



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**

**Acton Park Primary School  
Box Lane  
Wrexham  
LL12 8BT**

**Date of visit: January 2019**

**by**

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

## Outcome of visit

Acton Park Primary 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 in pupils' writing across the school and in mathematical development in the Foundation Phase**

The introduction of a range of new teaching techniques has had a positive impact on the writing skills of most pupils. For example, the use of a 'co-crafting' collaborative approach has greatly improved most pupils' ability to write for a range of purposes and audiences. As a result, most pupils now consider carefully the quality and accuracy of their writing and often identify correctly where they need to make improvements. However, the school has been more successful in embedding this beneficial technique in key stage 2 than the foundation phase. Increasingly, teachers ensure that pupils write for a range of real life purposes, such as creating newspaper reports for the local paper or writing wedding cards to the Duke and Duchess of Sussex. This provides pupils with genuine purpose for their writing and encourages them to produce work of a high standard.

Overall, there has been a marked improvement in pupils' understanding and application of basic skills in sentence construction, punctuation and spelling. In many cases in key stage 2, pupils demonstrate imaginative vocabulary choices. For example, pupils in Year 6 use a wide range of persuasive vocabulary when writing to the headteacher to argue against a proposed shortening of the school holidays. In key stage 2, many pupils write well at length. However, by the end of the foundation phase, most pupils do not extend their writing sufficiently and many do not demonstrate suitable creativity and imagination in their vocabulary choices.

Many pupils in the foundation phase demonstrate a sound understanding of number that they apply successfully to solve simple calculations as part of mathematics lessons and in their wider topic work. For example, pupils in Year 2 use their understanding of place value well to double and halve numbers up to 100. Pupils in reception use their counting skills to create tally charts independently that reflect their class's favourite dinosaurs. By the end of the foundation phase, most pupils develop mathematical skills that are appropriate for their age and apply their knowledge well in real-life contexts. For example, pupils in Year 2 use their understanding of Venn diagrams and money to select the most suitable items to put in their backpack for a trip to the North Pole, a desert or a rain forest.

### **R2. Improve pupils' ability to work independently, to take responsibility for their learning and to develop their thinking**

Across the school, many pupils have developed their ability to work independently on their own, in pairs and in groups. For instance, pupils in Year 2 adopt the roles of interviewer and interviewee confidently, producing effective questions to ask the main character in their class book.

In all foundation phase classes, pupils take part in planning their topics, identifying what they know and what they want to find out. Weekly 'big challenges' begin to provide pupils with opportunities to plan their own learning activities. For example, Year 2 pupils decide to use a map with co-ordinates to help a famous adventurer to find his way out of the woods in their 'survival of the fittest' topic. However, in a few classes, pupils still do not take enough responsibility for leading their own learning during times when they access the provision that is routinely available to them during free-play activities.

'Welly days' provide suitable open-ended challenges for younger pupils in the outdoors. For example, many nursery and reception pupils collaborate successfully to work out how to transport dinosaurs safely across a river. This helps to develop their thinking, problem-solving and physical skills suitably. However, in general, many foundation phase pupils are still too reliant on adults to support them in their learning in outdoor activities.

Each half term, teachers introduce key stage 2 pupils to a new thinking strategy or tool. This approach has helped many pupils to consider the ideas of others, to question, to solve problems and to explain their reasoning more successfully. However, very few pupils can explain how these strategies support their learning and very few make their own decisions about which tools to use in independent tasks.

In key stage 2, many pupils have a clear understanding of their strengths and the next steps they need to take in learning. They respond conscientiously to teachers' guidance on how to improve their work. Nearly all pupils engage positively with opportunities to choose from a range of tasks at varying levels of challenge. This encourages most pupils to reflect on their own learning successfully and to push themselves to develop their skills to a higher level. As a result, many persevere in their tasks.

