

Birchgrove Comprehensive School  
Birchgrove Road  
Birchgrove  
SA7 9NB

11/10/2024

Dear Andrew Owen

**Interim visit:** September 2024

Thank you for your support with the interim visit to the school. We enjoyed the opportunity to meet with you, your staff and pupils and hear more about the improvement work that the school has carried out since the core inspection.

During our visit, we had the opportunity to:

- Speak with senior leaders about your improvement work and how you are supporting teachers.
- Talk with pupils and hear their feedback about the school.
- Visit English, mathematics, science, drama, geography, history, and Welsh Baccalaureate lessons to see pupils and staff undertaking their work.
- Speak with middle leaders about their work and hear about the benefits and challenges they are experiencing.
- Undertake work scrutiny activities with senior and middle leaders.
- Visit the inclusion provisions to speak with staff and pupils about their work.

We found it helpful to discuss your approaches to school improvement. Leaders have established a strong culture of belonging and inclusivity in the school and this has a positive impact on pupils' attitudes and behaviour. We noted that, in the small number of classes we visited, pupils were engaged in their work and keen to learn.

### **Focus of visit**

**Strengthen the coordination of literacy to ensure a worthwhile range of activities across the curriculum to secure the progressive development of pupils' skills, in particular their reading**

During the visit it was helpful to hear how leaders have developed a robust diagnostic approach to evaluating pupils' reading skills through a range of regular assessments and one-to-one interviews. They have also developed useful literacy

passports which share key information effectively, with all staff, identifying individual pupils' reading, writing and communication areas for development and strategies teachers can use to support them in improving. The school has trialled a number of helpful approaches, including introducing more challenging academic texts in their subject areas, developing the use of more complex subject specific vocabulary and developing strategies to support the development of more advanced reading skills. The school has also implemented a number of positive strategies to develop a reading culture, for example, by setting up a reading room which pupils can access during non-contact time.

We think it would be helpful for you to consider:

- How might an increased focus on learning help to raise expectations of pupils' achievement?
- Do senior leaders evaluate the provision for literacy, especially reading, robustly enough through their self-evaluation activities?

### **Improve the impact that teachers' feedback has on pupils' progress**

Staff work together collegiately and productively in professional learning groups that focus on aspects of school improvement. As a result, approaches to improving key areas of the school's priorities such as the provision for reading and feedback to pupils are research-informed and teacher-led. Through professional learning, leaders have provided staff with a good range of opportunities to reflect on their assessment practice and to explore a range of strategies. Work on curriculum development has included useful planning for relevant assessment opportunities.

The school has taken a valuable approach to addressing this recommendation by considering teaching 'in the round', and how teachers' feedback helps pupils to improve their work both in lessons and in pupils' work. In addition, middle leaders are encouraged to take ownership of their areas of responsibility. As a result, the school is developing approaches to feedback that are most appropriate for each subject.

We think it would be helpful for you to consider:

- How effective is the support for and quality assurance of middle leaders' evaluation of learning and teaching in their areas of responsibility?
- How well do self-evaluation processes, particularly lesson observations and work scrutiny, focus on pupils' learning and progress?

### **Improve the standards of Welsh, particularly at key stage 4.**

The school has introduced a number of helpful to strategies to address this recommendation, including increasing curriculum time and appointing a second specialist Welsh teacher to ensure that nearly all lessons are taught by Welsh language specialists. Leaders have improved the curriculum and assessment arrangements for Welsh second language and as a result, the number of pupils who sit GCSE Welsh has increased substantially. The small minority who do not sit GCSE achieve an alternative basic qualification in Welsh which is appropriate for these pupils. These improvements have contributed to the positive attitudes of pupils towards learning Welsh.

We think it would be helpful for you to consider:

- How might transition work with partner primaries support continuity of practice and provision, particularly in literacy and Welsh.

Thank you again for all your help to plan and arrange our visit.

The school's latest core inspection report and further information on the process and purpose of interim visits can be found on our website:

<http://www.estyn.gov.wales/provider/6704075>

Yours sincerely



**Catherine Evans**  
Assistant Director