



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**

**Ysgol Gyfun Cwm Rhymni
Heol Gelli Haf
Fleur De Lys
Blackwood
NP12 3JQ**

Date of visit: February 2019

by

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

Outcome of visit

Ysgol Gyfun Cwm Rhymni is judged to have made insufficient 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 increasing the level of follow-up activity.

In accordance with the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that this school requires significant improvement. The school will produce an action plan indicating how it will address the recommendations.

Estyn will re-visit the school after receiving the action plan, to ensure that it is suitable and likely to drive the required improvement. Inspectors will visit the school again in approximately 12 months' time to monitor progress in addressing 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.

Progress since the last inspection

R1. Improve performance in key stage 4, especially among the pupils who are eligible for free school meals

Although the majority of pupils make satisfactory progress in their lessons, they do not make sufficient progress in external examinations in key stage 4. In lessons, most pupils show positive attitudes towards their learning and behave very well. Many are interested in their lessons and ready to work. They show evident pride in their work and, on the whole, the presentation of their work is good.

Most pupils listen respectfully to their teachers and to each other. Many are willing to contribute to class discussions. When they are given the opportunity, pupils provide extended verbal contributions, but on the whole, they do not develop this skill sufficiently. A few have a limited vocabulary and express themselves awkwardly.

When reading, many pupils have sound basic skills. They skim and scan competently and locate and gather information appropriately. Most can deal suitably with factual and literary reading materials. These pupils interpret texts efficiently and use technical terms accurately in doing so. For example, in history, they analyse a variety of historical sources in order to form an opinion about living conditions during the industrial revolution. However, when studying literary texts in particular, a minority tend to identify techniques mechanically rather than analyse their effect in line with the requirements of the task.

Many pupils organise their writing appropriately and form paragraph purposefully. In a range of subjects across the curriculum, the majority produce extended writing for different purposes suitably, displaying an appropriate understanding of audience. A few pupils have a rich vocabulary and they vary their sentences skilfully, for example

when writing passionate speeches about the environment. However, a minority of pupils write inaccurately and are careless in terms of their punctuation. In addition, a minority are over-reliant on scaffolding when producing their written work, and over time, they do not develop their independent writing skills sufficiently.

The majority of pupils have a suitable grasp of the main number concepts and apply their skills and knowledge appropriately in new situations. For example, in geography, pupils use the scale of a map confidently to calculate the distance between cities in South America. The majority gather and organise data appropriately, produce accurate graphs and use the information to form sensible conclusions.

On the whole, pupils use basic information and communication technology (ICT) skills appropriately to research and present information, although they do not develop their advanced ICT skills suitably. They are competent in using interactive software to work collaboratively on specific projects, such as work on conditions in the trenches during the First World War.

In a few lessons, pupils develop their thinking skills appropriately, for example when working out which birds could survive on various islands in the Galapagos. However, the majority do not develop their thinking skills sufficiently. A minority are over-reliant on the teacher's support and their independent learning skills are not sufficiently developed. A few pupils are slow to begin their work and lose interest in it.

Since the core inspection, the school's performance in most of the key indicators in key stage 4 has not compared favourably with the performance of similar schools. Performance in the level 2 indicator including English or Welsh and mathematics has been below expectations for four years. Performance in the capped points score has been notably below expectations for three years. In the 5 GCSE A*-A grade or equivalent indicator, the school's performance has been variable over this period, but it declined in 2018 and is below expectations. There was also a notable decrease in the level 1 indicator in 2018.

Performance in the core subjects has been varied since the time of the inspection. Performance in Welsh has improved gradually every year and in 2018 it is above expectations. Performance in mathematics and English has been inconsistent over the same period. In 2018, performance in both subjects is below expectations, notably so in mathematics.

The performance of pupils who are eligible for free school meals has been very varied. There was improvement in their performance in about half the indicators in key stage 4 in 2017, but overall, their performance has not compared favourably with the performance of their peers in similar schools since the core inspection.

Since September 2018, leaders have acted robustly to analyse the reasons for the decline in standards in key stage 4. In response, they have put new procedures in place and have refined processes appropriately, although it is too early to judge their effect on standards. For example, they have strengthened their progress-tracking system and introduced a new procedure for link meetings. Governors have also reviewed their systems and established a self-evaluation panel that enables them to support and challenge the school better than in the past. However, prior to this

recent period, leaders have not acted strategically enough or promptly enough to identify and respond to the lack of progress in standards. Self-evaluation systems have not been sufficiently sharp to identify weaknesses, for example, in identifying that arrangements for assessing, tracking and monitoring pupils' progress were not sufficiently reliable or robust. In addition, arrangements for monitoring quality and ensuring accountability have not been rigorous enough. Because of this, leaders have not prioritised appropriately and improvement plans have not been sufficiently strategic or timely. As a result, leaders have not had a sufficient effect on standards.

