



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**

**Ysgol Bryn Alyn  
Church Street  
Gwersyllt  
Wrexham  
LL11 4HD**

**Date of visit: October 2021**

**by**

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

## Outcome of visit

Ysgol Bryn Alyn 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 and the progress that pupils make including the development of their skills**

In a majority of lessons, pupils recall prior learning and subject specific terminology well, and have secure basic subject knowledge. In these lessons, pupils make sound progress, and in a few lessons they make strong progress. This is a marked improvement on what was seen in the core inspection in 2017 and the last monitoring visit in December 2019, despite the significant challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Most pupils' positive attitude towards their learning is a notable feature. They engage well in their lessons, complete all tasks set and display a genuine willingness to learn. These pupils work together well in groups and pairs, for example when completing practical work in science or when evaluating their performance in a netball match.

In a minority of lessons, pupils do not make sufficient progress and more able pupils, in particular, do not fulfil their potential. This is generally due to a lack of suitable challenge and low expectations from teachers. A minority of pupils have difficulty recalling and applying their prior knowledge and subject specific vocabulary.

Despite the lengthy periods out of school because of lockdowns and the significant impact on pupils' skills as a result, the school has been successful in supporting pupils to improve their skills since the core inspection. Most pupils listen respectfully to each other and adults, and follow instructions promptly. When speaking to adults outside of lessons, pupils converse confidently and are sociable, polite and welcoming. When given the opportunity in lessons, a majority of pupils express their viewpoints clearly. They use subject specific terminology appropriately, for example, when explaining their use of physical theatre techniques in devised pieces on the theme of protest in drama. A minority of pupils are reluctant to contribute and need to be prompted or supported to give adequate verbal responses.

Many pupils locate and understand information in a range of reading texts appropriately. A minority analyse meaning effectively, such as when they consider arguments for and against banning fizzy drinks. A minority of pupils struggle to apply a range of reading skills independently.

When writing, most pupils organise their writing and express themselves suitably. A majority are developing their writing skills well. For example, they vary sentence starters, write metaphorically and apply persuasive writing techniques. A few pupils demonstrate sophisticated extended writing skills and use effective stylistic devices,

such as when writing about the benefits and drawbacks of social media in English lessons. In general, middle and lower ability pupils in particular make effective use of support to help them to organise their writing. However, in a minority of lessons pupils are over-reliant on this support and struggle to structure their writing independently. At times, more able pupils' skills and creativity are restricted by this scaffolding. A minority of pupils make frequent spelling, punctuation and grammar errors.

Many pupils use the four number operations suitably and recall basic multiplication facts well. A majority can work well with fractions, decimals and percentages. A minority are able to use Pythagoras' Theorem to calculate the length of missing sides in a right angled triangle. Many produce accurate graphs, for example on the extension of a spring in science or population change over time in geography. A minority analyse these suitably. A majority of pupils struggle to apply their numeracy skills in context.

When given the opportunity, pupils explain their thinking suitably and offer thoughtful responses. However, overall pupils do not develop their thinking or independent learning skills sufficiently due to a lack of opportunities.

## **R2. Improve pupils' attendance and behaviour**

Since the core inspection, the school has implemented a wide range of strategies that have contributed valuably to the notable improvement in behaviour throughout the school. Most pupils behave well in lessons and are respectful towards their teachers and peers.

Over the last three years, the number of fixed-term exclusions has reduced considerably. The school has introduced a worthwhile alternative curriculum provision based in the Achievement Centre. The centre provides a bespoke curriculum for pupils who are vulnerable or at risk of permanent exclusion. Pupils who return from fixed-term exclusion benefit from a range of suitable support strategies, such as interventions to develop their resilience. This has helped to reduce the number of pupils being excluded more than once.

The school's behaviour for learning policy is now embedded across the school. The policy is understood clearly by nearly all staff and pupils, and is used consistently in most faculties. An internal exclusion area, 'Tawelfan', provides an appropriate environment for dealing with more challenging behaviour. Since the core inspection, there has been a sustained reduction in the number of pupils being referred to internal exclusion, especially those pupils with additional learning needs.

Nearly all teachers and pupils understand the importance of good attendance and this is promoted well throughout the school. Since the core inspection, the school has implemented a suitable range of strategies, including a thorough, graduated approach to tackling poor attendance. Pastoral leaders work effectively with attendance officers to identify individual pupils and groups of learners who need additional support. For example, an attendance officer targets and supports specific groups of pupils, such as those who are eligible for free school meals to improve their attendance. Senior leaders work successfully with the local authority when external

intervention is required. It is difficult to evaluate fully the impact of these strategies due to the disruption of the pandemic.

### **R3. Improve the quality of teaching and assessment so that pupils engage fully with their learning**

Since the core inspection, senior leaders have established a clear vision for teaching in Ysgol Bryn Alyn and this is understood well by most staff. They have developed a more reflective culture which has contributed suitably to improving the pace of learning and developing an appropriate level of challenge in the majority of lessons.

Senior and middle leaders have developed a clear understanding of the main strengths and areas for improvement in teaching and assessment. They have also introduced a programme of interventions to help pupils to develop their literacy and numeracy skills, though they are yet to evaluate their impact fully.

