



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 following monitoring
Level of follow-up: special measures**

**St Illtyds R.C. High School
Newport Road
Rumney
Cardiff
CF3 1XQ**

Date of visit: March 2015

by

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

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The monitoring team

Catherine Evans	Reporting Inspector
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Outcome of monitoring

St Illtyd's R.C High School is judged to have made sufficient progress in relation to the recommendations following the core inspection in November 2012.

As a result, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education and Training in Wales is removing the school from the list of schools requiring special measures.

Progress since the last inspection

Recommendation 1: Raise standards at key stage 3 and key stage 4

Satisfactory progress in addressing the recommendation

Since the core inspection, the school has introduced a wide range of useful strategies to improve performance at key stage 3 and key stage 4.

As a result, performance in all indicators at key stage 3 and key stage 4 has improved. At key stage 4, with the exception of the level 2 threshold and the capped points score, performance in many indicators is now close to that of similar schools.

Performance in the level 2 threshold including English and mathematics has improved by over 13 percentage points since the time of the inspection. Performance in 2014 is above the average for the family of schools and places the school in the lower 50% of similar schools based on eligibility for free school meals.

Performance in the level 2 threshold has improved by over 15 percentage points. However, performance in 2014 is still below the average for the family of schools and places the school in the bottom 25% of similar schools based on levels of eligibility for free school meals.

Performance in the core subject indicator has improved by over 11 percentage points and, since the time of the 2012 inspection, has moved the school from the bottom 25% to the lower 50% of similar schools. However, performance is still below the average for the family of schools.

Performance in each of the core subjects has improved since the core inspection with the greatest improvement seen in science and English. In 2014, performance in each of the core subjects has placed the school in the lower 50% of similar schools, and in English and mathematics above the average for the family of schools.

At key stage 3, performance in the core subject indicator and the core subjects individually has improved significantly. In 2014, performance in all indicators is above the average for the family of schools and places the school in the upper 50% of similar schools based on levels of eligibility for free school meals.

Since the core inspection, the performance of pupils eligible for free school meals has improved by over 37 percentage points in the level 2 threshold including English and mathematics and improved by over 35 percentage points in the level 2 threshold. In 2014, performance in the level 2 threshold including English and mathematics is well above the average for similar schools. However, performance in the level 2 indicator is slightly below.

In many lessons pupils make good progress and, in a very few lessons, pupils make outstanding progress. This represents a significant improvement since the time of the core inspection. In a few lessons, pupils have an infectious curiosity for learning and want to learn and know more. They demonstrate high levels of engagement and produce very good oral responses, explaining their ideas in detail as well as making sophisticated use of subject specific terminology. Many pupils are enthusiastic and engage well in their learning.

However, in a very few lessons, the poor behaviour of a very few pupils impacts on the learning of others.

Recommendation 2: Improve pupils' skills in literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology to ensure that they make good progress in lessons

Satisfactory progress in addressing the recommendation

Since the core inspection in 2012, the school has taken a systematic approach to developing pupils' skills. The school has made good progress in matching the strands of the Literacy and Numeracy Framework to pupils' work so that teachers have a better understanding of how to assess pupils' work against the framework. Overall, there has been good improvement in pupils' literacy skills, but pupils' ability in numeracy and in information and communication technology (ICT) has developed at a slower pace.

The school has monitored the provision of literacy across the school, and used the outcomes of this analysis, along with valuable training for teachers, to identify areas for development across the curriculum.

Pupils are developing a good understanding of structures and strategies to construct their written work, and pupils' writing has improved in many subjects. Pupils write at length and for a variety of purposes. Generally, they structure their writing suitably and they express their ideas well. Many pupils use an appropriate range of vocabulary, and pupils of higher ability present well-reasoned arguments. However, a minority of pupils still do not take enough care with the presentation of their work. This leads to careless errors.

The majority of pupils read well to extract information from a range of texts, and to develop their understanding of new knowledge and concepts. In many lessons, most pupils listen well.

