



Rhagoriaeth i bawb – Excellence for all

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**

**Heolddu Comprehensive School
Mountain Road
Bargoed
Caerphilly
CF81 8XL**

Date of visit: June 2015

by

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

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The monitoring team

Alwyn Thomas	Reporting Inspector
Michelle Gosney	Team Inspector
Farrukh Khan	Team Inspector
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Outcome of monitoring

Heolddu Comprehensive School is judged to have made sufficient progress in relation to the recommendations following the core inspection in September 2011.

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 in literacy and in key stage 3

Satisfactory progress in addressing the recommendation

During the core inspection of Heolddu Comprehensive School in September 2011 the school was identified as requiring monitoring by Estyn. During the monitoring visit that took place in November 2012, the school was placed in the category of a school requiring special measures as a result of declining standards at key stage 4.

Since the monitoring visit in 2012, the school has introduced a wide range of useful strategies to improve performance at key stage 3 and key stage 4.

At key stage 3, performance in the core subject indicator and the core subjects individually has improved significantly. In 2014, performance in all indicators is similar to the average for the family of schools and places the school in the upper 50% of similar schools based on levels of eligibility for free school meals.

In key stage 4, performance in the level 2 threshold including English and mathematics and the core subject indicator has improved by almost 12 percentage points since the time of the 2012 monitoring visit. In 2014, this performance places the school in the lower 50% of similar schools from previously being in the bottom 25%, based on eligibility for free school meals. However, performance in this indicator remains below the average for the family of schools.

Performance in the level 2 threshold has improved by over six percentage points since 2012. However, performance in 2014 is still below the average for the family of schools and places the school in the bottom 25% of similar schools based on levels of eligibility for free school meals. Performance in each of the core subjects has improved since the monitoring visit. In 2014, performance in English placed the school in the upper 50% of similar schools from previously being in the bottom 25%. Science performance has remained in the top 25% of similar schools for the past four years. Performance in mathematics has improved, moving the school from being in the bottom 25% of similar schools in 2012 to the lower 50% of similar schools based on free-school-meal eligibility in 2013 and 2014.

Since the 2012 monitoring visit, the performance of pupils eligible for free school meals has improved by over 14 percentage points in the level 2 threshold including English and mathematics and improved by over 10 percentage points in the level 2 threshold. In 2014, performance in the level 2 threshold including English and mathematics is above the average for the same group of pupils in similar schools.

However, performance in the level 2 indicator is below the average for this group of pupils in similar schools.

In a majority of lessons, most pupils are well motivated and respond positively to their teachers. They behave very well and remain on task throughout the lesson. In these lessons, most pupils enjoy the range of different activities presented and work enthusiastically in pairs and small groups to complete tasks. They listen carefully to the teacher and each other and demonstrate secure understanding of many of the main points being discussed.

The majority of pupils develop their writing skills suitably. They use appropriate subject vocabulary to complete tasks and structure their writing suitably in a range of different forms. However, the writing skills of a minority of pupils remain weak. Often this is because of poor presentation, limited use of varied vocabulary and sentence structures, and too many basic errors in spelling, punctuation and grammar.

In a few subjects, such as science and design technology, pupils use their numeracy skills well to collect data and to solve problems. However, the majority of middle and lower ability pupils struggle with basic aspects of numeracy, and this inhibits their progress in mathematics lessons and across the curriculum.

Recommendation 2: Improve the quality of teaching to increase the level of challenge for all pupils

Strong progress in addressing the recommendation

Since the time of the monitoring visit in 2012, there has been a marked improvement in the quality of teaching.

Senior leaders have an accurate understanding of the strengths and areas for improvement of the teaching staff. Evidence to support their judgements is gathered from a comprehensive programme of lesson observations and book reviews. Recent initiatives have improved further the clarity with which strengths and areas for improvement in teaching, marking and assessment are recorded and communicated to teachers.

The school has continued to address areas for improvement well through the provision of a programme of training for teachers that is targeted at identified needs. These activities contribute effectively to improved consistency in the quality of teaching and in the judgements of standards and teaching observed in lessons.

In many lessons, teaching is effective in ensuring that pupils make good progress. In these lessons, teachers plan carefully to include a well-balanced variety of activities that maintain pupils' interest at a high level and that develop their subject knowledge and understanding progressively. Teachers establish a positive working ethos that fosters well the development of pupils' learning skills. Teachers have high expectations of pupils and they use questioning skilfully to probe and extend the learning. On occasions teachers demonstrate innovative use of Information Communication Technology to support learning and teaching.

In a minority of lessons, pupils do not make enough progress because of shortcomings in teaching. In these lessons, teachers do not plan sufficiently to meet the need of pupils' differing abilities, or do not explain concepts and principles underlying the work clearly enough. In a few lessons, teachers talk for too long which limits pupils' independent learning. These judgements are broadly in line with the school's own self-evaluation of teaching quality.

