



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**

**Builth Wells High School
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Date of visit: November 2017

by

**Estyn, Her Majesty's Inspectorate for Education and
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Outcome of monitoring

Builth Wells High School is judged to have made sufficient progress in relation to the recommendations following the core inspection in October 2015.

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 all key stages

Satisfactory progress in addressing the recommendation

Provisional data for 2017 indicates that, since the core inspection, performance at key stage 4 has improved in the majority of indicators and particularly so in those that include English and mathematics. The extent of this improvement is greater than the average improvement in similar schools in the majority of the indicators. However, in many indicators, performance does not compare well to that in similar schools. Although outcomes at the end of key stage 4 remain in need of further improvement, many pupils make suitable progress in lessons.

Performance in the level 2 threshold including English or Welsh and mathematics has improved by nearly 10 percentage points over the last two years. Similarly, the proportion of pupils gaining five GCSE or equivalent grades at A*-A has also improved over the last two years. Although performance in the capped points score improved in 2016, it fell in 2017 and is now lower than at the time of the core inspection. In all of these indicators, performance remains below that of similar schools.

At key stage 4, performance in mathematics has improved slightly over the last two years and continues to compare well to that in similar schools. In addition, performance in English has improved by over 11 percentage points since the core inspection, although performance in Welsh has declined.

In 2017, the performance of boys at key stage 4 improved and was better than at the time of the inspection in half of the indicators. For girls, it was the same in only a very few indicators.

All sixth form pupils achieved the level 3 threshold in 2017, as was the case in the previous year. Nevertheless, their performance in all other indicators has fallen, does not compare well with levels in similar schools, and is lower than at the time of the core inspection.

Many pupils make suitable progress in lessons. They develop well their understanding of topics ranging from ballads and narrative openings to the causes of The Wall Street Crash. However, a minority of pupils demonstrate limited recall of recent learning such as the structure of the atom and how this is represented in the periodic table. In a few instances, pupils' progress is hampered by their failure to address missing or incomplete work.

Most pupils listen with attention and respect to their teachers and peers and provide appropriate verbal responses including sharing their ideas and opinions. A majority provide clear and suitably developed responses, including the use of subject specific vocabulary, on topics ranging from the flying styles of different birds to interpretations of poetry and the accurate definitions of mathematical terms and concepts. A few pupils use a much wider and more sophisticated vocabulary. However, a few pupils' verbal responses lack sufficient clarity and precision, such as when trying to describe how to identify the median value.

Many pupils have a suitable range of reading strategies that they use well to support their learning. Most read effectively to locate and extract information about topics including the character of Henry VIII and push and pull factors related to immigration into America. Many pupils use inference and deduction suitably to support their understanding of literary characters such as Macbeth and his relationship with his wife, and Lord Capulet and his ambitions for and changing relationship with his daughter. A majority of pupils in both English and Cymraeg analyse the content of poems suitably. However, a minority of pupils do not extract sufficient detail in their reading. Frequently, they identify key features but miss less evident aspects.

Many produce writing that is technically secure and suitably structured including narrative pieces, discursive essays on Shakespeare and balanced historical analyses such as whether or not Henry VII deserves the title of Welsh hero. A few pupils express efficiently in writing their feelings about pieces of art and a few older pupils write eloquently expressing emotional responses maturely. However, a minority of pupils use clumsy expressions and continue to make too many basic errors in their writing.

A majority of pupils use numeracy appropriately, for example calculating the average number of people executed each day when discussing the cruelty during the reign of Henry VIII. A majority of pupils produce accurate and well-presented graphs such as when plotting the current flowing through different lengths of wire.

Many pupils work well collaboratively undertaking warm-up fitness activities, netball shooting technique practices and discussing the value of openings to narrative writing.

Most pupils demonstrate positive attitudes to their learning. They are punctual to lessons, equipped suitably and settle quickly to their learning.

Recommendation 2: Improve the quality and consistency of teaching and assessment

Strong progress in addressing the recommendation

Since the core inspection in 2015, the school has implemented a range of useful strategies that has helped to improve the quality of teaching and assessment.

Nearly all teachers have positive working relationships with pupils and many manage their classes well. Many teachers have suitably high expectations of what pupils can achieve in lessons, for example the correct use of scientific terminology when describing the stages of digestion in science.

Many lessons are well-planned and incorporate a suitable range of learning activities that engage pupils' interests well and support an appropriate pace of learning. These lessons include effective starter activities that help secure continuity in learning, and an appropriate focus on the development of pupils' literacy and numeracy skills. However, in a few lessons, the work does not engage pupils well enough and does not provide a suitable challenge, particularly for more able pupils.

Many teachers use effective questioning to probe pupils' understanding. A very few make extensive and skilful use of developmental questions to encourage pupils to analyse and expand upon their explanations.

In most lessons, teachers provide helpful verbal feedback to pupils. In the majority of instances, teachers' written feedback to pupils on subject-specific and literacy aspects of their work is particularly useful. In these instances, effective use is made of followup questions to help pupils improve their work. Many pupils respond appropriately, for example by redrafting to improve sections of their work. However, in a minority of cases written feedback to pupils is too superficial and does not provide them with clear enough guidance on how to improve their work.

The school tracks and monitors pupils' progress well. This enables middle leaders to identify pupils who are underperforming and implement a range of suitable support strategies.

