



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**

**Newtown High School
Dolfor Road
Newtown
Powys
SY16 1JE**

Date of visit: October 2021

by

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

Outcome of visit

Newtown 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 performance at key stage 4 in the indicators that include English and mathematics

Since the core inspection, the school has focused suitably on raising standards, particularly in English and mathematics. This has contributed to the majority of pupils making sound progress in lessons and a general improvement in nationally verified key stage 4 outcomes up to 2019. Since March 2020, the school has faced exceptional challenges due to the COVID-19 pandemic. These include national lockdowns, distance learning protocols and staff and pupil absence. The team acknowledge the effect this has had on the work of the school and recognise the commitment that all staff have made to keeping pupils safe.

In the lessons observed during this visit, many pupils engage well in discussions and use a suitable range of vocabulary to express their thoughts. Their contribution to whole class discussion is generally clear and confident. Occasionally, pupils provide detailed and well considered verbal responses to teachers' questions. Pupils mostly listen attentively and with respect to their teachers and peers.

Most pupils write for a suitable range of purposes, discussing topics such as the importance of blood in science and the effects of counter-urbanisation in geography. The accuracy of their writing is generally appropriate, when for example, explaining requirements of their product design, or how Nazis used propaganda in history. Where writing is less secure, a minority of pupils make basic errors, including the spelling of subject specific vocabulary and confusion of tenses. This impedes their ability to convey ideas clearly and engage readers successfully.

Pupils frequently read for information and comment on basic stylistic features such as simile and metaphor in the poetry of Wilfred Owen. A minority are able to annotate well and make sensible comments about the importance of structure in poetry by Gillian Clarke and RS Thomas. Many pupils, mostly at key stage 4, develop their use of inference and deduction when considering characters in texts such as 'Of Mice and Men' and when evaluating historical source materials such as differing interpretations of the Treaty of Versailles. A minority offer views on texts they have been taught, based upon inference and deduction but there is limited evidence of them using these strategies independently.

Many pupils demonstrate secure and age-appropriate numeracy skills. They can, for example, solve simple equations for an unknown variable, work with indices and standard form, and draw pie charts accurately in mathematics. Across the curriculum, they calculate percentage increase and collect and generally present

pertinent data accurately. This includes rates of reaction and rainfall effects over time. Many pupils interpret this data and make suitable inferences and predictions.

Most pupils engage positively in their learning during lessons. They engage well in group discussions and settle quickly to tasks. The majority apply their previous knowledge and understanding to unfamiliar contexts well such as determining the meaning of unfamiliar words using context and similarities between French, Welsh and English.

R2. Improve attendance and reduce fixed term exclusions

Following the core inspection, the school secured notable improvements in nationally verified attendance rates up to 2019. In the last two years, it has continued to implement effective strategies that have had a positive impact on pupils' attendance.

The school monitors attendance data closely. This data is analysed effectively to ensure a thorough identification of concerns around attendance and the school provides helpful pastoral support to individual pupils whose attendance is poor. Those pupils who meet the school's high expectations of attendance are recognised through a worthwhile reward and celebration structure. This has been successful in promoting the importance of good attendance.

In general, fixed-term exclusions have reduced since the core inspection and remain low. Recently, the 'Ready to Learn' strategy has strengthened positive relationships and good habits of learning. The school monitors pupils' behaviour and wellbeing suitably. It identifies those in need of specific academic and wellbeing support and provides appropriate interventions for these pupils. The school engages well with specialist external agencies to support these interventions.

R3. Improve provision for developing pupils' numeracy and ICT skills across the curriculum

The school has put valuable measures in place to improve provision for developing pupils' numeracy and ICT skills across the curriculum. Pupils now benefit from a range of worthwhile opportunities to develop their numeracy skills in different subjects. This includes interpreting velocity time graphs in physics and investigating statistical information in history. In geography, pupils analyse climate data and use pie charts to present information accurately. In science, geography, and design technology, numeracy tasks are aligned with national curriculum mathematics levels and are appropriately challenging.

The numeracy co-ordinator provides valuable professional learning opportunities for staff to help them take a consistent approach to mathematical conventions, for instance guidance on how pupils draw and interpret graphs. In addition, she supports subject areas to plan and assess relevant and suitably challenging tasks. Opportunities for pupils to use and develop their numeracy skills are coordinated and evaluated by senior and middle leaders who use this information to plan appropriately for further improvement. Currently, a few teachers lack the confidence to provide appropriate and accurate feedback on cross-curricular numeracy tasks.

Pupils experience appropriate opportunities to practise their ICT skills across the curriculum. For example, key stage 3 skills-based challenges include relevant activities to develop pupils' digital competence. Furthermore, in a minority of subjects, pupils benefit from valuable opportunities to enhance their ICT skills. For example, in design technology pupils use software to design a moisture sensor. In religious education, pupils use interactive audio-visual programmes to create engaging presentations. In music, pupils use software to develop individual compositions. Senior and middle leaders evaluate cross-curricular ICT provision suitably and set appropriate improvement targets.

R4. Improve the quality of teaching and assessment

The school has developed an increasingly reflective culture that has contributed to improvements in the quality of teaching. This includes a common approach to the planning of lessons and a better understanding of the importance of suitable challenge and pace to pupils' learning.

In the few highly effective lessons, teachers have high expectations of what pupils can achieve. They engage pupils successfully with interesting tasks and ask incisive, challenging questions which help to create a brisk pace to learning. Their perceptive and well-focused verbal feedback accelerates pupils' understanding and supports them in making strong progress.