Since the 2012 monitoring visit, the school has implemented worthwhile procedures that have resulted in significant improvements in teachers' marking. Overall, teachers' comments on pupils' work are much more relevant and diagnostic. In many subjects there is a useful learning dialogue in which teachers' explanations of how work can be improved elicit thoughtful pupil responses that contribute to their learning. The school has developed useful procedures for marking for literacy, which place appropriate, strong emphasis on identifying spelling and grammatical errors and supporting pupils to correct them. Teachers are implementing these procedures well in many departments.

Book reviews are an integral and valuable aspect of the work of senior and middle managers. More rigorous procedures for responding to the findings of book reviews are helping to reduce inconsistencies in the quality of marking and feedback on pupils' work.

Recommendation 3: Increase accountability for improving standards and quality, especially through the establishment of rigorous line management arrangements

Strong progress in addressing the recommendation

Since the Estyn monitoring visit in October 2012 the school has seen considerable change in the senior leadership team. During this time, the school appointed two temporary headteachers and two deputy headteachers that have since retired. This means that the leadership team has completely changed. The current permanent headteacher has been in post since the beginning of the summer term 2014. Since the last monitoring visit, the school has appointed a deputy head teacher and two of the three acting assistant headteachers now have permanent roles. This has helped to increase the capacity of the senior leadership team in order to plan and implement improvements.

The recently introduced 'management tracker' system enables the leadership team to maintain a comprehensive overview of how thoroughly they are fulfilling their responsibilities and to identify aspects which need attention and support. For example, through the tracker, the school identified areas where there were issues with attendance. To address this, the school employed a family liaison officer whose work has helped to improve pupil attendance. The tracker system also enables the team to challenge each other constructively on performance to date, at the regular team meetings.

Performance management reviews appropriately include staff self-evaluation, individual action plans, professional development action plans, job descriptions update forms, lesson observation forms and in year monitoring. However, they lack

reference to how individual staff objectives relate to departmental and school priorities.

Middle leaders are suitably held to account by the senior leadership team. They have fortnightly meetings with their allocated member of the senior leadership team. These meetings appropriately include a focus on standards. Middle leaders are challenged well on areas of underperformance and support is provided where needed.

The school has recently improved the process for undertaking book reviews. Newly developed book review forms ensure that the teacher undertaking the scrutiny evaluates key aspects of teacher responses to pupils' work. These aspects include pupils' writing, numeracy skills, presentation, target setting and teacher/pupil feedback. This is enabling middle managers to hold departmental members to account better for the quality of work in pupils' books and in delivering support to help teachers address action points arising from the reviews.

Link governors attend department meetings and have also increased their involvement in holding middle leaders to account. For example, one link governor has undertaken work scrutiny to ensure that the school's marking policy is being implemented consistently in that department.

Recommendation 4: Improve the focus and sharpness of self-evaluation processes and improvement planning

Strong progress in addressing the recommendation

Since the 2012 monitoring visit, the school has made strong progress in improving the quality of self-evaluation at both whole school and department level.

The whole school self-evaluation report now contains a thorough evaluation of performance data and accurately identifies areas for further improvement. The recent introduction of new lesson observation and book review templates has led to an improved focus on pupil outcomes. The judgements made of the standard of teaching and learning across the school are more accurate. The senior leadership team have effective procedures to evaluate the school's performance and identify strengths and areas for improvement.

There is a clear link between the self-evaluation report and the school improvement plan. The plan identifies appropriate priorities that have measurable targets. It includes staff responsible, clear timescales against which to evaluate progress, and details of resources to support improvements. This new document provides a useful framework to support the leadership team as they continue to move the school forward.

Department self-evaluation reports link well with the whole school report but there is too much variation in the quality of these reports. Many departments effectively analyse outcomes, with suitable comparisons to similar schools. These departments are beginning to include the evidence from recent lesson observations and book scrutiny in their evaluation of provision. This has led to a more accurate assessment

of the quality of teaching and learning within their departments. However, this approach is not yet consistent across all departments and the areas for improvement identified in the updated self-evaluation reports have yet to be included in their department improvement plans.

Recommendation 5: Meet statutory requirements for the daily act of collective worship and address the specific issues of health and safety that inspectors brought to the school's attention

Very good progress in addressing the recommendation

The school's arrangements to provide a daily act of collective worship now meet statutory requirements. The school has two assemblies each week and has a structured framework for providing a 'thought for the day' in every tutor group on the other days. This framework appropriately includes private reflection and group discussion of the day's topic.

The themes and focus for the 'thought for the day' are relevant to pupils' daily experiences and occasionally topics are chosen by pupil requests. The programme of topics is, wherever possible, appropriately linked to religious themes and what is going on in the wider world. It includes, for example, historical events, anniversaries and other current events.

The school has taken appropriate actions to address successfully the specific health and safety issues brought to its attention during the core inspection in 2011.

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.