



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**

**Cefn Primary School
Greenfield Avenue
Glyncoch
Pontypridd
Rhondda Cynon Taff
CF37 3BD**

Date of visit: November 2021

by

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

Outcome of visit

Cefn 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 significant improvement.

Progress since the last inspection

R1. Establish stable and effective leadership and teaching teams

The Fern Federation now has a stable staffing structure that serves both schools well. The executive headteacher and two heads of school were appointed in the summer term of 2021, having been in post in an acting capacity since January 2020, when the schools were identified as needing significant improvement. As a team, they led the federation successfully through the considerable challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic. At the same time, they focused firmly on school improvement and addressing the recommendations from the core inspection. Leaders have established systems that enable the federation to function efficiently and effectively. There is a growing ethos of self-reflection amongst staff, which is helping to establish a culture of continuous improvement.

The executive head provides strong leadership across the federation. She is committed to securing high quality teaching and provision for the pupils of both schools. With the support of the heads of school and other members of the senior leadership team, she has established effective cross-school working and ensured that this is central to strategic planning across the federation. Staff in both schools now understand the benefits of working together and learning from one another through routinely sharing expertise, workload, and resources. Rigorous performance management and self-reflection help to identify relevant professional learning. This is tailored to the needs of individuals and groups of staff and includes beneficial visits to other schools.

In preparation for curriculum and ALN reform, and to continue to drive school improvement, leaders, staff and governors are developing a renewed vision for the federation. This vision recognises the needs of pupils, families, and the community. It places them at the heart of the federation's work and is aspirational, yet realistic. Roles and responsibilities of all leaders and staff are clear. Effective communication means that everyone knows what is expected of them and understands that their contributions are valued. A strong sense of mutual support now exists in the school, which means that staff are more confident to take risks, seek reassurance and ask for guidance.

The support of the governing body has been instrumental in moving the work of the federation forward well. Governors now understand the advantages of the two schools working together closely. They acknowledge the strength it brings to both schools and the positive impact this is having on the community. Auditing and using the skills of governors more effectively means that governors now provide a more suitable level of challenge to school leaders. This has been particularly beneficial

during the pandemic, for example, when considering pupils' engagement in learning during periods of lockdown.

R2. Improve monitoring and school improvement processes to ensure they focus on raising standards for pupils

Leaders have established a comprehensive cycle of monitoring and school improvement across the federation. This systematic and thorough approach helps leaders, staff and governors to evaluate the school's work and identify priorities for development that will improve provision and outcomes for pupils.

Understandably, the disruption caused by COVID-19 has hampered some elements of the federation's monitoring cycle, such as observations of teaching. However, to maintain their focus on self-improvement, leaders modified the planned monitoring timetable to consider aspects of the federation's work relevant to the pandemic. This included analysing and improving pupils' engagement in online learning and developing pupils' and teachers' digital skills. The ability of staff to be flexible and rise to these challenges confidently is a testament to the commitment and perseverance of the whole team.

All members of staff now understand the process and purpose of self-evaluation and school improvement, and their responsibilities to their pupils. Since the full return to school, there is a clear self-evaluation timetable in place for each term that includes focused lesson observations and scrutiny of pupils' work. Regular pupil progress meetings help all staff to identify how well pupils are doing and the standards they achieve. Importantly, these meetings also identify gaps in learning and areas of weakness for individuals or groups of pupils. This information informs teachers' planning and enables leaders to identify priorities for improvement that are common across classes in a school or the whole federation.

Feedback to teachers is honest and specific. It highlights their strengths and areas for improvement and encourages personal reflection. This means that leaders can tailor professional learning more specifically to suit the needs of individual teachers and support staff. Crucially, leaders follow up on any targets for improvement after an agreed time so that staff can demonstrate their learning and seek further guidance when they need it.

Governors are passionate about providing the best for pupils, their families, and the community. They have a stronger understanding of their role in self-evaluation and the importance of challenging leaders appropriately in relation to the work of the federation and pupil progress from their starting points.

R3. Improve the quality of teaching and ensure any grouping arrangements across classes enable pupils of all abilities to make effective progress

Across the federation, the quality of teaching shows notable improvement. Overall, teachers offer engaging learning experiences for pupils that support them to make good progress. Senior leaders have worked well to create a culture across both schools that makes improving teaching and learning everyone's responsibility. Working with staff, leaders have created a shared digital resource, which provides useful guidance that clearly defines leaders' expectations of teachers. It helps

teachers to evaluate their own practice, and that of their colleagues, and identify areas for improvement. Clear expectations and consistent support from leaders have helped to improve the consistency of teaching and assessment across the federation considerably.

Teachers and support staff receive well-considered professional learning to help improve the quality of their classroom practice. They use a variety of well-practised approaches to ensure that all lessons are carefully structured, focused and offer suitable challenge for all pupils. This has helped to eliminate any instances of unsatisfactory teaching and learning and promote professional relationships that generate trust and confidence between leaders and teachers. All staff have very good working relationships with pupils. Most learning proceeds at a lively pace and as a result, most pupils are eager to learn, engaged and sustain interest in their work.

Across the federation, leaders ensure that there is a strong focus on pupil progress. They have established a robust tracking process which all teachers use effectively. Regular pupil progress meetings enable leaders and teachers to identify whether pupils are on track to meet challenging targets. These meetings also enable staff to act promptly to provide interventions, particularly to support pupils' wellbeing and their literacy and numeracy skills. Feedback to pupils and other aspects of formative assessment are improving steadily across the federation. For example, many pupils respond appropriately to teachers' comments and this often helps them to improve specific elements of their work.

