



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**

**Bedwas High School  
Newport Road  
Bedwas  
CF83 8BJ**

**Date of visit: March 2019**

**by**

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

## Outcome of visit

Bedwas High 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 special measures.

## Progress since the last inspection

### R1. Improve standards at key stage 4

In 2018, the school's performance compares favourably with that in similar schools in all of the key indicators at key stage 4. Performance in the level 2 threshold, including English and mathematics improved in both 2017 and 2018 and compares well with that in similar schools. Over the last three years, performance in the capped points score has been broadly in line with that of similar schools.

While there was a slight decline in the proportion of pupils who gained five or more A\*- A grades at GCSE or equivalent in 2018, the school's performance in this indicator has been above that of similar schools for the last three years.

In 2018, the performance of boys compares favourably with that of boys in similar schools in all of the key indicators. The performance of girls is generally in line with or better than the performance of girls in similar schools.

While, in 2018, the performance of pupils who are eligible for free school meals in the level 2 threshold, including English and mathematics is below that of similar schools, their performance is better than that of similar schools in many key indicators. This is overall better than at the time of the core inspection.

Over the past three years, performance in the sixth form has improved in many of the key indicators and, in 2018, is broadly in line with that of similar schools.

In lessons, many pupils recall prior learning well. They make suitable progress in developing their knowledge, understanding and skills.

Many pupils respond to questioning appropriately. A few pupils are able to provide extended responses to questions from teachers, for example when considering the beliefs of the Inca people in Peru. However, a few pupils provide only brief underdeveloped responses and do not communicate ideas in a sufficiently fluent or thoughtful way.

Many pupils produce extended writing that is suitably structured. These pupils convey their ideas well, for example when selecting items to include in a drought survival pack for families in East African refugee camps. However, a minority of pupils make regular basic errors in their spelling, grammar and punctuation.

Most pupils read suitably to extract meaning from a variety of texts. For example, in history, pupils extract key information from a range of evidence regarding the causes of the great depression in 1930s Germany. A minority of pupils show strong ability to infer meaning and examine language to enhance their understanding of texts. For example, they make strong progress in developing their ability to analyse and comment on character, themes, language and structure in English literature.

Many pupils display sound numeracy skills and apply these well in different contexts. For example, in geography pupils are able to interpret a pie chart appropriately to calculate the proportion of the Earth covered by deserts, forests and mountains. They construct suitable graphs, for example in science to plot sulphur dioxide emissions.

In lessons and around the school, nearly all pupils are courteous and polite. Most engage well in their learning. Where teaching is particularly strong, nearly all pupils demonstrate resilience, perseverance and high levels of enthusiasm for learning.

## **R2. Improve the quality of teaching and assessment**

Since the core inspection, school leaders have focussed well on improving the quality of teaching and assessment. Staff benefit from a wide range of whole-school and individual training opportunities to help improve classroom practice. This includes useful guidance on developing teachers' questioning skills and the quality of written feedback. Leaders have identified and placed a suitable focus on sharing effective practice at the school and on developing a culture of collaboration between staff.

Most teachers demonstrate secure subject knowledge. They manage behaviour well and have strong working relationships with pupils. Many have suitably high expectations of pupils' achievement and attitude to work and provide them with an appropriate level of challenge. These teachers plan their lessons carefully and provide clear and relevant aims and objectives for pupils' learning. In the majority of lessons, teachers employ effective questioning techniques to gauge pupils' understanding and further develop their responses.

A few teachers plan and deliver lessons that inspire pupils. For example, in English, teachers focus well on developing pupils' reading skills to analyse the character of Crooks in 'Of Mice and Men' and discuss how his character reflects American society in the 1930s. These teachers use their understanding of pupils' prior learning skilfully to deepen their understanding and maximise their progress. A few teachers, however, do not plan lessons carefully enough. They do not ensure that activities are matched closely to pupils' ability or build well on their prior learning. Consequently, in these lessons, pupils do not engage fully in their learning and do not develop their skills, knowledge and understanding effectively. A minority of

subjects, outside of English, provide pupils with beneficial extended writing opportunities for a suitable range of purposes.

Many teachers provide useful verbal feedback in lessons. This enables pupils to know how well they are doing and what they need to do to improve. In a few lessons this practice is exceptionally effective in improving the quality of pupils' work. A minority of teachers provide pupils with pertinent written feedback which shows them clearly how to improve their work. However, the majority of teachers do not provide feedback that is sufficiently precise in identifying strengths and how to improve. Too often pupils do not respond appropriately to their comments. In a minority of cases, generic feedback does not address the specific needs of individual pupils well enough. Overall, teachers' written feedback focusses too narrowly on technical accuracy and does not give pupils guidance to develop their skills further.

