



*Rhagoriaeth i bawb - Excellence for all*

Arolygiaeth Ei Mawrhydi dros Addysg  
a Hyfforddiant yng Nghymru

Her Majesty's Inspectorate  
for Education and Training in Wales

**Report of visit  
Level of follow-up: significant improvement**

**Fairwater High School**

**Date of visit: November 2013**

**by**

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

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**The monitoring team**

Steffan James	Reporting Inspector
Michelle Gosney	Team Inspector
Anthony Sparks	Team Inspector
Alwyn Thomas	Team Inspector

## Outcome of monitoring visit

Fairwater High School is judged to have made sufficient progress in relation to the recommendations following the core inspection in January 2011.

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

### **Recommendation 1: Implement actions to raise standards in all subjects, particularly in English, mathematics and Welsh, and to raise the attainment of boys**

This recommendation has been largely addressed.

In 2013, the school consolidated the improvements made over the previous two years in key stage 3. In key stage 4, performance in public examinations was considerably better than in previous years.

In key stage 3, the core subject indicator, though below the average for the family group of similar schools, places the school in the upper half of schools with similar levels of entitlement to free school meals and is above national expectations based on free-school-meal benchmarks. The percentage of pupils achieving level 6 or above in the core subjects is on a par with performance levels of similar schools. Performance in Welsh second language at level 5 continued its improvement this year. It is now four percentage points below the family average, very close to the Welsh average, and places the school in the upper half of similar schools.

In key stage 4, performance has improved significantly in several areas. The level 2 threshold including English and mathematics rose from 32% in 2012 to 53% in 2013. It is now above the family average, placing the school in the top quarter of similar schools, and well above national expectations based on free-school-meal benchmarks. Performance in the level 1 threshold also improved well and is now close to the average for similar schools. The average capped wider points score rose slightly and, although it places the school in the lower half of similar schools, it is only just below national expectations based on free-school-meal benchmarks. Performance in the level 2 threshold dropped very slightly and places the school in the lower half of similar schools. Performance in English and mathematics improved substantially at level 2. These subjects place the school in the upper half and top quarter of similar schools respectively. Performance in science was outstanding. It was the best in the family and places the school in the top quarter of similar schools.

Around half of the non-core subjects made good improvements in 2013 compared with the previous year, but a minority were well below the targets set by the school. This was a factor in the slight drop in performance in relation to the level 2 threshold.

Performance in Welsh second language in key stage 4 was better in 2013 than in the previous year, although it was still below the target set by the school. Of all pupils in

Year 11, 21% gained GCSE grade A\*-C in 2012, all in the short course. In 2013, the figure was 38%, with a very few of these in the full course. The current key stage 4 contains an increasing number of pupils following the full course, while for the first time in many years there is now an AS group in Year 12.

In 2013, boys' performance in key stage 3 was closer to that of girls than in most other schools in the family. In key stage 4, the gap between the relative performance levels of boys and girls was smaller than the average gap in Wales in several indicators. Boys performed better than girls at level 2 including English and mathematics. Their performance was equal to that of the girls in English, better in mathematics, but below girls' in science.

Overall, the school now has a very strong focus on getting the best out of its pupils. This focus is strongly driven by the headteacher and the senior leadership team and is well supported by staff. The school's greatly improved performance in key stage 4 has been achieved by the energetic application and further development of the good measures that were put in place after the core inspection.

Appropriate actions now include the use of a wide range of data, within a very effective data management system, to analyse performance and set fair but challenging targets for both pupils and staff. Subject leaders regularly report to senior leaders, as well as to the governing body, on progress within their departments.

The thorough tracking of pupils' progress by means of half-termly progress checks has been highly influential. The school uses these checks to monitor the progress of pupils in all years. Careful identification of pupils who are under-achieving, and subsequent intervention through various mentoring strategies, encourages and supports them to achieve better standards.

All pupils in Year 11 are mentored, usually by their form tutor. Mentoring is heavily based on performance data and provides encouragement and support to pupils. A specific group of pupils close to the C/D borderline at GCSE receives particularly close mentoring from the senior leadership team and senior middle managers, who all mentor five pupils each. The school has good evidence to show that the introduction of this assertive mentoring system from November 2012 had a very powerful effect on pupils' examination results. A regular meeting of key middle managers with the headteacher and assistant head focuses on the performance of Year 11 pupils in core subjects and has contributed to the success of the mentoring programme.

Parents are kept well informed about their children's progress and are involved in helping them to do well.

There have also been a large number of lesson observations, both by senior managers and also by subject leaders. These, as well as scrutinies of pupils' work by senior managers, have resulted in useful reports and contributed to effective in-service training to improve the quality of lessons and marking.

Some of the above features are further described in later sections of this report.

Other successful strategies to improve performance have included extra lessons for Year 11 pupils during school holidays and after school, and careful deployment of teachers to specific classes.

This strong focus on performance is evident in the pupils themselves. Nearly all of them know their targets in each subject. Generally their attitude to work, behaviour and concentration in class are good. Many apply themselves well, listen attentively and are willing to contribute. They collaborate well in group work and respond well to questions. A minority of pupils, while they generally behave well, are too passive and do not contribute well. They lack confidence in speaking, have poor subject vocabulary and are reluctant to do tasks that they find difficult.

