



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 Y Castell  
Priory Street  
Kidwelly  
Carmarthenshire  
SA17 4TR**

**Date of visit: November 2021**

**by**

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

## Outcome of visit

Y Castell 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 special measures.

## Progress since the last inspection

### **R1. Address the shortcomings in safeguarding and health and safety identified during the inspection**

Following the core inspection, school leaders acted swiftly to ensure that robust systems and procedures were put in place to address the safeguarding and health and safety issues identified. Since this time, leaders review procedures regularly to ensure they continue to be effective and in line with current policies. All staff receive regular update training at the start of each academic year.

The school has established clear lines of communication with parents and carers about health and safety issues. They receive updates about any changes to procedures at the start of each term.

### **R2. Improve leadership at all levels and promote effective collaboration among all staff**

The headteacher and governors have developed an effective, cohesive and flexible leadership structure that is transparent and understood by all. Senior leaders are a well-focused team that have a clear, shared, strategic overview of the school's work. Staff roles and responsibilities are clear and concise. As a result, staff have a good understanding of what is expected of them and what they can expect from leaders. This has helped to improve the morale of staff, create a sense of teamwork across the school and raise expectations around what pupils can achieve. Leaders at many levels are beginning to drive important improvements. For example, the foundation phase leader and the leader for key stage 2 have introduced strategies across the school for pupils to develop greater resilience and effort toward their learning. This has led to pupils developing a better understanding that making mistakes and facing a few setbacks are a necessary part of the learning process.

The headteacher provides comprehensive reports to the governing body that encourage governors to ask suitable questions about the work of the school. This enables them to offer suitable support and challenge. Teachers' reports and action plans provide governors with good quality information about the school's performance. Participation in school improvement panel meetings support governors to gain a clear understanding of the school's progress against the recommendations from the core inspection report. The chair and governors with specific responsibilities continue their visits to the school to undertake monitoring activities and gain a good understanding of the school's strengths and areas for development.

Working relationships across the school are good. There is an improved sense of confidence, collaboration and trust. Nearly all staff feel they can share their opinions and that they are valued. Nearly all staff feel they contribute to matters of school

improvement and that senior leaders value and welcome their ideas. For example, all staff contributed to the recently developed marking and feedback policy. This has begun to impact positively on pupils' understanding of their own learning.

Staff meetings are regular and purposeful. Clear agendas are available for all staff in advance and the main points from all meetings are recorded, with many highlighting impact and further actions. Leaders tackle any underperformance confidently and sensitively. Teachers and support staff appreciate the support, coaching and mentoring they receive from leaders to help them to do their best for the pupils in their lessons. These actions have helped to build a culture where all staff appreciate their key responsibility, to do their best for the pupils in their class, and across the school.

Overall, leadership is more robust and senior leaders are more able to identify and address issues that challenge the smooth operation of the school.

### **R3. Improve the effectiveness of self-evaluation and improvement planning**

The school's capacity to evaluate its own performance is improving steadily. Leaders have developed a robust self-evaluation cycle and have shared this with all staff. They have adapted monitoring processes thoughtfully to take account of the challenges arising from the pandemic and provided staff with realistic timescales to undertake these activities. Leaders have engaged in regular pupil work scrutiny, learning walks, listening to learners' sessions and lesson observations. These activities have led to improvements in teachers' planning and the school's approach to developing pupils as independent learners. Leaders provide teachers with clear, beneficial feedback that identifies effective practice and indicates areas for improvement.

To increase leadership capacity across the school and assist in creating a culture of self-reflection, the senior leadership team have thoughtfully included other staff members in focused monitoring activities. For example, the involvement of subject leaders for English and science in pupil work scrutiny has helped to encourage ownership in the self-evaluation process. Members of the senior leadership team have worked alongside staff to undertake these activities and to support their professional development. This process refined the evaluation skills of middle leaders and gathered valuable information to inform school improvement. Leaders provided staff with opportunities to evaluate the school's progress against recommendations from the core inspection and have valued and responded to the contributions they raised.

Governors understand their responsibilities well and challenge leaders by asking relevant questions about the school's work. They receive regular reports about the school's progress in relation to the recommendations. Through regular contact with the school, governors are becoming more informed about its work and how to evaluate its progress more effectively. A few governors are involved in gathering first-hand evidence. For example, they have joined school leaders on learning walks, talked to pupils about their learning and engaged in looking at pupils work with staff. As COVID-19 restrictions reduce, governors recognise the need to increase their visits to the school to gather first-hand evidence that informs their scrutiny and understanding of the school's improvement cycle.

