

Re-inspection

of

**Ysgol y Berwyn
Heol Ffrydan
Y Bala
Gwynedd
LI23 7BN**

School number: 6614033

Date of inspection: October 2009

The school was inspected in November 2007 and was identified as a school that required significant improvement. In accordance with the requirements of the Welsh Assembly Government in relation to schools which require significant improvement, Estyn undertook two re-inspection visits, the first in February 2009 and the second in October 2009. These visits focused on evaluating progress in relation to the recommendations contained in the November 2007 inspection report.

The outcome of the re-inspection

Ysgol y Berwyn has made good progress in relation to the recommendations of the Section 28 inspection report of November 2007. Furthermore the Senior Management Team (SMT) has demonstrated that it has the capacity to ensure the further necessary improvements. As a result, the Chief Inspector of Education and Training in Wales has removed the school from the list of schools that require significant improvement.

Progress since the last inspection

To follow is a summary of the progress that has been made in improving the school on the basis of the recommendations of the November 2007 inspection report. For ease of reference, the recommendations have been re-arranged in order to give attention to similar aspects together.

Recommendation 1: Define more clearly the roles and responsibilities of the SMT to ensure that there is greater focus on monitoring standards, teaching/learning, and consistency and rigour in the quality of line management of faculties, departments and year teams.

Recommendation 3: Re-define the current middle management structure and develop the role and accountability of middle managers.

Recommendation 7: Improve the processes of self-evaluation and planning for improvement at all levels across the school to ensure that developments are effectively prioritised, monitored, evaluated and supported.

The link between departments and the contact member of the SMT has been strengthened, with clear lines of accountability having been determined. There is increasing evidence of the SMT identifying and challenging aspects of underachievement by subject departments. Departments and the contact member of the SMT have agreed on a clear list of departmental action points based on an analysis of examination and assessment results in summer 2009.

There has been an improvement in the school's planning processes and in the quality of the development plans. The school development plan is based on detailed analysis of performance and clearly identifies aspects that require improvement. There is a clear focus on raising standards, and improving the performance of boys in particular, together with the recommendations of the November 2007 inspection and the monitoring visit by Estyn. Increasing use is made of quantitative targets, including the challenging target of raising the proportion of good teaching or better to 80% of lessons. Departmental development plans do not contain sufficient detail about the steps to be taken to implement aims, particularly improving the performance of boys. The use of quantitative targets in departmental development plans is limited.

Since Estyn's last visit, good progress has been made in the development of monitoring and quality control systems at senior management team level in the school. With substantial assistance from the local authority's advisory service, Cynnal, an extensive programme of classroom observation was held across the school, giving grades 1-5 to standards of achievement and the quality of teaching in every class. A useful report summarising the conclusions was prepared, and this has been shared with staff and the governing body. As a result, the SMT and the governing body have a better understanding of quality and standards across the school. There is a good match between the profile of the grades of the internal review and those awarded by Estyn's inspectors during the most recent monitoring visit.

There are definite plans to revisit those classes in the second half of this term that received lower grades in the first round in order to review progress. Also, there are plans in the pipeline to undertake a programme of classroom observation with attention being given to pupils' communication skills across the curriculum.

There have been useful opportunities for heads of core subject departments to participate in the observation programme during the summer term and to develop their monitoring and quality control ability. They have also contributed to whole-school reviews on the quality of marking and responding to children's work by examining samples of work books. However, there is still much that needs to be done to develop the roles of heads of department in this important aspect of their responsibilities and to ensure greater consistency.

The expectations and monitoring responsibilities of managers are not clearly defined at all levels and there is no programme in place to provide a clear direction in relation to monitoring and evaluation in the medium and long term. This has been included as one of the aims in the 2009-2012 School Development Plan.

Recommendation 2: Increase the management time of the SMT and develop this role to co-ordinate assessment for learning and embed key skills in the curriculum, and promote good features to all departments by sharing best practice.

Recommendation 4: Revise the current assessment policies and procedures to ensure that all staff use assessment diagnostically to improve pupils' performance.

Recommendation 6: Raise pupils' expectations by developing a rigorous process for target-setting procedures to ensure that pupils have an input to their own targets and understand how to achieve them; all available performance data are used effectively to establish appropriate challenge in each pupil's individual target, and staff are pro-active in the process.

The school has succeeded in ensuring more time for members of the SMT to secure improvements across the school. This has led to an improvement in the quality of teaching and whole-school assessment systems.

As a result of reviewing the assessment policy, there has been an improvement in the way in which teachers show pupils how to improve their work. This includes more instances of looking together with pupils at examples of work which shows good standards and sharing success criteria with the pupils. Pupils are becoming more familiar with personal targets for improving their work. However, inconsistency still remains between subjects, in particular in key stage 3.

The computer system for recording assessments is increasingly used to track the progress of every pupil and to identify those pupils who are underachieving. On the basis of this, specific target groups are allocated in every school year, and every subject indicates what steps they will take to ensure improvement by every pupil in

the target group. In the case of pupils who are on the GCSE C/D borderline, the school contacts the parents or guardians to ensure the attendance of pupils at the weekly mentoring meetings.