### **Recommendation 2: Implement strategies to improve attendance and behaviour**

This recommendation has been fully addressed.

Attendance has improved by more than two percentage points since the core inspection. In the year ending July 2013 it was above national expectations based on free-school-meal benchmarks and placed the school in the upper half of similar schools.

The school attendance officer works closely with the progress managers to monitor attendance and provide daily attendance reports. Where necessary, relevant follow-up actions are undertaken to contact parents through first day phone calls and text messages. Certificates and rewards are given to pupils with high attendance. All of these measures are having a positive impact.

School staff apply consistent behaviour procedures and the evidence from lessons and pupils' conduct around the school confirms this. The Fairwater Referral Unit has proved very successful in targeting and supporting potentially disaffected pupils. Most pupils are now well behaved and the incidents of low-level disruption have significantly reduced since the core inspection.

### **Recommendation 3: Strengthen provision to develop pupils' skills, particularly in literacy and numeracy**

This recommendation has been largely addressed.

Since the core inspection, the school has made significant improvements in promoting the development of pupils' literacy skills. Successful strategies have included specific training for teachers and additional lesson time for English and mathematics in key stage 3.

The school has improved its knowledge about pupils with literacy and numeracy difficulties who are moving from key stage 2 to key stage 3, and there are suitable measures to support them before they leave primary school. The additional learning needs co-ordinator provides effective additional support for pupils with significant difficulties in key stage 3. Overall, provision is significantly more developed for literacy than for numeracy.

The school has responded well to the outcomes of the national reading and numeracy tests. It has introduced relevant, specific activities during form tutor time and at the start of lessons to support pupils' literacy and numeracy skills. There is now an increased emphasis both on strengthening aspects of literacy and numeracy in lessons and also on marking of pupils' work that pays attention to these skills.

The strategies to support pupils, as well as school-based in-service training for teachers, have started to impact positively upon teaching styles and the standards reached by pupils, particularly in literacy. Good classroom practice is shared systematically through the staff skills group. Appropriate additional measures are planned to monitor how well the school addresses pupils' numeracy skills.

The school continues to focus upon the Literacy and Numeracy Framework. Plans for its implementation are appropriate but remain at an early stage.

**Recommendation 4: Further develop the curriculum at key stage 4 and the sixth form by extending collaboration with other schools and the further education college**

This recommendation has been fully addressed.

The school has broadened the curriculum in key stage 4 and the sixth form. This has ensured that the school meets the requirements of the Learning and Skills Measure (Wales) and has relevant learning pathways available to all pupils. The well established links with Coleg Gwent contribute towards extending provision at all levels. The key stage 4 and sixth form curriculum now provides a good range of vocational and general courses for all pupils.

In addition, a range of new twilight courses is offered to pupils at Coleg Gwent, with transport provided by the college. The school is also working effectively with secondary schools in the area to offer a broader range of arts courses.

The support for vulnerable pupils provided in the Fairwater Referral Unit enables them to access a good range of appropriate courses. This has contributed to improving the level 1 threshold indicator.

**Recommendation 5: Improve the quality of teaching and learning to increase the level of challenge for all pupils**

This recommendation has been largely addressed.

Senior leaders have energetically addressed this recommendation, and the school has a strong focus on improving teaching and learning. The regular evaluation of standards, teaching and assessment, through data analysis, lesson observations and book scrutinies, has provided material for useful reports on strengths and shortcomings in the classroom. These, together with a good number of in-school training sessions, have contributed to a measurable improvement in the quality of teaching and assessment.

All school training days have included attention to improving the quality of teaching. The senior team's lesson observations were extended by the introduction of peer observations and team teaching last summer term, and nearly all teachers took part in one or the other. Staff received training on conducting lesson observations and many have now observed each other's lessons. There are firm plans to extend this initiative this year. There is a growing awareness of the value of observing lessons for professional development. Six teachers took part in the local authority's 'Outstanding Teacher Programme' last year. They and other members of a school working party have contributed strongly to training sessions.

The school has also addressed assessment well. It has paid attention to improving the quality of marking, and teachers now have to adhere to a useful marking policy.

Taken together, the school's and Estyn's lesson evaluations show that the quality of teaching is now good in many lessons. Good features of teaching include wellplanned lessons, appropriate activities, provision of a wide range of resources and skilful use of interactive white boards. There are often differentiated lesson objectives to cater for the range of abilities in the class. Teachers know their pupils well, almost invariably establish good relationships, and manage their classes effectively. Tasks and the teachers' questions are often challenging.

In a minority of lessons, there is still too much teacher talk and too little challenge, with closed questioning which does not encourage extended responses. Other shortcomings in these lessons include a lack of a range of tasks for different abilities, and a lack of pace. In good as well as adequate lessons, teachers sometimes rush through activities in order to keep up with the lesson plan, and do not give pupils enough time to finish tasks and gain enough benefit from them as they might.

