



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**

**Aberdare Community School
Ynys Road
Ynys
Aberdare
CF44 7RP**

Date of visit: October 2021

by

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

Outcome of visit

Aberdare Community 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. Improve attendance and behaviour

Since the core inspection, senior leaders have outlined a clear strategic vision for securing good attendance and behaviour and ensured that all stakeholders, including pupils, teachers and parents or carers understand the new expectations well. Leaders have prioritised wellbeing to secure a positive learning environment and pastoral staff now provide valuable support to address different pupils' needs. This has resulted in notable improvements in these aspects.

The school has developed many beneficial strategies to support pupils' wellbeing and attendance. These initiatives include the school's 'PACE' (Punctuality and Attendance Counts Everyday) programme and its SEREN reward scheme. These strategies have led to improved attendance and positive behaviour across the school.

The school's new approach to improving behaviour has led to positive working relationships between staff and most pupils. Leaders have fostered a culture of praise and encouragement in which pupils can achieve. In general, staff deal with incidents of poor behaviour sensibly and sensitively. They listen and respond calmly to pupils and develop a sense of mutual trust. As a result, nearly all pupils feel that the school is safe and welcoming.

The school makes effective use of designated areas such as Triage, the Learning House, nurture provision and Cyfle to provide support for pupils' different needs. For example, a very few key stage 4 pupils requiring the most intensive support have access to individualised provision at The Dare Valley Wellbeing centre. These approaches have led to improved engagement, attendance and positive behaviour for learners at risk of disaffection.

At termly 'concern and action' meetings, the educational psychologist, attendance and wellbeing officer and senior deputy headteacher identify beneficial strategies and plan the next steps for identified pupils.

R2. Improve the quality and consistency of teaching and assessment

Since the core inspection, the school has introduced valuable whole-school strategies and professional learning opportunities to improve the quality of teaching. Professional learning has continued to be a priority during the pandemic. Most teachers have benefited from this, and there is now a culture of professional learning within the school. Leaders have a clear vision for how these approaches will be developed further.

In the few very effective lessons, teachers have exceptionally high expectations. They foster a passion for learning with their enthusiastic delivery, and ensure all pupils are involved fully in their learning. These teachers question pupils skilfully to challenge their thinking and preconceptions. As a result, pupils in these lessons make rapid progress.

In most lessons, teachers foster positive working relationships with pupils. They have high expectations of pupils' behaviour and use the school's behaviour policy effectively. In many cases, teachers understand their pupils' learning needs well. They provide clear instructions and attractive, well-designed learning resources to engage pupils and develop their knowledge and understanding. However, in a minority of cases, lessons are not planned well enough. It is unclear what the intended learning is, and teachers plan activities that keep pupils busy rather than challenging them to develop their thinking.

In many instances, teachers question pupils suitably to check for recall. The majority use a range of questioning techniques effectively to assess progress at suitable points in the lesson, which allows them to provide helpful verbal feedback. However, in a minority of cases, teachers do not ask supplementary questions to probe pupils' understanding or give them the opportunity to elaborate on their responses. A few teachers do not check pupils' understanding closely enough. As a result, they do not correct misconceptions and pupils do not make enough progress. In a few lessons, teachers make overly long presentations and provide little opportunity for pupils to develop their independent learning skills.

Despite the challenges caused by the pandemic, many teachers have developed a range of assessment techniques to gauge pupils' understanding, and a few use this information well to inform their planning. They offer pupils useful written feedback and ensure they act upon this. However, in a few cases, the quality of written feedback is not helpful in enabling pupils to improve their work.

R3. Improve pupil standards and progress

Despite the challenges of the pandemic, pupils' learning and the progress they make in lessons have improved notably since the core inspection.

In most lessons, pupils display positive attitudes to their learning. They listen well to their teachers and to one another. The majority recall prior learning accurately and make suitable progress in their subject knowledge and understanding. In a few lessons, pupils respond well to tasks that challenge them to examine their own ideas and challenge their preconceptions. For example, pupils discuss the characteristics of past activists in their history lessons and relate this to the tactics of current national and international organisations. However, in a minority of lessons, pupils do not develop their thinking skills well enough.

In general, pupils' ability to communicate verbally is underdeveloped, partially as a result of periods of absence from school during the pandemic. Overall, pupils develop their general and subject-specific vocabulary suitably. In a few lessons, they have confidence to discuss their ideas and elaborate on their thinking well.

Many pupils are able to annotate and draw suitable conclusions from texts appropriately. In a few cases, pupils develop their use of inference suitably, for example when discussing a blog entitled 'Is international women's day sexist?'.

The majority of pupils produce suitable pieces of extended writing across the curriculum. In general, they use paragraphs competently to structure their writing and adjust their tone to suit their audience. However, a majority of pupils make frequent errors in their spelling, grammar and punctuation.

Many pupils develop their numeracy skills well in mathematics lessons, including through well-rehearsed routines. These pupils are able to use their skills appropriately in subjects across the curriculum to solve simple problems. However, a few pupils have gaps in their understanding. For example, they struggle with double digit multiplication or comparing the size of four-digit numbers.

R4. Improve the rigour and effectiveness of self-evaluation and improvement planning

Nearly all staff understand and support the headteacher's vision for the school and express their commitment to continued improvement. Governors are now suitably involved in whole school self-evaluation and planning and hold the school's senior and middle leaders to account appropriately.

Senior leaders have strengthened their approach to self-evaluation suitably. There is now a strong emphasis on data analysis, alongside lesson observations, discussing work with pupils, surveys and consultations with parents and pupils. During the pandemic, leaders adapted activities to suit the new circumstances, for example by focusing on the impact of blended learning. Pastoral leaders use a range of evidence well to identify beneficial adaptations to attendance and behaviour strategies. This has ensured a greater degree of rigour and consistency in evaluation and planning. A minority of leaders have a detailed understanding of the specific aspects of teaching and pupils' skills that need to be addressed within their area of responsibility. In these subjects, leaders amend their provision to build effectively on successful practice and address shortcomings. However, overall, leaders across the school do not focus consistently closely enough on the impact of teaching and assessment on pupils' learning when carrying out activities such as lesson observations and work scrutiny.

Senior leaders now have a comprehensive view of most of the strengths and areas for improvement across the school. Their evaluation of findings are detailed, honest and for the most part accurate. This has helped them to secure significantly better behaviour and attitudes to learning, as well as making improvements in learning, attendance and teaching. Senior leaders have provided helpful support for middle leaders to enable them to become more effective in their role. As a result, a minority of middle leaders now drive improvement well in their areas of responsibility. However, there remains too much variation in how consistently middle leaders plan and secure improvement.

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