Report following monitoring

Level of follow-up: Special Measures

Ysgol Gymraeg Gwynllyw
Folly Road
Trevethin
Pontypool
Torfaen
NP4 8JD

Date of visit: February 2023

by

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

This report is also available in Welsh.

Outcome of visit

Ysgol Gymraeg Gwynllyw 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 standards, particularly the standards of boys and more able pupils

In many lessons, pupils make sound progress in their subject knowledge and understanding, and in the most effective lessons, they make strong progress. Many pupils also make sound progress in their literacy skills, by contributing orally and completing reading and writing tasks successfully. They also complete number tasks suitably across the curriculum. This is a significant improvement in comparison with the time of the core inspection in April 2019.

In many lessons, pupils recall their previous learning appropriately and apply their understanding successfully. For example, they show a mature understanding of Martin Luther's attitude towards Jews and are able to explain the differences between anti-Semitism and anti-Judaism eloquently. They make links in their learning by using their previous learning skilfully to apply their knowledge and understanding effectively to new situations. In a few lessons, pupils do not make as much progress as they could, mainly due to shortcomings in teaching.

Most pupils listen carefully and respectfully to their teachers and the contributions of their peers. Many express themselves clearly orally and use an appropriate range of subject terminology to explain their views. These pupils are keen to discuss with a partner or to contribute answers to class discussions. A few pupils give answers of a very high standard and develop sophisticated explanations. The contributions of a minority of pupils are littered with English words but, with the support of their teachers and fellow pupils, they develop their Welsh vocabulary and syntax appropriately. A few pupils are reticent and do not make robust enough development in their oral skills.

When reading, many pupils locate information effectively and come to relevant conclusions about the implied meanings in texts. They are able to gather information from more than one text to summarise the information for a purpose appropriately. More able pupils analyse and evaluate text skilfully, for example when analysing the atmosphere in the work of Arthur Conan Doyle, the *'cynghanedd'* in a poem by Emyr Lewis or discussing the suitability of sources about the First World War.

A majority of pupils develop sound writing skills across the subjects and in both languages. Many pupils organise their work sensibly by using paragraphs suitably and punctuating appropriately. A majority write suitably in a range of genres for various audiences. A few pupils are developing as confident writers and use

extended phrases and vocabulary to enrich their work. However, the work of a minority of pupils is littered with spelling errors, awkward syntax, or the use of English words.

Many pupils develop their numeracy skills appropriately and apply the four number rules suitably. They add and subtract decimals and round up numbers that include decimals successfully. More able pupils are able to produce and interpret various graphs effectively and come to sensible conclusions. They draw scatter diagrams appropriately and identify correlation. A majority of pupils apply their numeracy skills suitably across the curriculum. They use grouped data to label maps appropriately, use equations correctly and discuss graphs suitably.

A majority of pupils make sound progress in their information and communication technology (ICT) skills. For example, they use coding skills appropriately when using software to plan digital games. Many pupils use software to research and present information for a variety of purposes successfully.

Many pupils develop their creative and physical skills appropriately. For example, they show creativity when using body movements to create characters in their drama lessons. A majority of pupils use their thinking skills suitably, for example when calculating angles to solve problems or when ordering and explaining factors that cause floods in geography.

R2. Improve the quality of teaching and assessment

Since the core inspection, the school has strengthened provision to support teaching and assessment to respond to the needs of the whole school and individual staff. The professional learning *'Rhaglen Gymell'* programme provides valuable support for all teachers at the school. Leaders have adapted professional learning sessions sensibly to give teachers more time to experiment and embed practice in the classroom. As part of the *'Rhaglen Gymell'* programme, teachers are given regular opportunities to attend beneficial professional learning sessions that focus on priorities for developing teaching set by the school's pedagogy leaders. One-to-one sessions also provide useful support to respond to the personal and subject priorities of individual teachers. This programme of professional development is having a positive effect on the quality of teaching, in addition to pupils' standards of achievement in areas such as their oracy skills and vocabulary.

Nearly all teachers have a positive working relationship with pupils and ensure their engagement to learning successfully. Overall, there is a supportive and productive environment that enables many pupils to contribute enthusiastically orally when giving answers and discussing with their peers. Most teachers have sound subject knowledge and present clear instructions and explanations. Many teachers plan beneficial activities that build on each other to enable pupils to make sound progress in their learning. They present subject knowledge enthusiastically and use attractive resources to support teaching. These teachers are good language models who present and enrich pupils' vocabulary effectively. They ask a combination of closed and open-ended questions to help pupils recall previous knowledge appropriately. These teachers circulate the classroom regularly to check pupils' understanding of the work and provide useful oral feedback.

