

19 June 2020

Dear

Thank you again for your email. In accordance with Estyn's Freedom of Information policy, I attach a copy of the 2019 monitoring report for Abertillery Learning Community.

Yours sincerely

Robert

Robert Gairey

Swyddog Arweiniol Cyhoeddiadau / Lead Officer: Publications

Estyn

Arolygiaeth Ei Mawrhydi Dros Addysg A Hyfforddiant yng Nghymru
Her Majesty's Inspectorate For Education and Training in Wales

Cyfeiriad: Llys Angor, Heol Keen, Caerdydd, CF24 5JW

Address: Anchor Court, Keen Road, Cardiff, CF24 5JW

Ffôn Estyn/Estyn Phone: 02920 446309

E-bost/E-mail: robert.gairey@estyn.gov.wales

From:

Sent: 19 June 2020 10:18

To: Enquiries <Enquiries@estyn.gov.uk>

Subject: Abertillery learning community

To whom it may concern.

Many thanks for your return call I'm sorry that I did not obtain your name in our conversation please could I be granted a copy of the monitoring report that was recently done at Abertillery learning community.

Estyn, Llys Angor/Anchor Court, Heol Keen/Keen Road, Caerdydd/Cardiff, CF24 5JW

Ffôn/Telephone 02920 446446

yholiadau@estyn.llyw.cymru • enquiries@estyn.gov.wales

www.estyn.llyw.cymru • www.estyn.gov.wales

Mae Estyn yn croesawu gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg a Saesneg. Bydd gohebiaeth a dderbynnir yn y naill iaith neu'r llall yn cael yr un flaenoriaeth.

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



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**

**Abertillery Learning Community
Alma Street
Abertillery
Blaenau Gwent
NP13 1YL**

Date of visit: June 2019

by

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

Outcome of visit

Abertillery Learning Community is judged to have made insufficient 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 maintaining the level of follow-up activity.

Estyn will re-visit the school in around six months' time to monitor progress against the recommendations.

Under the provisions of Section 39 (9) of the Education Act 2005, every annual report to parents prepared by the governing body under Section 30 of the Education Act 2002 must include a statement on the progress made in implementing the action plan.

Progress since the last inspection

R1. Improve standards, in particular outcomes at the end of key stage 4

The school has improved arrangements for pupils to be able to learn and develop their knowledge. This includes addressing the behaviour issues in the secondary phase to reduce disruption in classes. As a result, standards of pupils' work seen in lessons and books during this visit are generally better than at the time of the core inspection. However, outcomes at the end of key stage 4 have not improved sufficiently.

Many pupils make suitable progress over time. They recall prior learning appropriately. A few pupils make strong progress in their learning. Most pupils listen well to the teacher and engage positively in dialogue. They discuss work with each other well and listen to the views of others with respect. Many respond purposefully to teacher's questions and speak confidently to present their ideas and opinions. They interpret evidence appropriately to inform views and opinions. A few pupils use subject vocabulary competently in context, often to explain complex concepts such as euthanasia or structure of the Earth.

The majority of pupils can read short texts and extract information from them effectively. They answer simple questions that relate to the texts successfully. However, they do not read extended texts well enough to extract relevant information and draw conclusions.

A minority of pupils write at length independently with a suitable understanding of purpose and audience. They use an appropriate range of subject specific vocabulary. However, a few rely too much on the written structure provided by the teacher. Most pupils in the primary phase develop a secure understanding of genre types and structure their work well using paragraphs as they progress through key stage 2. In the secondary phase, many pupils are beginning to apply their writing

skills appropriately across the curriculum, for example to review the work of famous artists. However, a minority make basic spelling and grammar errors and a few have poor, untidy handwriting.

Pupils in the secondary phase do not apply their numeracy skills in subjects other than mathematics well enough. For example, a majority are unclear about the criteria for selecting different types of graphs or charts. In addition, they do not draw graphs accurately enough to display data for different purposes. Secondary pupils' use of information and communication technology (ICT) in subjects across the curriculum remains underdeveloped.

Since the core inspection, performance in key stage 4 has improved in a few indicators but in general, it does not compare well enough with performance in similar schools in all indicators.

