



Arolygiaeth Ei Fawrhydi dros Addysg a Hyfforddiant yng Nghymru
His Majesty's Inspectorate for Education and Training in Wales

Report following monitoring

Level of follow-up: Significant Improvement

**Brecon High School
Penlan
Brecon
Powys
LD3 9SR**

Date of visit: November 2022

by

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

Outcome of visit

Brecon High School is judged to have made insufficient 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 increasing the level of follow-up activity.

In accordance with the Education Act 2005, His Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that special measures are required in relation to this school. The school will draw up an action plan to show how it is going to address the recommendations.

Estyn inspectors will re-visit the school following receipt of the action plan, to ensure that it is suitable and likely to bring about the required improvements. Inspectors will visit the school again, in a further four to six months' time, to monitor progress in addressing a sample of the recommendations. Under the provisions of Section 39 (9) of the Education Act 2005, every annual report to parents prepared by the governing body under Section 30 of the Education Act 2002 must include a statement on the progress made in implementing the action plan.

The Education (Induction Arrangements for School Teachers) (Wales) Regulations 2015 state that an induction period may not be served in a school requiring special measures i.e. as described in grounds 6 or 8 in section 2 of the School Standards and Organisation (Wales) Act 2013 (1). The presumption is that schools requiring special measures are not suitable for providing induction for newly qualified teachers, other than in exceptional circumstances. Therefore, schools requiring special measures should not normally appoint a newly qualified teacher (NQT) to their staff.

Progress since the last inspection

R1. Improve standards at key stage 4, including those of more able pupils

Many pupils have sound recall of prior learning, for example when describing the character of Slim in 'Of Mice and Men' or outlining the essential elements of the human diet. Overall, around half of pupils make suitable progress. Where pupils make insufficient progress, this is because expectations are not high enough and teachers do not probe or extend pupils' learning sufficiently.

The quality of pupils' extended writing is variable. More able pupils are able to structure pieces appropriately and have a clear sense of audience and purpose. In English lessons, the weekly writing challenges provide helpful opportunities for pupils to develop their writing. For example, pupils explain how the character of Curley's wife epitomises attitudes towards women in 1930s America. Despite having more frequent opportunities to write at length, around half of pupils' writing lacks technical accuracy. Often pupils do not proofread their work and although errors are identified by the teacher, a minority of pupils continue to make similar mistakes. The school has recently introduced a new approach to support pupils to improve their spelling.

When given the opportunity, many pupils read aloud confidently with clarity and good pronunciation, although a few make errors with fluency and expression. Many skim and scan texts suitably to locate information, for example when preparing presentations about the seven natural wonders of the world or gathering information about Malala Yousafzai.

The majority of pupils provide brief verbal responses to questions. A few provide extended answers when prompted, for example when explaining the reasons for deforestation. Overall there are too few opportunities for pupils to speak at length.

Many pupils listen well to their teacher and their peers although a minority do not listen attentively and miss some of the instructions given. These pupils are slower to get started with their work and often require prompting or support from their teacher.

During the past six months there has been a significant increase in opportunities for pupils to use and develop their numeracy skills across the curriculum, particularly in humanities subjects and science. The majority of pupils can apply basic multiplication and division when solving problems. Many draw graphs accurately and understand the importance of scales, axes, labels and titles. They use a variety of graphs to represent different types of data, although they do not interpret these well enough. A minority of pupils make basic errors in their graph work, for example not labelling units accurately, or they select the wrong type of graph to present their data.

In ICT lessons many pupils use advanced database skills such as validation and verification accurately. Across the curriculum, they use spreadsheets to construct bar graphs.

Many pupils in the Welsh stream are confident when speaking and reading. Their pronunciation is generally sound, although the quality of their written work is variable. A majority have difficulty expressing themselves in writing and make frequent errors with spelling, punctuation and mutations. Pupils respond to teacher feedback and redraft their work appropriately, for example when outlining their views on the benefits of being bilingual.

R2. Improve attendance

Since the core inspection, the school has implemented a wide range of beneficial strategies to support improvements in attendance. Pupils are attending school more regularly this year compared to last year, when the COVID-19 pandemic had a negative impact nationally on school attendance. Considerably fewer pupils are persistently absent this year compared to last.

The school has a helpful and detailed policy, which aims to encourage good attendance. It has been adapted to meet the specific needs of Brecon High School, taking account of feedback from pupils and parents. This has been supported well by relevant scrutiny of attendance data and stronger links with families to help improve attendance.

The school has reviewed its attendance reward system so that it is now in line with their overall approach to rewarding good behaviour and achievement. It has raised the profile of attendance through assemblies, form periods and displays that highlight

the importance of good attendance. Pupils can purchase a variety of items from a virtual shop, and they particularly value the opportunity to convert their points into donations to their chosen charities.

The school analyses attendance rates closely and allocates a key worker to support any pupils identified as having low attendance. The key worker's role is to liaise closely with the pupils and help remove any barriers that affect their attendance. This process has supported improvements in attendance for these pupils. A useful reintegration programme for persistently absent pupils helps them return to school. The school's attendance officer liaises well with parents and pupils.

The school has improved the way it communicates with parents through a mobile application. This provides a beneficial communication channel between the school, parents and pupils and includes useful feedback on pupils' attendance.

R3. Improve the learning experiences of pupils including the quality of teaching, the curriculum at key stage 4 and the provision to develop their skills

Leaders are developing a clearer vision for teaching in Brecon High School. Staff have undertaken helpful professional learning to improve specific aspects of teaching, such as the level of challenge and improving questioning. However, not all teachers apply these strategies well enough.