In the few lessons where teaching is at its strongest, the teachers' passion towards their subjects inspires pupils. These teachers plan skilfully to spark pupils' interest and deepen their understanding. They have high expectations of what pupils can achieve and challenge them very effectively. These teachers use scaffolds and modelling strategies wisely to support learning purposefully. They question to probe pupils understanding effectively and develop them as increasingly independent learners. As a result, pupils in these lessons make strong and swift progress.

In a minority of lessons, less robust teaching means that pupils do not make as much progress as they could. These teachers do not structure learning strongly enough so that there are opportunities for pupils to build on their knowledge and understanding step by step to apply it to the main task of the lesson. They include presentations that are too lengthy, activities that do not have a clear purpose or they fail to model work.

The quality of feedback that teachers place on pupils' work continues to be variable. In a majority of examples, feedback provides pupils with firm and clear guidance, which helps them to improve their work. In these instances, teachers ensure that pupils respond to the purposeful targets by allocating time for them to respond. This has a positive influence on the progress they make. A majority of teachers draw attention to spelling errors in subject terminology and ensure that pupils correct them. Where teachers' feedback is not as useful, comments are too generic to help pupils to improve their work. In a few cases where peer assessment strategies are used, pupils do not always understand the success criteria clearly enough to provide useful feedback to their peers.

R3. Improve provision to develop pupils' skills in literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology (ICT)

Since the core inspection, the school has strengthened its provision for literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology (ICT). The school implements beneficial strategies to develop pupils' skills across the curriculum and these have a positive effect on pupils' skills. Since September 2022, there is a permanent co-ordinator for each of the skills, with a support headteacher keeping an overview and acting as their line manager. Regular line management meetings ensure that strategies are monitored appropriately to consider their effect on pupils' standards.

Overall, there are valuable opportunities to develop pupils' oracy, reading and writing skills. Senior leaders have provided useful professional learning sessions for staff to develop opportunities for pupils to use their oral skills. This beneficial training includes strategies for questioning pupils, useful strategies to improve subject vocabulary and guidance to support pupils' syntax. The increase in the opportunities given to pupils to develop their oral skills is having a positive effect on the quality of many pupils' oral contributions and vocabulary across the curriculum.

Work to develop literacy skills has focused sensibly on provision in high demand departments, such as religious education, geography and history. In these subjects, there are valuable opportunities to develop pupils' reading and writing skills. Leaders have worked with departments to develop tasks that reflect the way that the language departments teach pupils to write different kinds of texts. For example, writing for different audiences and purposes when expressing an opinion, writing a monologue,

evaluating and writing letters. This work has a positive effect on the quality of a majority of pupils' responses. However, there are still weaknesses in standards of pupils' writing, with the work of a minority of pupils littered with spelling, punctuation and grammatical errors. Overall, although attention is given to spelling terminology, there is not enough emphasis on improving pupils' expression and syntax.

By working closely with subject heads, leaders have mapped provision to develop pupils' numeracy and ICT skills suitably and they have a sound understanding of the quality of tasks. Since returning to school following the pandemic, they have worked together to improve the provision that already existed appropriately and expand opportunities further. As a result, in relevant subjects, there is a suitable range of appropriate opportunities for pupils to develop their numeracy and ICT skills. The mathematics department has revised its schemes of work to ensure increasing opportunities for pupils to develop their reasoning and problem-solving skills. However, there is not enough emphasis in mathematics or across the curriculum for pupils to develop these skills.

Leaders use relevant data appropriately to identify strengths and areas for improvement in terms of pupils' standards of numeracy. Data is also used appropriately to identify pupils who need further support with basic numeracy and reading skills. The school has a suitable intervention programme to support pupils with weak literacy and numeracy skills.

Leaders monitor provision for skills carefully through activities such as scrutinising work, lesson observations and analysing data. They now have a better awareness of strengths and weaknesses in provision than at the time of the core inspection. They prioritise and plan purposefully to improve important areas, such as oracy and reading skills. This planning is beginning to have an effect on pupils' skills.