Most teachers mark books regularly and follow the school's marking policy. They often write detailed, encouraging comments and provide helpful targets and advice on how to improve. They pay attention to written accuracy, with a good focus on incorrect spelling, punctuation and paragraphing. However, occasionally, marking does not indicate spelling errors of important words or pay enough attention to subject-related aspects of the work. More generally, teachers do not do enough to improve sentence structure and the quality of expression. In a few of the books seen, teachers ask pupils to finish incomplete work but do not ensure that they do so.

**Recommendation 6: Make sure that all staff fully understand their roles and responsibilities and implement policies consistently**

This recommendation has been fully addressed.

The school has further developed good strategies and actions to increase accountability for improving standards and quality. There are robust, high quality systems to enable senior leaders to monitor departments, and to help middle managers to lead their areas effectively. Senior leaders ensure that all staff have a secure understanding of their roles and responsibilities, and that they carry them out effectively. They challenge departments where standards are causing concern.

Calendared meetings between middle and senior leaders are supported by welldefined procedures. Agendas for these and department meetings are structured to ensure that important issues are addressed, lines of accountability are clear, and appropriate actions are taken within clear timescales. As a result, there is increasing consistency across the whole school in the way that managers and staff focus on agreed areas for improvement. Most middle managers and teachers have responded well to the challenge of improving pupils' outcomes. There is a strong desire throughout the school to achieve good results for all pupils.

The use of the wide range of data is now an outstanding feature. The analysis of performance, with half-termly updates through the pupil progress checks, enables senior managers to monitor the performance of departments and teachers rigorously and regularly, and to hold them to account for under-performance. While in 2012 there was a strong focus on core subjects, in 2013 the school has begun to pay closer attention to other subjects too.

Governors' knowledge of targets and data has improved, and they have a very good understanding of the school's performance, and of how it compares with that of other schools. They look closely at targets and results, and have begun to ask challenging questions about departments that under-achieve. Certain governors are linked to key areas in the curriculum in order to monitor their progress.

The headteacher has a clear vision and a strong commitment to raising standards. She inspires colleagues to share her high expectations for pupils and has ensured that the whole school is totally committed to improvement. In this focus on improvement the senior leadership team supports her very well.

### **Recommendation 7: Further develop self-evaluation procedures and the rigour of improvement planning**

This recommendation has been largely addressed.

The school now has good systems for self-evaluation and improvement planning. It has a clear calendar for a wide range of self-evaluation activities, which regularly involve both the senior leadership team and middle managers. These activities include data analysis, lesson observations, book scrutinies, surveys, and school and departmental self-evaluation reports and improvement plans.

The thorough use of data is now a very strong feature, which has ensured that the senior team has a detailed and objective understanding of the school's performance. At the same time, middle leaders have the information to rigorously evaluate their areas of responsibility.

As part of its self-evaluation activities, the school undertakes useful surveys of pupils' views.

The school has a large evidence base of lesson observations which involve evaluation of standards as well as of teaching. There is a good correlation between the leadership team's and Estyn's judgements of the quality of teaching, although in a small minority of cases the school's view is more generous than the inspectors'.

The leadership team complete a book scrutiny twice a year. This has focused appropriately on implementation of the school's marking policy. A minority of subject leaders carry out further book scrutinies to monitor consistency across their department, but this is not yet widespread.

The school self-evaluation document is thorough and evaluative, and accurately reflects the school's strengths and weaknesses. The school improvement plan has clear and measurable targets that appropriately address recommendations from the core inspection. Action points include allocated staff responsibilities, a timescale for review and costs where appropriate.

Departmental self-evaluations and improvement plans are generally good, but there is some variation in quality. Many are extremely honest and thorough, but in a minority of departments the self-evaluation reports lack detail in their data analysis and do not identify weaknesses rigorously enough, while improvement plans do not address weaknesses identified in the self-evaluation report. The documents of all departments are regularly monitored by the leadership team, who are aiming and gradually succeeding in raising most reports and plans to the quality of the best.

All of these evaluation activities have provided senior managers with a very good understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses. Action plans are leading to improvement in many areas. The school has now addressed all the inspection recommendations well, though managers know that there is still potential for further improvements in outcomes and are taking steps to achieve these.

**Recommendation 8: Meet statutory requirements for teacher assessment at the end of key stage 3, for the daily act of collective worship and for the action plans identified in this report**

This recommendation has been fully addressed.

The school now meets statutory requirements for key stage 3 teacher assessments for all pupils, and the assessment data is routinely scrutinised by the senior leadership team. The daily act of collective worship is delivered through assemblies and the 'thought for the day' programme. Approved and up-to-date Disability and Race Equality Action Plans are in place.

<b>Recommendations</b>
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In order to make further progress the school should:

1. make further improvements to standards in all subjects in key stage 4;
2. improve support for the development of pupils' numeracy skills;
3. further improve the quality of teaching;
4. ensure that all marking addresses the quality of expression as well as the subject content of pupils' work; and
5. ensure that all departmental self-evaluations fully identify weaknesses as well as strengths, and that the weaknesses are reflected in development plans.