Most teachers have good working relationships with their classes. In the minority of lessons where teaching is most effective, teachers have strong subject knowledge and provide clear explanations which help pupils understand what they need to do. These teachers use a variety of techniques to engage pupils' interest and develop their knowledge, understanding and skills suitably. In the strongest lessons, teachers model learning effectively and ask probing questions to extend pupils' understanding. These teachers circulate the room and provide helpful verbal feedback to pupils.

Where teaching is less effective, important shortcomings limit the progress pupils make. In these lessons, teachers' expectations of what pupils can achieve are too low and the pace of learning is not matched well enough to pupils' needs. As a result, pupils do not sustain their focus on learning or make sufficient progress. Furthermore, teachers do not always use subject specific vocabulary accurately, nor do they address misconceptions. They are not clear about the intended learning and do not direct learning well enough. As a result, they plan for what they want pupils to do rather than what they want pupils to learn, and this limits the progress that pupils make.

In general, teachers provide appropriate verbal feedback at relevant points in lessons. However, most teachers ask mainly closed questions and do not support pupils well enough to develop their verbal responses. They identify spelling errors appropriately in pupils' work, although in general written feedback does not identify the specific aspects that pupils need to improve.

Overall, the school provides a more appropriate curriculum than at the time of the core inspection. In Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form, the school has increased suitably the range of subjects and pathways offered, including those in partnership with other local schools and colleges. Many pupils are able to study their first-choice

subject and the school provides appropriate and timely advice to pupils regarding their choices.

The school has recently strengthened systems to improve the provision for skills and has identified suitable opportunities for subject areas to contribute to this strategy. Systems are less well developed for the Welsh stream, although the school has enabled a Welsh speaking middle leader from a core subject to carry out an evaluation of provision.

Overall, progress against this aspect of the recommendation has been too slow. Although leaders have put in place supportive activities to improve teaching, and pupils now have more opportunities to develop their higher order skills, it is too early to measure the impact of these strategies.

R4. Improve the quality and impact of leaders at all levels including their ability to self-evaluate robustly and accurately to support effective school improvement

The headteacher has placed a strong emphasis on building a positive culture of mutual support and respect. Senior and middle leaders are working together collegiately and purposefully to address improvement priorities. Recently, leaders have refreshed approaches to addressing the recommendations from the core inspection, and this has led to a greater consistency in systems and processes. However, leadership has not had sufficient impact on improving the quality of teaching and learning.

The headteacher has worked collaboratively with governors to adjust the roles and responsibilities of the senior team. He has created an extended leadership team that has helped to build capacity, improve succession planning and allows the school to respond to new initiatives, such as approaches to tackling disadvantage. The lead practitioners take on important areas of the school's work with commitment and they have a clear vision for these specific aspects. However, senior leadership roles and responsibilities are not equitable. Not all senior leaders have roles that are suitably strategic and in some cases are very narrow. Furthermore, there are gaps in the leadership structure in key areas, such as the leadership of the Welsh stream. Middle leaders support the school's ambitions diligently. Generally, they have a good understanding of the span of their responsibilities and carry out their roles conscientiously.

A notable proportion of teachers are teaching outside their subject expertise. Although middle leaders work hard to support these teachers, overall, their professional learning needs are not managed sufficiently well by the school. This has a negative impact on the quality of teaching.

Recently, leaders have strengthened quality assurance processes and started to analyse the outcomes of work scrutiny and lesson observation. This has provided evidence of areas for improvement in a few key areas, such as the correct use of the marking policy. Overall, self-evaluation and planning for improvement processes remain insufficiently rigorous. Leaders identify broad areas for improvement, but priorities for curriculum areas and subject teachers are not clear or specific enough. Leaders do not consider well enough how the effectiveness of teaching strategies is

measured by the impact on pupils' learning. This continues to hamper their capacity to plan for improvement effectively.

Middle leaders are conscientious in completing self-evaluation records and action plans for their areas of responsibility. Regular quality assurance meetings provide beneficial opportunities to discuss the progress of individual pupils. They are developing their capacity to evaluate teaching and learning, but they do not identify specific areas for development precisely or put in place clear actions to address them and this is hindering progress.

Governors support the school well and provide suitable challenge. They continue to develop their understanding of the school's strengths and areas for development.

R5. Provide robust financial management

Since the core inspection, the school has worked with the local authority to review the arrangements to tackle the large deficit budget. The school has agreed a recovery plan with the local authority, and this has been ratified by the governing body and implemented by the school. While considering how to reduce the deficit, leaders conducted a beneficial exercise to review all outgoings and have taken steps to reduce staffing costs by restructuring non-teaching roles across the school.

The headteacher, finance officer and governing body consider carefully the impact of any planned spending and monitor expenditure regularly. Some elements of the budget are difficult to identify precisely, for example rising utility costs. In addition, the budget is based on significant but unconfirmed projected growth in pupil numbers over the next few years. Despite the school's efforts to identify and estimate these variables, the school is projecting a significant in-year deficit budget. Leaders are working with the local authority finance team to consider how best to manage the budget in the future and have planned a review in the new year.

Over time, the school has made appropriate use of additional grants, including the pupil development grant.

R6. Address the health and safety issue raised during the inspection

Since the time of the core inspection the school has relocated to a new building. As a consequence, the issues brought up during the inspection have been addressed. No further health and safety concerns were raised during this visit.

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