In their oral communication, many pupils are developing a wide range of subject specific terms, which they use accurately to respond to their teachers and peers. Where teachers' questioning is more challenging, pupils give extended oral responses, and express their understanding thoughtfully. However, in a few lessons, pupils have difficulty expressing their views orally or in written form. In these instances, pupils are quiet, provide very brief responses or are unwilling to respond to the teacher's questions in front of their peers.

The school is using numeracy assessments suitably to identify areas for development in pupils' skills. Pupils use their numeracy skills in a range of appropriate contexts across the curriculum. In a few subjects, such as science and design technology, pupils use their numeracy skills well to collect data and to solve problems. However, the majority of middle and lower ability pupils struggle with basic aspects of numeracy, and this inhibits their progress, not only in mathematics lessons, but across the curriculum.

The school supports well those pupils who have particular difficulties in literacy and numeracy through a range of worthwhile intervention programmes.

The school has recently appointed new staff to lead on aspects of ICT, both within the department and across the curriculum. These changes have added a greater momentum to improve pupils' skills in ICT. The school has developed a comprehensive action plan to improve provision and skills in this area. This includes an analysis of provision to identify opportunities to develop pupils' skills, an audit of teachers' skills, and the identification of staff 'champions' and pupils as 'digital leaders'. The school has invested in improvements to the ICT infrastructure and in resources. The recently introduced use of digital tablets is having a positive impact on pupils' engagement in their learning. These developments, although too new to measure impact, provide a firm foundation from which to improve provision.

Recommendation 3: Improve attendance and reduce fixed-term exclusions

Strong progress in addressing the recommendation

Since the core inspection the school has successfully implemented a wide range of strategies to improve attendance and reduce fixed-term exclusions. It continues to place a very strong focus on, and give a high profile to, improving these aspects.

The school monitors pupils' attendance very closely at individual, group, class, year and school level. It uses this detailed information effectively to analyse trends, to identify pupils at risk of poor attendance and to provide targeted, timely and appropriate support to minimise the risk of poor attendance.

It continues to consolidate, refine and develop systems aimed at improving attendance. For example, it focuses strongly on pupil praise and rewards, building partnerships and maintaining close contact with parents and carers. The school identifies and articulates clearly the responsibilities of all stakeholders, including pupils, to ensure improved attendance.

Two school attendance officers, a newly appointed community engagement officer, the introduction of 'pupil trails', and the appointment of three teaching and learning advocates all give further worthwhile support to improving attendance.

The school's attendance shows a consistent and sustained improvement over the last three years. In 2013-2014, the school's attendance rate improved by two percentage points from the previous year, placing the school in the highest benchmark quarter, above modelled expectations and above the family average. During the same period, persistent absences declined by 5.7 percentage points. The school's unverified attendance data for the current school year indicates that it is slightly below the attendance rate for the previous year by 0.8 percentage points.

The recent introduction of a 'tariff' system categorising the severity of unacceptable behaviour has enabled the school to provide a more considered approach to the number and duration of fixed-term exclusions that it applies. This, together with an increased emphasis on the consistent implementation of policies and procedures relating to behaviour, is starting to have a positive impact on the reduction of fixed-term exclusions. Fixed-term exclusions have decreased significantly over the last year. This term they have decreased further to 20, compared with 60 for the previous term. These figures are now lower than the national average.

Recommendation 4: Improve the quality and consistency of marking and feedback to pupils

Strong progress in addressing the recommendation

Since the core inspection, the school has developed worthwhile procedures, which have resulted in a significant improvement in the quality and consistency of marking. Overall, the quality of marking is now strong. Teachers' comments on pupils' work is far more relevant and diagnostic. Feedback provides pupils with a clear understanding of how to improve their work.

The school has established a useful 'marking for literacy' policy. This places a strong emphasis on identifying spelling and grammatical mistakes and supporting pupils to correct these errors. This is a very strong feature in the Welsh and English departments in particular. However, a few subject leaders do not monitor the quality and consistency of marking rigorously enough. In these departments, there is still too much variation in the quality of assessment.

At the time of the core inspection, nearly all teachers marked work regularly. However, there were too many inconsistencies in teachers' marking both between and within departments. Many comments did not provide sufficient guidance to pupils about how to improve their work.