#### **R4. Ensure that staff have high expectations of pupil achievement and provide pupils with tasks and feedback that challenge them to make the progress of which they are capable**

Staff work collaboratively across year groups to plan interesting learning opportunities. They provide pupils with a range of engaging tasks that are appropriate to their abilities. The use of 'missions' is embedded well across key stage 2 and this is having a positive effect on pupils' engagement and independent skills. Pupils have opportunities to challenge themselves through selecting tasks that consolidate and stretch their learning. In the foundation phase pupils are offered a range of engaging learning experiences based on a theme. Pupils can access resources and effectively use materials independently showing appropriate level of independent skills. For example, by selecting paints to make a firework painting and using tally charts to count favourite colours in the class, with a few pupils progressing to create a block graph of their results. However, on occasion teachers miss opportunities to extend pupils' learning and this means that a few pupils are not challenged well enough

The use of assessment for learning strategies are well embedded throughout the school and pupils talk confidently about their learning and their next steps. The new marking and feedback policy is used consistently throughout the school. Older pupils are developing a language around what they need to do to improve their work and teachers provide opportunities for pupils to respond to feedback to enhance their work further.

The school has clear and coherent plans for developing pupils' writing skills across the curriculum This has had a positive impact on the level of literacy skills throughout the school and resulting in pupils able to write at length. For example, in Year 2 many pupils can recount and write the story of the Enormous Turnip and pupils in Year 6 create vivid poems about the effects of the Black Death.

#### **R5. Improve attendance**

Monitoring attendance continues to be a priority for school leaders. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, they introduced a comprehensive tracking system to monitor pupils' attendance carefully. This system allows the school to identify any pupils whose attendance is a cause for concern and to follow this up appropriately. Leaders work closely with the education welfare officer and follow the advice offered effectively. For example, they invite identified families to attendance meetings that offer support, and this has led to measurable improvements in the attendance of a minority of pupils.

During the pandemic, the school adapted its focus from monitoring the attendance of pupils, to tracking pupils' participation and engagement in blended and remote learning during lockdown periods. Leaders introduced a valuable engagement tracker to monitor the attendance of pupils in live learning sessions and in daily tasks. The school provided careful assistance to those families facing difficulties. This included providing access to ICT resources and Hub provision for vulnerable pupils and those pupils displaying a lack of engagement.

Purposeful re-engagement plans were implemented for those learners and families who were anxious about returning to school. Regular meetings have been held with the education welfare officer to address concerns regarding those families who are not engaging. There is a weekly online attendance assembly to ensure that regular and improved attendance is promoted and celebrated. In addition, leaders have developed thoughtful adaptations to the school building enabling medically vulnerable learners to return to school successfully. Nearly all learners have now returned to on-site learning and pupil attendance and engagement is improving.

#### **R6. Ensure a balanced curriculum that allows appropriate time for pupils to develop the full range of skills and greater opportunities to learn independently**

The school now delivers a wide-ranging curriculum that engages nearly all pupils effectively. Staff have worked well to improve their pedagogy to ensure beneficial opportunities for pupils to develop their skills as independent learners.

Teachers have worked effectively to map out skills coverage across subjects, year groups and over time. Staff have improved the quality of pupils' extended writing through developing a range of fiction and non-fiction text types that pupils explore. This has been supported well by professional learning for staff to develop pupils' writing skills. In particular, the focus the school places on providing opportunities for pupils to redraft and improve their work continues to have a positive impact on the quality of writing.

Pupils frequently apply their numeracy skills across many areas of the curriculum. In most cases, teachers provide pupils with worthwhile tasks that encourage them to apply and build upon the skills they have developed in dedicated mathematics and English lessons. For example, pupils in Year 5 apply and refine a range of numeracy and literacy skills when learning about the impact of the Black Death. However, activities are not always tailored effectively enough to meet the needs of all pupils, especially those pupils with additional learning needs.

Since the core inspection, leaders have continued to ensure gradual improvement in the quantity and quality of independent learning opportunities for pupils. In the foundation phase, staff plan engaging activities as part of their continuous and enhanced provision. In key stage 2, 'missions' provide valuable opportunities for pupils to engage in independent learning. Across the school, pupils are responding well to this change in provision and become increasingly confident and reflective independent learners. For example, pupils in key stage 2 regularly make sensible choices when choosing the independent task that is most suitable to their level of ability. Overall, there is a good balance between adult-led and independent activities that helps support high levels of pupil engagement.

#### **R7. Ensure that the school's information about pupils' progress is accurate and used well to inform next steps in learning**

Staff now have a well informed and accurate understanding of the standards and progress of pupils. They use this knowledge increasingly well to inform their planning and to tailor support to specific groups of pupils.

Senior leaders have worked effectively to overhaul the school's systems for tracking and monitoring the progress of pupils. They have used examples of effective practice from other schools and adapted this to suit their context. Leaders and staff work well together to ensure the accuracy of their tracking procedures. For example, all staff work collaboratively each half term to standardise examples of pupils' literacy and numeracy work and use an appropriate balance of tests and teacher assessment to inform their evaluations.

Staff consider carefully how they will use tracking information to plan support for pupils and next steps in learning. For example, teachers work with teaching assistants to consider the progress that pupils are making and adjust provision to address any concerns. Senior leaders have developed a system of 'provision triangles' that provide a useful tool for planning and recording support for all groups of pupils. The school is using its new systems effectively to identify the impact of the pandemic on pupils' standards and wellbeing and to plan support and intervention to address any issues.

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