Recommendation 3: Ensure that performance management and line management systems are effective in challenging any underperformance

Strong progress in addressing the recommendation

Since the core inspection, the school has implemented a robust and supportive performance management system. This is used effectively to address areas of underperformance in order to improve standards and the quality of teaching.

Senior leaders and governors work well together to provide appropriate challenge and support to staff, including when underperformance is identified. This is contributing to improvements in the quality of teaching.

Line management arrangements have been revised appropriately and there is balanced allocation of responsibilities which reflect school improvement priorities well. This has helped to establish a strong, whole school focus on improving pupil outcomes, enhancing the quality of teaching and improving pupils' literacy skills.

The headteacher and her senior leadership team work together well to drive forward a range of effective improvement strategies. The quality and consistency of middle leadership have been improved through beneficial internal and external support programmes.

All leaders and staff have specific performance targets against each of the school's three key priorities. Progress in achieving their objectives is reviewed suitably.

Revised performance management and line management systems have contributed to improved pupil wellbeing and are beginning to impact positively on standards.

Recommendation 4: Ensure that self-evaluation and improvement planning have an impact on improving the quality of teaching, assessment and outcomes

Strong progress in addressing the recommendation

Since the core inspection, the school has implemented effective arrangements to strengthen the quality of self-evaluation and improvement planning. These processes are contributing well to improvements in the quality of teaching and assessment and, in particular, to cultivating pupils' literacy skills.

There is a systematic and rigorous cycle of quality assurance activities that provides relevant information about many areas of the school's work. These activities include a regular programme of lesson observations and scrutiny of work that focus appropriately on pupils' skills and progress. The school also carries out helpful surveys of the views of pupils, parents and teachers.

The self-evaluation report is a comprehensive, well-structured and data-rich analysis of outcomes and the effectiveness of provision across the school. It provides a robust and generally accurate evaluation of these aspects. Senior leaders support middle leaders well to produce helpful departmental reviews that include detailed analyses of pupil outcomes. As a result, leaders at all levels have a secure understanding of particular strengths as well as key areas for improvement.

The school improvement plan sets out clear, high-level priorities and includes suitable initiatives that focus directly on raising standards, developing pupils' skills and improving the quality of teaching and learning. Departmental plans contain a suitable range of actions that address these priorities well. Performance targets are suitably challenging and take appropriate account of previous outcomes, pupils' progress and performance in similar schools.

There are useful arrangements to monitor the implementation of key improvement initiatives. However, these evaluations do not always measure the impact of specific actions sharply enough.

Recommendation 5: Improve the behaviour of pupils in the classes where their disruption hinders the progress of other pupils

Strong progress in addressing the recommendation

Since the core inspection the school has implemented a positive behaviour policy that outlines clearly the roles and responsibilities of pupils, parents, staff and governors. Arrangements to support this policy include the introduction of an electronic system for recording pupil behaviour. This is used effectively to recognise good behaviour and identify any instances of poor behaviour. These approaches are contributing to nearly all pupils behaving well in lessons and around the school. Most are courteous and respectful to adults and to their peers.

Progress managers undertake useful learning walks to monitor pupils' behaviour. This helps to ensure consistency in application of the schools' behaviour policy. In addition, staff receive beneficial training in behaviour management, for example in using restorative approaches. Most teachers deal well with the few incidents of poor behaviour.

The school has improved well its communication with parents. This includes providing parents with their child's behaviour record as well as their records on attendance and progress.

The school has recently employed a behaviour support officer and established a nurture room to support pupils at risk of underachieving. However, it is too early to evaluate the impact of these initiatives.

Recommendation 6: Ensure that governors use performance data effectively to monitor and challenge underperformance, particularly standards and the quality of teaching

Strong progress in addressing the recommendation

Since the core inspection, senior leaders have improved the range, quality and clarity of information, including performance data, which governors receive. This helps governors to monitor and challenge school performance suitably. There is a strong relationship between senior leaders and the governing body based on this open and transparent sharing of information.

Governors receive regular detailed reports which identify trends in pupil performance, including appropriate benchmark analyses. They also receive a useful report on the standard of teaching. This helps governors in understanding clearly the specific challenges the school faces in improving the quality of teaching and in raising standards.

Governors are supported well to improve their use of key performance data, for example through their attendance at senior leadership and curriculum progress managers' meetings. Their involvement in the work scrutiny process has also helped strengthen governors' understanding of this aspect of the school's work and their ability to hold staff to account.

Recommendation 7: Improve the planning for the development of literacy skills across all subjects

Satisfactory progress in addressing the recommendation

Since the core inspection, the school has implemented a suitable range of strategies to support the development of pupils' literacy skills. Many pupils now produce writing that is technically secure and use a suitable range of reading strategies to support their learning. However, it is too soon to identify the full impact of these strategies.

The school has made effective use of the national reading tests to identify pupils' weaknesses in reading and provide all pupils in Years 8, 9 and 10 with a reading target. These targets are known and understood by pupils and by staff in key subject areas who provide useful support and monitor progress appropriately.

Revised lesson observation and work scrutiny records now focus well upon the development of pupils' skills. The school makes suitable use of these records to monitor pupil progress and evaluate the learning opportunities provided. As a result, the school has now identified common aspects of reading and writing that need to be improved. Learning opportunities to address these skills across the curriculum have been reviewed and improved accordingly.

The school is aware that simply providing opportunities for pupils to use their skills will not in itself lead to rapid enough improvement. As a result, the literacy co-ordinator and the consortium staff have provided useful training for teachers to help them support pupils effectively.

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.