### **R3. Provide opportunities for pupils to apply their literacy and numeracy skills across the curriculum**

Since the core inspection, staff have received a range of valuable professional learning opportunities to improve their knowledge and understanding of how to develop pupils' literacy and numeracy skills effectively across the curriculum. This includes attending regional training events, visits to other schools, peer observation of lessons and sharing good practice regularly in departmental meetings. An agreed planning format has led to a more consistent approach to teachers' medium-term planning. Teachers consider carefully how to introduce skills in discrete English and mathematics lessons and how to provide pupils with beneficial opportunities to

practise these skills. For example, in the reception class, pupils consolidate their ability to measure with non-standard units in the enhanced provision. Subsequently, they apply their skills independently to pack dinosaurs into the correct boxes to send them to a museum.

In key stage 2, many teachers provide purposeful opportunities for pupils to apply their literacy and numeracy skills in 'rich' cross-curricular tasks, using imaginative or real-life contexts. Provision for numeracy is particularly effective. Nearly all pupils apply their numeracy skills in other subjects at the same level as in their mathematics lessons. For instance, in design technology, pupils in Year 6 work to a budget to design and make a model of an air raid shelter to withstand a kilogram weight successfully. They carry out research effectively to compare family life at Christmas during the Second World War with modern times, and they write their own play script, which they perform for parents and carers.

Teachers make good use of the school's electronic tracking system to identify gaps in the school's provision for pupils to apply their literacy and numeracy skills across the curriculum. Regular discussions with leaders in pupil progress meetings helps teachers to identify pupils who require further support or challenge to develop these skills. Through recent monitoring activities, leaders have recognised teachers do not provide pupils with enough opportunities to write at length in the foundation phase.

#### **R4. Ensure that all lessons move forward purposefully and challenge pupils to succeed at a worthwhile level**

The quality of teaching in most classes has improved since the core inspection. Staff have received a wide range of valuable professional learning opportunities, including peer coaching and regular support from the regional consortium to improve the quality of teaching. This has led to successful improvements in nearly all key stage 2 classes. However, there remains too much variability in the quality of teaching in the foundation phase. Most teachers now plan stimulating contexts for pupils' learning, which engage and motivate most pupils successfully. Effective schemes of work ensure that lessons build systematically on pupils' previous achievements and this has improved the continuity and depth of their learning, particularly in key stage 2.

Most teachers share clear learning objectives and discuss success criteria with pupils, so they know what they need to do to be successful in their tasks. In many classes, the pace of learning is brisk, teachers have high expectations for pupils' learning and they provide good challenge for pupils of different abilities. For example, in key stage 2, the 'chilli challenge' initiative has been successful in providing a more flexible approach to meeting individual pupils' needs. Across the school, many teachers use questioning effectively to develop pupils' understanding, including the more able. In a very few classes in key stage 2, teachers engage in extended dialogues with individual pupils to probe and explore concepts in depth. This helps to develop their thinking skills successfully. In general, teaching assistants provide appropriate support for individuals and group of pupils in

classroom activities and intervention programmes. However, teachers do not always plan well enough to make the best use of teaching assistant time during the introductions to lessons.

#### **R5. Ensure that teachers assess pupils' progress accurately and use the information to inform the next steps in pupils' learning**

Leaders have established effective systems to support all teachers to assess pupils' attainment and progress accurately against national expectations. The introduction of 'tracked books' has been particularly effective. In each class, teachers assess and review the work of a small group of identified pupils over time to assist with standardising teacher assessment across the school. This approach has improved teachers' understanding of the progression of skills development in the primary phase and raised their confidence in making accurate 'best fit' judgements. There have been regular opportunities for all staff to moderate pupils' work in year groups, across age phases and to attend cluster activities. As a result, assessments now match pupils' abilities closely.

Termly pupil progress meetings ensure leaders hold individual staff to account for the standards pupils achieve. Together, leaders and staff scrutinise a range of evidence, including how well pupils apply their literacy and numeracy skills across the curriculum. They discuss any barriers to pupils' achievement, such as wellbeing issues, and they identify pupils who require intervention or greater levels of challenge. As a result, these meetings have raised teachers' expectations of what pupils can achieve and supported them to set precise and sufficiently challenging targets for all pupils.

