostly clear action points from these meetings provide an appropriately robust framework for further improvement. The school has now introduced a suitable process to quality assure these meetings. This process ensures that they focus well enough on the common, agreed priorities and put in place actions to bring about the improvements required.

Most middle leaders now have a clear understanding of their roles and responsibility for raising standards. Many use pupil data suitably to review the performance of their teams and to plan for further improvements.

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

Satisfactory progress in addressing the recommendation

Since the core inspection, the school has made useful progress in improving the quality of the school and departmental improvement plans.

Self-evaluation processes leading to improved planning are developing appropriately and becoming embedded across the school. The new whole-school evaluation process has enabled the school to set targets, actions and success criteria for improvement which are suitably focused and measurable. Paired lesson observations, learning walks and work scrutiny enable leaders to share good practice appropriately. However, at present, work scrutiny in particular does not focus well enough on pupils' standards and progress.

The whole-school development plan is reviewed regularly and comprehensive data analysis is used well to inform whole school target setting.

Middle leaders have been supported well to develop self-evaluation and improvement planning. Many analyse data and the outcomes of self-evaluation activities usefully to identify areas for improvement. They set clear, measurable targets and success criteria. However, in a minority of departmental development plans the actions set are not sufficiently robust or precise enough to bring about improvements required in teaching and learning.

Recommendation 7: Plan to resolve the budget deficit effectively

No judgement applied

At the time of the core inspection the school had significant budgetary issues. By 2013 the school had made very good progress to resolve the budget deficit.

The school is judged to have made sufficient progress in relation to the recommendations following the core inspection in May 2012. Over the past three years the school has managed its budget effectively. However, projected figures for the next three years suggest that the school again faces a growing budget deficit. Falling roles and a worsening financial position may reduce the school's ability to sustain the progress made over the past four years.

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

Very good progress in addressing the recommendation

The school meets the statutory requirement to provide a daily act of collective worship.

Recommendations

In order to maintain and improve on this progress, the school should continue to sustain the level of progress it has already made, and continue to address those inspection recommendations where further progress is required.