R2. Improve attendance levels

Recently, leaders have responded positively to the need to improve pupils' attendance. They use varied and useful strategies to increase attendance and this work has had a positive effect on pupils' attendance in 2018. However, previously, the school's strategies to improve attendance were not robust enough and leaders did not respond quickly enough nor effectively enough to enable adequate progress.

Attendance has improved gradually since the core inspection but the improvement has been more notable in the past year. In 2018, the school's performance is similar to that of similar schools for the first time in over four years. Persistent absence has decreased over this period and in 2018 it is substantially lower than in similar schools. The attendance of pupils who are eligible for free school meals has improved steadily since the inspection. It compares favourably with similar schools.

The school has reviewed the work of the wellbeing team appropriately. The new attendance officer offers valuable support to progress leaders and to pupils and their families. There is now a definite direction to the work of improving pupils' attendance and there are clear lines of accountability between middle managers and members of the senior leadership team. Since September 2018, the wellbeing leaders have been held to account appropriately by the governors.

Recently, the school has been successful in communicating its high expectations regarding pupils' attendance. It gives a clear explanation to all stakeholders of the link between pupils' attendance and their achievement. The importance of attendance is given prominent attention in newsletters, at parents' evenings and in pupil contact books.

Leaders have developed positive strategies for encouraging better attendance. For example, the competitive element between classes to ensure the best attendance has engaged pupils' enthusiasm. The challenge of the '15-day marathon', which targets attendance in the 15 days before any holiday, has also contributed positively to a reduction in absence levels. The valuable provision in the 'wellbeing room' has made a beneficial contribution to raising levels of attendance of vulnerable pupils.

In 2017-2018, there was a substantial increase in the number of exclusions but they have begun to decline since September 2018. Suitable provision in the Hafan for pupils that are in danger of being excluded makes a valuable contribution to the recent reduction in exclusions.

R3. Reduce the variation in teaching by continuing to share the best practices that exist in the school

Most teachers have a constructive working relationship with pupils and many have good subject knowledge.

In many lessons, teachers plan activities that succeed in engaging pupils' interest. In these lessons, teachers communicate clearly and provide useful resources. They offer beneficial support to pupils by circling the class and giving purposeful verbal feedback, where necessary. In the majority of lessons, teachers provide a broadly suitable challenge for pupils, although they do not give enough attention to developing their thinking skills. On the whole, teachers do not provide enough challenge to extend the most able pupils.

In a very few particularly effective lessons, teachers demonstrate infectious enthusiasm towards their subject and there is a fervour to the learning that inspires pupils. In these lessons, teachers provide activities that offer sufficient challenge for all pupils across the range of ability. They model and exemplify their high expectations for pupils and provide them with valuable opportunities to learn for themselves, without interfering unduly with the learning. They question pupils probingly, insisting that they respond at length and explain their reasoning.

In a minority of lessons, teachers' expectations of what pupils can achieve are not high enough. These teachers do not prepare activities that are sufficiently challenging. They lead pupils excessively, giving them too much help. They do not provide enough opportunities for pupils to develop their independent learning skills.

In many lessons, teachers' questioning is not perceptive enough. They do not ask questions that give pupils opportunities to answer at length, developing their subject understanding as well as their oral skills.

The school has focused purposefully on improving the quality of feedback to pupils. Many teachers offer constructive written feedback on pupils' work and explain clearly what they need to do to improve. Their comments include an appropriate balance between subject targets and those that focus on improving language skills. This feedback has a positive influence on pupils' progress. In the majority of cases, teachers ensure that pupils respond purposefully to their comments and they check their improvements appropriately. However, inconsistency across departments and subjects in terms of effective implementation of the assessment policy hinders its wider influence.

Since the core inspection, the school has provided beneficial opportunities for teachers to observe peers and share good teaching practice in specific areas. Recently, the school provided appropriate training on how to evaluate the quality of teaching. However, overall, leaders do not place sufficient emphasis on evaluating the quality of teaching according to its effect on pupils' standards, progress and skills when they observe lessons and scrutinise work. Furthermore, they do not identify specific enough areas in need of improvement in the teaching. Although the school seeks pupils' views to evaluate the standard of teaching, it has not made appropriate use of this information. As a result of these aspects, variation persists in the quality of teaching and plans to improve the quality of teaching are not specific enough.

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