R4. Raise standards in writing

Leaders and teachers have worked effectively with external partners to develop a consistent approach to the teaching of writing. This ensures that pupils' writing skills develop well over time, often from low starting points. Across the federation, teachers provide a wide range of opportunities for pupils to write freely and encourage them to draft and improve the quality and quantity of writing. For example, in reception, many pupils begin to hear the first and last sounds within words and start to make good attempts at writing simple sentences. Leaders have developed a useful guidance document that supports the progression of pupils' skills. The document identifies broadly expected outcomes for each year group and for all types of writing. This provides useful benchmarks for teachers and helps to ensure that all staff have high expectations of pupils' work.

Pupils write for a wide range of purposes, and many write at a level suitable for their stage of development in both schools. By the end of Year 2, many pupils begin to write creatively and across a variety of genres. When writing a story, many pupils use adventurous vocabulary choices and adjectives to add interest and create clear descriptions for the reader. Their spelling shows increasing awareness and understanding of phonics and many pupils use genre specific language appropriately. For example, when discussing the sequencing of a story, Year 2 and Year 3 pupils refer to story title, plot, and character.

By the end of key stage 2, many pupils make good progress in developing their writing skills and understand how to use punctuation for effect. Teachers provide good opportunities for pupils to use self and peer assessment to help them to redraft and polish their writing. For example, in Year 5 and 6, many pupils add effective

similes to build atmosphere and character when editing and improving their poems about Henry VIII.

R5. Ensure all teachers give pupils appropriate opportunities to apply their literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology (ICT) skills effectively across the curriculum

The leaders for literacy, numeracy, and ICT have worked closely with the regional consortium and external providers to establish a systematic and effective approach to teaching and developing pupils' skills in these areas. This approach, alongside the federation's improved culture of collaboration, has supported teachers to achieve a more consistent approach to planning. They now provide good opportunities for pupils to develop their skills, then apply and consolidate them in authentic tasks across the curriculum.

All staff have taken part in professional learning to help them to develop their practice in cross-curricular maths and numeracy. Professional dialogue meetings between leaders and teachers enable all staff to understand the expectations for numeracy across the curriculum. As a result of the improved provision since the core inspection, most pupils now make steady progress in developing their numeracy skills. For example, nursery pupils consolidate their understanding of repeating patterns by making fruit kebabs. By the end of key stage 2, pupils use and interpret data from questionnaires and calculate profit accurately when designing a theme park.

Both schools have prioritised the improvement of pupils' literacy skills since the core inspection. Teachers have improved the range and consistency of opportunities for pupils to write at length in a wide variety of contexts. They encourage pupils to reflect on their work regularly and improve the quality and accuracy of their writing. This means that many pupils now write for a wide range of purposes across the curriculum at a level suitable for their stage of development. For example, foundation phase pupils retell stories accurately and write information pamphlets on how to be healthy. In key stage 2, pupils write detailed instructions on how to play a game they invented and write formal letters asking parents for their support to complete a survey. Leaders and staff have now recognised significant weaknesses in the speaking and listening skills of many foundation phase and lower key stage 2 pupils, partly due to the disruption to their education caused by the pandemic. They have identified this as a priority for their new school improvement plan and have started to consider a cross-federation approach to improving these elements of pupils' literacy skills.

Teachers' planning for the development of ICT is comprehensive. Leaders have refined the scheme of work and it now supports teachers to plan for progression more effectively. During periods of lockdown due to the pandemic, all staff developed their skills in using a range of online platforms to support distance learning effectively. They supported pupils and families to engage effectively with their learning using ICT and shared ideas for teaching, learning and feedback with colleagues. As a result of these improvements to provision, nearly all foundation phase pupils are familiar with using an app to present work in response to a task, with an increasing number of pupils doing so independently. Many pupils in key stage 2 use Hwb regularly to support learning and most pupils upload and retrieve work in

their online folders competently. In both schools, staff encourage pupil digital leaders to play a prominent role in raising the profile of ICT in classrooms. Pupil digital leaders lead extra-curricular clubs and help their peers to improve their ICT skills. As a result, pupils are more confident and skilled in using a variety of digital technology effectively.

R6. Improve pupils' attendance

Since the core inspection, monitoring pupils' attendance has been a high priority for the school. Leaders have established useful strategies to support good attendance, including dedicated assemblies to promote the importance of coming to school regularly. The school's family engagement officer supports pupils and families effectively. He builds positive relationships with parents and pupils and this enables him to give them appropriate advice and encourage them to follow it. Leaders and the family engagement office have taken careful account of the impact of the pandemic on pupils' individual attendance and have been sensitive to pupils who have had to isolate due to COVID-19.

School leaders track and monitor all pupils' attendance carefully. This means that they can identify pupils whose attendance is a cause for concern and follow this up appropriately. During the pandemic, leaders adapted tracking systems to take account of pupils' engagement in online learning. This helped the school to tailor support for families effectively and sensitively. For example, it enabled the family engagement officer to identify needs in the community. To help meet these needs, he provided many worthwhile learning activities in the community, including a digital trail. Many pupils and their families, as well as other members of the community, engaged in these activities.

Leaders set high expectations for pupils to arrive on time and for lessons to begin promptly. Class teachers and teaching assistants take turns to welcome pupils at the school door every morning, along with the head of school. This provides useful contact between parents and school staff and gives a clear signal that the school day has started. Despite the impact of the pandemic on pupil attendance, the actions of leaders and staff have ensured that attendance continues to improve.

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