In the few lessons where teaching is highly effective, teachers have high expectations of what pupils can do and they plan work that builds on pupils' prior knowledge and understanding skilfully. They engage pupils successfully and plan a range of stimulating learning experiences, using carefully selected resources. These teachers frequently ask incisive questions that encourage pupils to think deeply and secure a brisk pace to learning. The focused verbal feedback in these lessons supports pupils to make strong progress.

In many lessons, teachers foster strong working relationships with pupils and are good language models. They have sound subject knowledge and use this to provide helpful verbal feedback to pupils. These teachers make appropriate use of the 'Do Now' activities to engage pupils well from the start of the lesson and they manage pupils' behaviour effectively.

A majority of teachers provide clear explanations of important concepts and helpful instructions that support pupils to engage in activities. They have appropriate expectations of their pupils and plan engaging tasks that build suitably on pupils' prior learning. These teachers provide beneficial opportunities for pupils to develop their speaking and listening skills. In a minority of cases, they encourage pupils to develop and extend their verbal responses with helpful sentence stems. This, along with helpful modelling of answers, contributes appropriately to developing pupils' extended responses.

In a minority of cases, where teaching is less effective, teachers' expectations of what pupils can achieve are too low. These teachers do not have a clear enough understanding of what effective challenge is and plan low-level activities that do not support pupils well enough to make progress. They mainly use questioning to test pupils' basic knowledge and recall. Too often, their questioning does not probe or deepen pupils' understanding or help them to improve their responses and develop their thinking skills. A few teachers spend too long on the 'Do Now' activities, which limits the opportunities for pupils to develop their knowledge, skills and understanding of new and more challenging concepts.

A majority of teachers provide suitable feedback to pupils about their work. In the most effective examples, teachers provide useful advice to help pupils to improve the

content of their work. However, a minority of teachers' feedback is not precise enough to support pupils to improve their knowledge and skills. Generally, pupils respond suitably to written feedback from teachers.

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

Since the core inspection, the headteacher has focused on strengthening leadership and fostering a sense of teamwork across the school. This has contributed well to changing the culture and ethos of the school. Over the last 18 months, the headteacher and the senior leadership team provided purposeful leadership while pupils and staff worked from home. This has had a positive effect on staff and pupil wellbeing.

The senior leadership team work cohesively, and their responsibilities are now distributed appropriately to enable them to work according to their strengths. An associate senior leader role provides a valuable opportunity for professional development and building leadership capacity across the school.

Senior leaders hold middle leaders to account suitably through regular line management meetings. These meetings focus appropriately on addressing the findings from evaluation processes and reviewing improvement priorities. The rigour of support and challenge provided by senior leaders is much more consistent and effective than at the time of the core inspection and contributes towards the increased impact of middle leaders on the school's work.

Middle leaders and many other staff are positive and supportive of the senior leaders. Many of them strive to improve their own performance and that of the school. They undertake many helpful activities that contribute to improving their leadership skills such as training on self-evaluation, improvement planning and use of data.

Senior leaders know their school well and identify strengths and areas for improvement accurately. The school recently resumed evaluation activities such as learning walks and book reviews. These involved middle leaders and included an element of coaching to develop their ability to evaluate and improve the work of their faculty. Leaders' evaluation of teaching considers a suitable range of evidence including assessment data and canvassing the opinions of pupils. Most middle leaders identify strengths and areas for improvement in teaching in their faculty appropriately. However, they do not always focus closely enough on the quality of pupils' work or the impact of teaching on standards. For example, book reviews check whether pupils comply in terms of presentation or self-assessment rather than evaluating the quality of their work. This inhibits leaders' ability to accurately evaluate and develop a whole school understanding of a few important areas for development such as the level of challenge in lessons.

Leaders have a clear understanding of the main priorities of the school. They set improvement targets that align suitably with their self-evaluation findings. Overall, the actions of leaders have led to a marked improvement in the behaviour of pupils and, to a lesser extent, improvements in teaching.

The school addresses underperformance of teachers effectively through targeted support plans. Performance management arrangements are robust, with targets based on the school's main priorities. Lines of accountability are clear to all staff.

Governors know the school well. They are now suitably informed and have a better understanding of the school's strengths and areas for improvement than at the time of the core inspection. They use this information well to challenge leaders and support the school when appropriate.

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

The headteacher, business manager and governors monitor expenditure regularly and consider carefully the impact of any planned spending in order to reduce unnecessary costs. They work closely with middle leaders to ensure that best use is made of available funds. These actions have supported the school well to reduce its outgoings and match spending appropriately to improvement priorities.

Since the core inspection, senior leaders worked successfully to eliminate the deficit budget by the end of the 2019-20 financial year and have maintained this improved position. They are projecting a surplus budget for the current financial year. To eliminate the deficit, they conducted a beneficial exercise of reviewing all outgoings to ensure that all spending provides them with value for money. During the pandemic, they have made appropriate use of additional grants to support improvements in behaviour and to provide interventions for vulnerable pupils and those with weak skills.

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