

Jane Wilkie
Blackwood Comprehensive School
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11/03/2025

Dear Jane Wilkie

Interim visit: March 2025

Thank you for your support during the interim visit to the school on the 4th and 5th of March 2025. We enjoyed the opportunity to meet with you, your staff and pupils and hear more about the improvement work the school has undertaken since the core inspection.

During the visit, we had the opportunity to:

- Hold discussions with leaders and staff about your improvement work and your work to improve pupils' attendance.
- Talk with pupils and hear their feedback about the school.
- Visit a small sample of lessons to see pupils and staff undertaking their work.
- Scrutinise a sample of pupils' work.
- Undertake joint work scrutiny and lesson observation activities with leaders and discuss the main findings from these activities.

Focus of visit

How effective is the school's work to improve attendance, especially that of pupils eligible for free school meals?

Since the core inspection, leaders have focused closely on improving pupils' attendance, including that of pupils eligible for free school meals.

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Estyn welcomes correspondence in both English and Welsh. Correspondence received in either language will be given equal priority.

During the visit, leaders shared the wide range of strategies introduced to improve attendance for all. These include various rewards, attendance ‘target weeks’ and regular assemblies which emphasise the importance of good attendance. Pupils we met on the visit understand the importance of regular attendance and value the rewards and recognition they receive.

We also heard about how pupils with declining attendance are identified and supported with a wide range of bespoke strategies to help them. For example, staff hold 5-minute mini-attendance meetings with pupils or conduct skills walks in the community to help pupils overcome barriers to attendance.

The school has a clear focus on building positive relationships with pupils and their families. Leaders work sensitively with them to help them to understand the reasons for pupils’ absence and to look for ways to support them to attend school regularly. For example, it was interesting to hear about how staff visit families at home and hold sessions in the community to offer bespoke support for pupils to improve attendance.

The school’s work on attendance has resulted in improvements. Leaders recognise the need to continue to work to make further improvements in this area.

How effective are your self-evaluation and improvement planning processes in bringing about improvements in teaching, learning and assessment?

During the visit, it was helpful to hear how the school has continued to use its established self-evaluation and improvement planning processes to target priority areas in teaching, learning and assessment.

Senior and middle leaders continue to be involved in regular self-evaluation activities, which develop their understanding of strengths and aspects in need of improvement in their areas of responsibility. Teaching and learning reviews provide a detailed overview of these aspects.

The school has identified improving feedback and outcomes for pupils eligible for free school meals as priority areas. Leaders have developed strategies to improve these aspects and have provided relevant professional learning for staff. For example, it has been interesting to hear how the school has appointed mentors to work alongside individual pupils who are eligible for free school meals to address barriers that affect their learning.

It may be helpful for the school to consider:

- Do leaders and teachers maintain an appropriate balance between focusing on improving general teaching strategies for all pupils alongside improving the provision for pupils eligible for free school meals?
- Do leaders and teachers give enough consideration to feedback as an aspect of assessment, as opposed to a stand-alone element?
- Could leaders consider further how they use a range of evidence, including data, when evaluating the impact of teaching and learning?

Thank you again for all your help in planning and organising our visit. We wish you well with your future developments.

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/6764046>

Yours sincerely



Catherine Evans
Assistant Director