The school has begun to seek external accreditation in key skills. Last year, approximately 80% of Year 9 pupils gained level 1 accreditation in information technology and about 40% of them gained level 2 in communication. There are no opportunities for Years 10 and 11 pupils to gain accreditation. In the sixth form, the majority of pupils gain level 3 in either the application of number or communication and level 2 in information technology.

Recommendation 5: Raise standards and examination results by extending the range of teaching and learning strategies to meet the needs of all pupils and in particular:

- ***substantially reduce the levels of underachievement identified in middle and lower ability boys; and***
- ***raise standards in French and music in KS3, Science in KS4, and ICT across the school.***

There has been a significant improvement in the quality of teaching that has led to better achievements by pupils in the classes. To date, sufficient improvement has not been achieved in external examination results.

Standards of achievement in classes

The inspection team observed 25 lessons during its most recent visit. The standards pupils achieved in these lessons are as follows:

Grade	1	2	3	4	5
Number of lessons	2	17	5	0	1
%	8%	68%	20%	0%	4%

The proportion of lessons in which standards were given grade 1 or 2 was 76%. This is now similar to the national average and is a significant improvement on standards during the inspection held in November 2007 and the previous monitoring visit. The percentage of standards awarded grade 1 remains low.

In general, pupils show better motivation when learning. They listen intently and concentrate in lessons, they respond to tasks with interest and enthusiasm and are more willing to expand on their answers to their teachers' questions. As a result, they are making better progress in their understanding of the work in question.

The results of assessments and external examinations

There has been a significant improvement in the results of medium and low ability key stage 4 pupils. The percentage of pupils who gained 5 or more A*-G grades (level 1 threshold) increased from 79% in 2008 to 95% in 2009. But there was no improvement in the percentage of pupils who gained 5 or more A*-C grades (level 2

threshold). As a result, the school compares unfavourably with schools in the same national family against this indicator and is likely to remain amongst the lowest 25% of similar schools across Wales.

In key stage 3, there has been an improvement over the last three years in the performance of pupils in mathematics and science, but a decline in Welsh and English. In 2009, the performance in Mathematics compared favourably with similar schools across Wales but the performance in Welsh, English and science was below the median.

Boys continue to underachieve. For example, only 38% of the boys in the school attained the level 2 threshold in 2009, which is much lower than the county figure (55%) and the figure for Wales (54%).

In general, the school's performance in the summer 2009 examinations was considerably lower than the school's targets. One reason for this is the shortcomings in the process of determining challenging and attainable departmental and whole-school targets on the basis of individual pupil targets.

Quality of teaching

The grades awarded by the inspectors for the quality of teaching are as per the following table:

Grade	1	2	3	4	5
Number of lessons	6	13	5	0	1
%	24%	52%	20%	0%	4%

As in the case of standards of achievement in classes, the proportion of lessons in which the quality of teaching was either grade 1 or 2 was 76%. Here again, this figure is similar to the national average and is a significant improvement on the figure during the previous monitoring visit.

Lessons have a clearer structure and teachers use a better range of varied and practical teaching methods to gain pupils' interest. More attention is given to key skills in lessons. Teachers' questions continue to improve and encourage a fuller response and a more open discussion by pupils.

Where the teaching is not so good, insufficient thorough checking is undertaken to ensure that pupils have understood the work before moving on to the next activity. In general, the cases in which lessons have differentiated learning activities, particularly when there is a wide range of ability in a class, are limited.

There have been insufficient opportunities for teachers to visit other schools to observe good practice and to deepen their understanding of the features of excellence.

Recommendation 8: Improve curricular provision in KS4 and the sixth form by introducing a wider range of vocational and other courses to meet the Welsh Assembly Government's 14-19 Learning Pathways agenda.

By collaborating with other schools and Coleg Meirion-Dwyfor, the range of subjects that are provided in key stage 4 has been extended. The total number of qualifications that are provided complies with the Learning and Skills (Wales) Measure for the current school year.

The post-16 choice has improved this year but remains limited. The total of 19 subjects is likely to be far below the proposed requirements of the Assembly. Only one vocational option (health and social care) is provided. Although the school's sixth form students receive information about courses in nearby colleges, they are unable to combine vocational courses in the school and in college.

Recommendations for improvement

In order to maintain the progress to date and to ensure further improvement, the school must:

- R1 improve pupils' performance against the main key stage 4 indicators, in particular the level 2 threshold and the performance of boys;
- R2 clearly define the monitoring and evaluation responsibilities for managers at all levels and draw up a specific and comprehensive monitoring programme;
- R3 continue to develop the observation skills of middle managers and their use of data;
- R4 strengthen the systems for determining the school's targets;
- R5 plan differentiated tasks to meet the needs of pupils of different abilities particularly in mixed ability classes;
- R6 organise opportunities for teachers to visit other schools to observe excellence; and
- R7 improve the range of qualifications which are provided for post-16 students.