Performance in the level 2 threshold, including English or Welsh and mathematics improved in 2018. Although closer to that in similar schools, it remains well below expected performance. Performance in the capped points score in 2018 is well below that in similar schools. The proportion of pupils gaining five GCSE or equivalent grades at A*-A improved in 2018 but is below that of similar schools.

At key stage 4, since the core inspection, performance of girls and boys improved in the level 2 threshold including English or Welsh and mathematics. However, their performance is below that of their counterparts in similar schools for all indicators in 2018. Pupils with additional needs do not make enough progress by the end of key stage 4. Pupils eligible for free school meals perform below the same group of pupils in similar schools in all indicators.

In 2018, a minority of pupils gained a level 2 qualification in Welsh. Very few pupils speak Welsh in lessons other than Welsh on the secondary campus. .

R2. Improve standards of behaviour in the secondary phase

Since the core inspection, standards of behaviour have improved considerably in the secondary phase. Most pupils behave well in lessons, when moving around the school and during lunchtimes and break times. In lessons, they adopt positive attitudes to learning and engage well in their work. They are respectful to each other and to adults in the school.

In developing the 'ready to learn' behaviour policy, the school consulted widely and effectively with pupils, parents, staff, governors and a local school. This consultation alongside appropriate whole school training enabled the school to implement this policy effectively. This has supported well the improvements in behaviour across the school.

The new behaviour policy outlines school's expectations of pupils' behaviour and responsibilities well. In addition, it provides suitable information regarding sanctions

and rewards. This policy is well understood and accepted by pupils. Furthermore, robust implementation of policies such as regulation of pupils' use of mobile phones and school uniform have had a beneficial effect on pupils' behaviour and attitudes to learning. However, a few staff do not apply the policy consistently.

The school has established a 'ready to learn' room where staff support pupils who demonstrate poor behaviour in lessons. These staff ensure pupils are engaged in meaningful activities during their withdrawal from usual lessons. Since the introduction of the new behaviour policy, the overall number of fixed term exclusions has reduced considerably and the number of pupils that attend the 'ready to learn' room for poor behaviour has reduced.

Staff use the school's tracking system to record and monitor pupils' behaviour suitably. This enables pastoral leaders to identify early any particular issues of concern and implement suitable support strategies to address these concerns.

R3. Improve the quality of teaching

Since the core inspection, the school has implemented a range of suitable strategies to monitor and improve the quality of teaching. Overall, the quality of teaching in the secondary phase is better than at the time of the core inspection. However, this has not had enough impact on pupils' progress or outcomes, particularly at the end of key stage 4.

Leaders have undertaken a systematic programme of lesson observations to develop accuracy and consistency in evaluations of teaching. However, feedback following observations does not always focus well enough on how to improve teaching and how teaching impacts on pupils' progress.

Many teachers receive suitable professional learning opportunities to improve their teaching. These include whole staff training and working parties, for example to improve the clarity of teachers' explanations.

Most teachers have strong working relationships with pupils and create a positive learning environment where many pupils are engaged in their learning. A majority of teachers have good subject knowledge and use this appropriately to plan a suitable range of activities and tasks to stimulate learning. They have suitable expectations of pupils. However, in a few cases, expectations of what pupils can achieve are too low. In these cases, teachers do not challenge pupils enough and the pace of learning is too slow.

A majority of teachers ask suitable questions to test pupils' knowledge and understanding and give clear verbal and written feedback that helps them understand well their areas for improvement. However, a minority of teachers do not use questioning well enough to probe and deepen pupils' knowledge or thinking skills. In addition, they do not monitor pupils' response to feedback well enough. This limits the impact of their feedback on the quality of pupils' work.

R4. Improve planning for progression of skills, including the Welsh language, and the breadth of the secondary phase curriculum

Since the core inspection, the school has taken suitable steps towards improving the planning for progression of skills across the curriculum. The school has appointed staff to coordinate the provision of literacy, numeracy and ICT skills and senior leaders have introduced beneficial arrangements for managing their work. The school has provided a range of useful professional learning activities and resources for staff and identified relevant subject areas to lead on planning for the development of skills. However, leaders do not evaluate the impact of the school's planning for skills closely enough. Developments in the provision for numeracy and ICT across the curriculum lag behind those for literacy.

