



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: Significant improvement**

**Abersychan Comprehensive School
Incline Road
Abersychan
Pontypool
NP4 7DF**

Date of visit: March 2018

by

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

Outcome of visit

Abersychan School is judged to have made sufficient progress in relation to the recommendations following the most recent core inspection.

As a result, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education and Training in Wales is removing the school from the list of schools requiring significant improvement.

Progress since the last inspection

R1. Raise standards at key stage 4, and for pupils with additional learning needs

Since the time of the core inspection, the school's performance at key stage 4 improved well in many indicators in 2017.

Performance in the level 2 threshold including English and mathematics and the capped points score indicator is now in line with that of similar schools. In many indicators, pupils make strong progress from previous key stages. Despite these improvements, pupils' performance in a minority of indicators remains below that of pupils in similar schools.

The performance of boys and girls improved in the majority of indicators in 2017 compared with 2016. While girls' performance is above the average for girls in the family in the majority of indicators, that of boys is lower than the average for boys in the family in most indicators. The performance of pupils eligible for free school meals improved well in 2017 in many indicators and is above the average for similar pupils in the family in the majority of indicators. The performance of pupils with additional learning needs improved notably in 2017.

Many pupils read and write in Welsh competently. The most able at key stage 4 converse capably in Welsh with their peers and visitors. A minority of pupils achieve a level 2 qualification in Welsh.

Most pupils show sound recall of prior learning. They work competently independently and with others. They settle quickly to tasks and many show resilience when challenged. Many pupils also apply their knowledge successfully to new situations. In doing so, they develop their subject specific skills well during lessons. However, in a few lessons, a minority of pupils do not engage well enough in their learning and, as a result, do not make enough progress.

In many lessons, nearly all pupils listen well to their teachers. When given the opportunity, a majority of pupils use subject specific vocabulary confidently to explain their ideas and thinking. A few provide well-developed, eloquent responses. However, a minority of pupils' responses to teachers' questions are too brief.

Many pupils use a range of effective strategies to extract information and draw suitable inference from texts. A minority of pupils are able to provide detailed, thoughtful analyses of the materials that they read, for example when reviewing how effectively Martin Luther King persuades his audience to believe in his cause.

Most pupils have well-presented books. The majority write well at length for a suitable range of purposes across the curriculum. They structure their writing appropriately and convey their ideas effectively in their written work. For example, they use complex technical terms adeptly when discussing how intensive farming can affect the water cycle and climate. A few pupils write very confidently at length and vary what they write effectively to interest and engage the reader. The majority of pupils write generally accurately. However, a minority of pupils make frequent technical and grammatical errors. A few of these pupils do not express their ideas clearly in their work, which further impedes its quality.

The majority of pupils have strong number skills and learn and apply new methods successfully. They show sound mathematical reasoning skills and a minority of pupils apply these effectively to real life situations. The majority of pupils draw a range of graphs competently and interpret information contained in them accurately.

In general, pupils do not develop their information and communication technology (ICT) skills well enough in subjects outside of ICT.

R2. Improve attendance and behaviour

Since the time of the core inspection, the school has put in place rigorous and effective systems to promote, monitor and support good attendance and behaviour.

The school has strengthened considerably the strategic and operational oversight of its work in this area. Pastoral roles have been reviewed suitably, and heads of year now focus well on behaviour, attendance and wellbeing. A new and simplified behaviour management system is used well by nearly all staff. The school uses detailed information on behaviour and attendance to plan suitable interventions to target improvements effectively. It works well in partnership with pupils and parents to address persistent absence and behavioural issues. The school has developed an effective range of strategies to promote and celebrate good behaviour and attendance, for example through a wide range of enjoyable rewards.

Rates of attendance at the school, in particular those of pupils eligible for free school meals, have improved well and compare favourably with those of similar schools. The school is now a calm environment, where most pupils behave well. They are polite and respectful to their peers, teachers and visitors. However, in a few instances, a few pupils are not as well behaved as their peers and disrupt the learning of others.

R3. Strengthen the quality of teaching and the provision for skills

Since the core inspection, the school has implemented many useful strategies to improve the quality of teaching, for example the sharing of good practice regularly through teaching forums and staff newsletters.

Nearly all teachers demonstrate strong subject knowledge and are good language role models, and most forge productive working relationships with pupils. Many teachers plan effectively and set an appropriate level of challenge in their lessons. They use a wide range of approaches to sustain pupils' engagement and interest well. Many teachers have appropriate expectations of pupils in regard to their standard of work and behaviour. The majority of teachers secure strong pace and challenge to the learning in their lessons. Many use pupils' individual education plans appropriately to provide suitable support in lessons. However, a minority do not adapt tasks to meet pupils' needs consistently well.

In a few instances, teaching is energetic, passionate and inspiring. In these lessons, teachers create an extremely positive learning environment and challenge pupils successfully to produce high quality work. However, a few teachers do not plan work that is challenging enough or manage behaviour consistently well in their lessons. As a result, they do not engage all pupils successfully.

Many teachers provide useful verbal feedback to individual pupils and the whole class. The majority explore pupils' understanding well, challenge them through effective questioning, and allow them enough time to respond fully. A few teachers encourage pupils, through clever questioning, to elaborate on their ideas and those of others in order to strengthen the understanding of the whole class well. However, a few teachers do not question effectively to deepen understanding, or focus on too few pupils when seeking responses.