R4. Improve the quality and effect of leadership at all levels

Since the core inspection, the school has faced periods of instability in terms of leadership. A permanent headteacher has now been appointed following a period acting as the support headteacher. He has a clear vision and, with the support of the rest of the senior leadership team, has developed a culture of co-operation and collaboration to ensure improvement. Under their guidance, structures and processes have been developed to address important areas, including self-evaluation and planning for improvement, teaching and skills. As a result, there is improvement in pupils' standards and in the quality of provision compared with the time of the core inspection.

There is a logical structure to the senior leadership team and their duties have been distributed sensibly so that there is a suitable balance. Senior leaders have a good understanding of their roles and the roles of other members of the team and work together closely and productively to develop their areas. Over time, leaders have focused on the recruitment and retention of staff in key roles by implementing succession plans.

This year is a period of transition from one leadership structure to another to form faculties that align with the areas of learning and experience and the re-organisation of pastoral responsibilities. Leaders at all levels now work together beneficially

through different teams that focus on specific aspects, such as teaching and learning, curriculum development and well-being and inclusion. There are clear lines of communication between senior leaders, middle leaders and the wider staff, which succeed in maintaining a positive ethos and fostering a sense of co-operation.

Middle leaders understand their roles suitably and take increasing responsibility for implementing quality assurance and self-evaluation processes in their departments. The school provides a valuable professional learning programme to develop the skills of middle leaders in evaluating the standard of pupils' skills and teaching. Senior leaders hold them to account appropriately by challenging them on standards in their areas of responsibility.

The school has revised the performance management system to align with the proposed staffing structure and their targets are suitable and sensible. The school addresses staff underperformance suitably. Leaders are able to access professional learning that responds to their individual needs to improve their leading and teaching skills. Leaders at all levels benefit from beneficial opportunities to discuss pedagogy through the *'Rhaglen Gymell'* programme. They work together to develop pedagogy in their departments and share teaching practices in departmental meetings and regular link meetings. This has led to improvements in the quality of teaching and pupils' skills.

Governors are knowledgeable and know the school's strengths and weaknesses. They play an active part in evaluating progress against the school improvement plan and challenge leaders firmly.

R5. Improve the rigour and effectiveness of quality improvement processes

Since the core inspection, leaders have introduced beneficial changes to the procedure for improving quality. They have placed a clear emphasis within quality assurance processes on strengthening the skills of middle leaders in particular, in addition to focussing more on the progress that pupils make in their subject understanding and skills.

A wider range of stakeholders are now involved in the school's self-evaluation processes. There are beneficial opportunities for pupils to voice their opinions on teaching at departmental level and departments make adjustments as a result of the findings. Governors are more knowledgeable about the school's work through the new system for link governors and there are clear examples of them challenging the school's work. Staff benefit from valuable opportunities to observe and give each other feedback and to evaluate their own work by analysing relevant data. The school also works productively with external partners to validate and ensure the consistency of its findings and to complement its professional development programme.

The school has introduced a new system of useful departmental reviews. Middle leaders take ownership of these activities and have evolved and strengthened the process since its introduction by learning from each other. These reviews include lesson observations, scrutiny of work and seeking the views of pupils and staff. Middle leaders have received valuable self-evaluation training and have observed and scrutinised alongside senior leaders and external partners. Findings from the

reviews are useful and provide a beneficial overview of the work of departments and are a valuable basis for planning for improvement. As a result of these activities, middle leaders have improved their understanding of performance in their areas of responsibility, although a minority are continuing to develop this understanding.

More recent whole-school quality assurance activities have a better focus on pupils' standards, in addition to provision. For example, the findings of learning walks identify specifically the aspects of pupils' skills that need improvement. As a result, leaders have implemented strategies and the positive effect of this can be seen, for example, on pupils' oral skills. Middle leaders also have an improved focus on pupils' standards, but this continues to be an area for improvement for some as they scrutinise work and take part in lesson observations.

Leaders have revised the procedure for meetings, recognising that they focused on too many things. As a result, line manager meetings and, to a lesser extent, departmental meetings, now focus on teaching and learning and include valuable activities such as joint scrutiny of books.

As a result of strengthening self-evaluation procedures, senior leaders have good knowledge of the school's main strengths and areas for improvement. Planning for improvement at whole-school level reflects this knowledge and progress against priorities is reviewed regularly. Departmental improvement planning includes departmental priorities based on the self-evaluation of middle leaders and their departments, but also reflect whole-school priorities where it is sensible to do so. This means that improvement planning is more relevant to the work of departments. However, in a few cases, these plans include too many priorities.