### **R3. Improve the quality and impact of leadership at all levels**

Since his appointment, the new headteacher has established a clear vision for the school that places high quality teaching and learning at the heart of its work. His vision is well communicated and understood by all. In a short space of time, the headteacher has established a realistic understanding of the school's strengths and areas for development. He has not shied away from tackling underperformance and removing significant barriers to school improvement. This includes robust plans to address the budget deficit, appropriate restructuring of staffing and leadership at all levels as well as curriculum re-organisation.

The rigour of accountability between the headteacher and the senior team has been increased suitably. Their actions focus well on strategic matters and strike the right balance between addressing inspection recommendations and wider school improvement priorities. Associate leaders have assumed responsibility for important aspects of the school's work, such as teaching and pupils' progress. This has helped build the capacity of the extended senior team and also provides valuable professional development opportunities for those looking to develop as leaders. However, the strategic leadership of wellbeing is underdeveloped.

There are stronger links between the senior team and middle leaders than at the time of the core inspection. The morale of middle leaders has improved there is now a sense of collegiality. Many middle leaders understand their responsibilities for securing strong teaching and learning well and discharge their roles more effectively than at the time of the core inspection. They use data well to address underperformance, monitor provision appropriately, share good practice effectively and manage their teams purposefully. However, in a minority of cases discussions around the outcomes of monitoring activities are not sufficiently robust and do not address areas for development in provision well enough.

The governing body has built its capacity effectively. It is now able to offer better support to the school and to hold it to account rigorously. Governors now have a clear understanding of the school's work. New committees aligned with school development priorities provide robust challenge to senior leaders.

Overall, these changes have contributed effectively to improvements in the quality leadership and improved teaching and outcomes for pupils in key stage 4.

#### **R4. Improve the rigour and accuracy of self-evaluation and the precision of improvement planning at all levels**

Since the core inspection, the school has taken suitable steps to strengthen arrangements for self-evaluation and improvement planning. These are beginning to increase the accuracy of information to support self-evaluation. For example, the school has refined its approach to lesson observation and the scrutiny of pupils' work to ensure greater reliability. Through these activities, leaders are beginning to analyse and evaluate accurately the impact of teaching on the progress that pupils make in their learning and skills across the curriculum. As a result, leaders have an appropriate understanding of the school's strengths and areas for improvement and are able to plan precisely for improvement.

Many middle leaders contribute well to the whole school self-evaluation process. Senior leaders provide useful support and challenge for middle leaders in this aspect of their work. While many middle leaders evaluate data and provision well to identify appropriate improvement priorities, the contribution of the pastoral team to self-evaluation and improvement planning is underdeveloped. Leaders' evaluation of groups of learners is detailed and now includes appropriately the performance of boys and girls, pupils entitled to free school meals and those with additional learning needs. However, the performance of more able and talented pupils at the school is not evaluated thoroughly enough.

There is a clear link between self-evaluation findings and improvement planning priorities. Improved systems continue to have an impact on further improving the quality of teaching. However, a few plans are not based soundly enough on self-evaluation, for example the literacy action plan focusses too narrowly on technical accuracy and does not focus well enough on the broad range of literacy skills required across the curriculum.

The school has strengthened appropriately its approach to engaging pupils and parents in self-evaluation and improvement planning processes.

Overall, these improved systems have contributed effectively to improvements in important areas of the school's work, including the impact of teaching.

## **R5. Provide robust financial management to eliminate the budget deficit**

The school has made valuable progress in reducing the budget deficit with current projections agreed with Caerphilly County Borough Council. A comprehensive recovery plan has been approved by the local authority.

The headteacher meets regularly and frequently with representatives of the local authority, the consortium, the governing body as well as with the business manager. Close monitoring of every aspect of the school's finances is having a positive effect on reducing the deficit without harming opportunities for pupils. The school has made valuable efficiency savings in day-to-day running costs, such as reducing reprographic costs, reducing the budget for supply teachers and examination fees. Leaders are maximising all avenues to secure additional funding through various grants such as applying for monies for science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) subjects. The school has also improved how it uses the pupil deprivation grant and the education improvement grant. For example, it provides beneficial numeracy and literacy interventions in Years 7 and 8 for disadvantaged learners. The impact of the initiatives designed to support these pupils and their progress is tracked suitably.

The new headteacher has undertaken a prudent and strategic review of the existing curriculum. Whilst he is beginning to address the impact of staff absence and use of supply teachers on standards, the number of days lost through staff absence has not reduced significantly since the time of the core inspection..

The school is taking suitable steps to ensure that the sixth form is cost effective. It is streamlining provision in partnership with other local schools to make worthwhile savings whilst maintaining appropriate pathways for pupils.