The school has suitable plans in place to develop pupils' literacy and numeracy skills in subjects outside of English and mathematics. Pupils at key stage 3 benefit from valuable skills' lessons. Departments have assumed responsibility for suitable aspects of the literacy and numeracy framework. Co-ordinators provide teachers with valuable support to improve provision for skills, for example to develop methodology in numeracy and approaches to extended writing. How well departments develop pupils' skills is variable. For example, many teachers provide suitable opportunities for pupils to write at length. However these opportunities do not develop consistently well pupils' ability to write for a wide range of purposes across the curriculum. Provision for the development of pupils' ICT skills across the curriculum is underdeveloped.

R4. Strengthen the provision for additional learning needs

Since the core inspection the school has strengthened suitably its provision for additional learning needs. The appointment of a new additional learning needs co-ordinator has ensured that there is a more cohesive and comprehensive approach to planning for and monitoring the progress of pupils with additional learning needs.

For example, staff have received valuable training on how to support pupils of all abilities effectively. The departmental 'additional learning needs champions' play a key role in sharing useful information and good practice within departments. The additional learning needs bulletin provides regular updates about individual pupils and helpful strategies to support their progress. The school has also produced valuable individual education plans for pupils, which include useful targets and teaching strategies. However, in a minority of lessons, teachers do not adapt work well enough to meet the needs of all pupils.

The additional resource base provides pupils with a safe environment that promotes positive attitudes to learning. Staff in the base provide expert support for pupils with specific learning needs in the resource base and in mainstream lessons. The 'Learning to Live' centre is used well to meet the needs of pupils with identified behavioural issues. This provision is now monitored thoroughly to ensure that nearly all pupils are given appropriate support to help them re-engage with their learning. These approaches have contributed effectively to improved behaviour among pupils at the school.

The school has worked productively with external providers to offer a wide range of appropriate vocational courses to pupils. This extended provision has helped to secure higher attendance rates for learners with additional needs and engage them in their learning.

R5. Improve leadership across the school, and in particular the leadership of wellbeing

Since the time of the core inspection there have been substantial changes in senior and middle leadership, including to the leadership of wellbeing. The school has refined suitably the roles and responsibilities of leaders so that they are clear and align well to whole-school priorities.

The deputy headteacher, with responsibility for the strategic co-ordination of the full range of wellbeing provision at the school, oversees highly effectively the work of heads of year, the additional learning needs co-ordinator and the attendance and behaviour support teams. This has had a material impact on improving the behaviour and attendance of pupils at the school and the outcomes for pupils with additional learning needs at key stage 4.

Middle leadership at the school has been strengthened well through new appointments and robust processes for holding all middle leaders rigorously to account. There are strong arrangements in place for all heads of department to review examination performance annually with senior leaders and governors. Ongoing assessment information is reviewed monthly with a member of the senior team in charge of raising standards to ensure that leaders maintain their focus on monitoring and improving pupil outcomes consistently throughout the year. Regular line management meetings focus well on the improving the quality of teaching and

learning. Extensive leadership training has strengthened well the ability of many to fulfil their roles effectively. However, there remains variability in the ability of a few middle leaders to improve outcomes in their departments.

The school has strong performance management arrangements and staff's targets align well with whole school priorities. These targets are challenging and are closely monitored throughout the cycle. This has resulted in more rigorous and effective line management arrangements.

The governing body is substantially strengthened. Governors have a clear and thorough understanding of the school's strengths and areas for improvement and provide the school with strong support and rigorous challenge.

R6. Strengthen self-evaluation and improvement planning

Since the core inspection, the school has continued to strengthen arrangements for self-evaluation and improvement planning. This has had a positive impact on pupil outcomes, attendance and behaviour.

The school has a well-organised calendar of self-evaluation activities. Leaders now accurately identify strengths and areas for development following lesson observations and scrutiny of pupils' work, and this information is used well to provide support and challenge to teachers in order to improve the quality of provision and pupils' outcomes.

Whole school self-evaluation includes detailed analyses of data that identify trends and performance against that of similar schools appropriately. Success criteria include challenging targets for whole-school performance. The school takes account of first hand evidence well, including pupils' views. It is developing its use of the views of parents, staff and governors appropriately. As a result, the report gives an accurate picture of the school's strengths and areas for improvement. The school's improvement plan links well to self-evaluation findings.

Since the core inspection, the senior leadership team has provided valuable support to middle leaders in order to help them improve their practice in self-evaluation and improvement planning. Senior and middle leaders carry out many quality assurance activities together, and this effectively provides middle leaders with worthwhile opportunities to develop their skills in evaluating performance.

Many middle leaders now use data appropriately to analyse pupils' outcomes. However, a few do not use data accurately to identify all key priorities for improvement. Departmental improvement plans link well to the findings of middle leaders' self-evaluation, and they monitor progress against the plans rigorously. The actions identified in a few of these improvement plans are not always clear enough or the plans do not include sufficiently precise success criteria.

Heads of year evaluate their work suitably, and plan for improvement in aspects such as attendance and behaviour appropriately.

As a consequence of these arrangements, the quality of teaching and learning has improved, pupils' outcomes have improved in many indicators in key stage 4 in 2017, rates of attendance have risen notably and the school is now a calm and pleasant environment.