The school has a consistent approach to providing pupils with feedback on their work. As a result, most teachers provide effective verbal guidance to pupils while they are working and this enables them to improve their work immediately. In key stage 2, nearly all teachers provide high-quality written feedback to pupils, which identifies achievable next steps for their learning. They ensure that pupils have time each day to use this feedback to make notable, in-depth improvements to their work. For example, Year 6 pupils redraft their reports on music from different decades successfully to improve their content.

Many foundation phase pupils enjoy using 'sea creature' characters to begin to help them to evaluate how successful they have been in their learning, for example when creating a dinosaur fact file in the learning resource class. However, the school has not embedded this well enough across all foundation phase classes to make a strong enough impact on pupils' standards. In upper key stage 2, many pupils use self-assessment well in lessons and have a strong understanding of their strengths and the areas they need to improve.

#### **R6. Improve strategic leadership at all levels to ensure improved outcomes for pupils**

The headteacher has worked effectively with leaders and staff to develop a vision for the school that focuses clearly on improving the quality of provision and raising standards. She has distributed leadership responsibilities well among senior and middle leaders. All staff are clear about their roles and responsibilities and there is a developing ethos where nearly all staff view themselves as part of the school improvement process. This clarity of purpose has supported the school in taking effective action to address many of the areas of concern arising from the core inspection. For example, leaders have led a successful process of trial and refinement to improve the teaching of writing. This has resulted in many pupils, particularly in key stage 2, making marked improvements to their skills and ability to produce writing of high quality.

Leaders have developed effective whole school systems to support school improvement. For example, staff and leadership meetings focus well on the recommendations from the core inspection and have clear outcomes. Performance management processes are robust and support whole school priorities well, such as improving the quality of pupils' writing and developing teachers' questioning skills.

The governing body has strengthened its knowledge of the work of the school, successfully. Governors link with specific recommendations arising from the core inspection report. They meet with the staff responsible for each of these areas on a regular basis to develop their understanding of the progress the school is making. Increasingly, they use evidence gathered from looking at pupils' work and observation of lessons to ask relevant and challenging questions. These are beneficial in helping the school to drive forward improvements. Leaders and governors have sensibly begun to look beyond the recommendations of the core inspection report and have started to adapt their systems to focus on the next set of improvement priorities.

#### **R7. Ensure that school improvement activities link clearly to the outcomes of robust self-evaluation and monitoring processes**

Leaders have introduced robust processes to gather information on the quality of the school's work. They use this well to make judgements about the school's strengths and areas for improvement. These lead to well-planned actions that result frequently in improvements for their specific area of focus. For example, teachers worked very effectively to improve the range and quality of opportunities for pupils to apply their numeracy skills across the curriculum. As a result, the ability of pupils in key stage 2 to use their numeracy skills to support their learning in other subjects is now a strength of the school.

An increasingly wide range of staff participates in gathering first hand evidence on the work of the school through monitoring activities. For example, teachers and teaching assistants were recently involved in looking at pupils' work to judge the impact of new initiatives and identify further areas for improvement. This inclusive

approach from senior leaders successfully supports the development of an ethos where all staff are keen to take responsibility for school improvement actions.

The school is beginning to use the outcomes of monitoring activities successfully to identify and share good practice. For example, senior leaders used the outcome of lesson observations and pupil progress meetings to identify areas of strength in teachers' practice across the school. They then provided teachers with opportunities to undertake peer observations of their colleagues to support them in improving aspects of their professional practice.

Senior leaders ensure that improvement planning processes identify clear criteria against which to measure the impact of actions on the quality of provision and pupil standards. As a result, they have a clear picture of how successful their improvement actions have been and the areas that still require further development.

### **R8. Reduce the school's budget underspend**

Senior leaders work well with governors and local authority officers to ensure close control of spending. The school maintains effective records of expenditure and relates spending decisions closely to the needs of the school and its improvement priorities. As a result, the school now maintains an acceptable budget surplus.

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