Since the time of the core inspection, the school has focused appropriately on developing strategies to improve the speaking and listening skills of pupils. There is a broader range of writing opportunities and a greater focus on improving the presentation of pupils' work in books. These strategies are beginning to have a positive impact on the standards of pupils' work.

The school has recently placed a suitable focus on developing pupils' reading skills in key stage 3 and has introduced appropriate programmes to support basic reading and numeracy skills across the school. It is, however, too early to measure the impact of these programmes on the standards achieved by pupils.

Since the time of the core inspection, the school has increased its expectation of pupils' progress in learning Welsh. As a result, nearly all pupils in key stage 4 now follow the GCSE full course in Welsh. However, in general, staff do not ensure that pupils build well enough on the strong progress pupils make in the primary phase as they transfer to the secondary phase.

Since the core inspection, the school has made appropriate arrangements for broadening the key stage 4 curriculum. This curriculum now offers suitable learning pathways for pupils and a wide range of level 2 qualifications, including GCSE and vocational courses. Nearly all pupils express satisfaction with the provision on offer.

R5. Improve the quality and impact of leadership at all levels, including in self-evaluation and planning for improvement

Initially, the school's leadership was slow to address the shortcomings identified within the core inspection. This was largely due to a lack of effective leadership at all levels at that time. Since the autumn of 2018, the school's acting principals have provided much needed strategic leadership to the school. This leadership has secured notable improvements to the quality of the school's work. For example, improvements to behaviour management systems ensure that the secondary campus now has a pleasant atmosphere where teaching and learning take place. However,

leaders have not addressed fully weaknesses in teaching and provision to develop pupils' skills.

The principal and governors have recently made significant changes to the staffing structure of the school. Leadership responsibilities are now distributed suitably across the school and roles are clear to staff. Senior leaders have raised expectations and established appropriate processes, such as pupil progress meetings that hold staff to account for the quality of their work. They have established appropriate systems for leaders to meet to ensure greater consistency in approaches to leadership and provision for pupils. However, the school does not have a substantive principal and the newly established leadership structure has not had time to fully impact on improving the quality of teaching or learning experiences. The role of middle leaders in improving quality within the secondary phase is at an early stage of development.

All leaders are involved in a suitable range of evaluation activities including a detailed and consistent process of lesson observations. This process has been successful in raising expectations of the professional practice of teachers. However, the quality of feedback to teachers following many lesson observations does not identify clearly enough what they need to do to improve their work. Arrangements to coach or to tailor professional learning to the needs of individual teachers are limited. Leaders are beginning to use the process of lesson observations to promote professional reflection and dialogue beneficially. However, this does not focus sufficiently on pupils' progress or on how teachers can improve their practice. There remains a tendency amongst leaders to aggregate judgments from lesson observations rather than identifying strengths, shortcomings and opportunities for improvement.

Leaders are beginning to use pupil voice successfully to support school improvement, for example by consulting pupils regarding the use of tutor time and the behaviour management system. This positive development gives pupils a sense of ownership of important aspects of the life and work of the school.

Governors are developing a suitable understanding of their roles and responsibilities. However, their role in providing effective support and challenge is at an early stage of development.

R6. Provide robust financial management to address the deficit budget

The school has an agreed recovery plan with the local authority to address the deficit budget. Careful financial management by the business team, principal and governors has decreased the budget deficiency significantly in the last year. Substantial restructuring of staffing and a review of service level agreements have contributed to making significant and sustainable savings.

The school has been effective in generating extra income by leasing its facilities and through fund raising activities by the parents, teachers and friends association.

However, the school's use of significant grant funding, including the pupil development grant has not improved outcomes or raised attendance for pupils eligible for free school meals.

© Crown Copyright 2019: This report may be re-used free of charge in any format or medium provided that it is re-used accurately and not used in a misleading context. The material must be acknowledged as Crown copyright and the title of the report specified