In the majority of lessons, where pupils make suitable progress, teachers create a positive learning environment based on appropriate challenge and effective support. They provide helpful explanations of important concepts, examination requirements and techniques, and make relevant links to pupils' previous learning. In these lessons, teachers usually plan activities that engage and challenge pupils of all abilities and provide relevant opportunities for them to develop their knowledge and skills.

In the minority of lessons where the pace of learning is too slow, and teachers do not plan to meet the needs of all pupils well enough, pupils do not make enough progress. Often, teachers' expectations of what pupils can do, such as producing well-structured, technically correct writing, are too low. In these lessons, teachers' questioning is used only to determine recall or knowledge, and too rarely probes pupils' understanding or challenges them to develop their verbal responses.

The school has established a baseline against which pupils' progress, particularly at key stage 4, can be monitored and evaluated. Teachers are beginning to use this as an aid to improving pupils' learning. The school has also listened to the views of teachers and pupils and mostly moved away from whole-class feedback sheets that do not address the needs of all pupils.

Teachers' feedback on pupils' work remains too variable. Where it is most effective, teachers offer clear, precise guidance on how pupils can improve their work. Their advice usually focuses appropriately on the content of the work, though a few also provide helpful, accurate observations on pupils' writing. However, many teachers offer little advice to support pupils' basic literacy skills and are inconsistent in their correction of basic spelling and grammar errors.

Pupils are mostly very diligent in responding to written feedback from teachers and often improve their work suitably. The benefits of them doing so are, on occasions, undermined by the quality of the teachers' initial feedback, which often does not focus sharply enough on key issues and is frequently overly generous.

R5. Review and strengthen the school's arrangements for tackling bullying

The school has introduced a range of valuable strategies to tackle bullying. Through regular line management meetings, leaders consider carefully the few reports of bullying and act on them promptly. Termly year group reviews provide an additional worthwhile opportunity to discuss any concerns and identify necessary actions. Most pupils feel that any incidents of bullying are dealt with effectively by the wellbeing team.

Recently, the school has engaged with Race Council Cymru and North Wales Regional Equality Network to develop its equality and diversity work. This has raised awareness of issues that may lead to bullying incidences. In addition, pastoral leaders have led a comprehensive series of assemblies highlighting a strong anti-bullying message. They have implemented an effective poster campaign and worthwhile discussions around related topics, for example hate crime.

Awareness days and pupil-led events have provided further support to tackle bullying sensitively and effectively. Anti-bullying ambassadors provide peer-to-peer support. Pupils benefit from designated year group zones and increased supervision in all areas of the school. This has improved pupils' feeling of safety.

R6. Improve the quality and consistency of middle leadership to ensure that they secure sufficient improvements in standards and wellbeing within their areas of responsibility

Since the last monitoring visit, the school has adopted a range of strategies to enable middle leaders to be more effective in their role. As a result, middle leaders are now having a much greater impact on the work of the school than they were at the time of the core inspection. Although some inconsistencies remain in how effectively they carry out their role, overall, middle leaders are now clearly demonstrating the capacity to secure the necessary improvements.

In general, middle leaders have a clear, shared understanding of the school's processes for quality assurance, self-evaluation and improvement planning and how they link together. This helps these activities to be purposeful and focused on the school's key priorities. The school has provided leaders at all levels with a range of beneficial support and professional learning programmes. This has helped middle leaders to become increasingly reflective and evaluative about their role and enabled senior leaders to support them more effectively and hold them to account more robustly. In addition, clear line management arrangements focus suitably on pupil progress and wellbeing and generate appropriate action points.

Pastoral leaders at all levels liaise closely and monitor pupil wellbeing, behaviour, and attendance carefully. This enables them to deploy a wide range of effective strategies to support the most vulnerable pupils.

Middle leaders work well as a team. For example, they have collaborated well to develop a range of relevant numeracy activities across the curriculum. The school provides regular valuable opportunities for subject and pastoral leaders to share information and good practice. The governing body holds middle leaders to account suitably for the quality of their work.

R7. Improve the rigour and effectiveness of self-evaluation and improvement planning

Since the last monitoring visit, the school has strengthened appropriately its processes for evaluating progress, teaching and wellbeing. In particular, leaders have moved away from approaches that simply check compliance with school policies and procedures. They have worked hard to promote an improvement culture where the focus is always on the effect that provision has on pupil outcomes. This is helping leaders at all levels to make a positive impact on pupil progress and wellbeing, and the quality of teaching.

When carrying out activities such as learning walks and work scrutiny, the majority of leaders focus suitably on the impact of teaching on pupils' learning. A minority have a detailed understanding of the specific aspects of teaching and pupils' skills that need to be addressed. This enables these leaders to identify precise targets for improvement. A minority of middle leaders, however, do not focus consistently closely enough on pupil progress when carrying out self-evaluation activities, and this hampers their ability to plan effectively for improvement.

The school has strengthened its links with parents, providing them with a range of opportunities to share their views. It has also expanded the role that pupil voice plays in its self-evaluation processes and has adapted its provision in light of their feedback.

The governing body plays an appropriate role in the school's self-evaluation and improvement processes. Governors have a sound understanding of the school's main strengths and areas for development.

The impact of the school's evaluation and improvement processes on pupil standards and the quality of teaching remains inconsistent. However, leaders are demonstrating clearly their capacity to use these processes to make further improvements.