In response to these shortcomings, the school has identified skilful practitioners who share their good practice with other teachers. The school has held useful training events, focussing effectively on improving teachers' ability to identify and communicate strengths and areas for development in their verbal and written feedback to pupils.

In many subjects, there is a useful learning dialogue between teachers and pupils. In their books, pupils' responses to teachers' comments are thoughtful and contribute well to their learning. Teachers monitor and analyse these comments well to ensure pupils are clear about what they need to do to improve.

Book scrutinies are undertaken rigorously by senior leaders and the new process introduced in January is developing appropriately as part of the school's wider book-review scheme. Book sampling is an integral and valuable aspect of the senior leadership team's learning walks. Senior leaders scrutinise books to verify whether marking is diagnostic and that comments provide clear guidance to pupils about how to improve. Subject leaders are held to account appropriately during follow-up meetings, which are held promptly once the book reviews have been completed.

Recommendation 5: Develop line management systems so that all leaders are challenged and are held to account for improvement

Strong progress in addressing the recommendation

Since the core inspection, the school has made strong progress in strengthening its line management systems so that leaders at all levels are challenged and held to account with greater rigour. Most middle leaders are now fully accountable for the quality of learning, teaching and assessment in their departments.

Since the core inspection, there have been significant staffing changes at the school. These changes include the appointment of a new headteacher, two deputy headteachers and two assistant headteachers. In addition, around half of the middle leaders have taken up their posts since the 2012 inspection.

Leadership now has the capacity to hold staff to account and secure further improvement.

Senior leaders meet regularly with those they line manage. The school has established a useful programme of line management workshops that take place once a month. These workshops provide middle leaders with the opportunity to come together, discuss key aspects of their role and receive valuable professional development. In addition, line managers meet regularly with those they line manage in formal one-to-one meetings. These meetings have a suitable focus on the school's priorities for improvement, such as improving pupils' performance and strengthening teaching and assessment. The focus on improving pupil performance and securing further improvement at key stage 4 is a strong feature. Records of these meetings include appropriate action points, which are followed up during subsequent meetings.

Since September 2014, the school has re-established its performance management system. Performance management objectives link appropriately with the school's key areas for development.

Changes in key personnel and improvements to the management systems have contributed to suitable progress in most performance indicators, sustained improvements in the quality of marking and led to solid improvements in the quality of teaching.

Recommendation 6: Improve the use of data at all levels to ensure accurate target setting

Strong progress in addressing the recommendation

Since the core inspection, the school has made strong progress towards addressing this recommendation. During the core inspection, the school's tracking system was underdeveloped. This meant that pupils at risk of underachieving were not being identified clearly and promptly. Furthermore, many pupils were unsure of their target grades and levels and whether or not they were on target to meet them.

Since then, the school has developed and refined a series of successful strategies to address these concerns. Now, senior leaders and most middle leaders analyse data effectively. The deputy headteacher analyses the performance of groups of pupils thoroughly before setting ambitious targets for departments and individuals. Subject leaders track pupils' progress against these targets regularly and systematically.

Progress leaders track the performance of year groups and individuals thoroughly. Form tutors also play a key role in monitoring pupils' performance against their minimum targets.

All pupils have a 'summary card' that captures their progress against their minimum expected grades. Class lists are displayed across the school and highlight pupils' performance in a colour-coded format. These displays motivate pupils positively to improve their performance even further.

Pupils are very positive about the quality of their progress reports. These have been simplified and provide parents with clear, continuous and comprehensive information about their child's performance following each assessment point.

Recommendation 7: Develop the role of the governing body in challenging the school

Strong progress in addressing the recommendation

Over the last two years, the governing body has strengthened its understanding of the work of the school. New committee structures and the addition of four new governors have improved the governing body's capacity to challenge and support the school.

Six new committees have been formed, three to report to the standards committee and three to report to the strategic committee. Regular committee meetings ensure that governors are now better informed about standards, teaching and leadership and have increased opportunities for them to act as a critical friend.

Communication between governors and the school has improved significantly and this has had a positive impact on the work of the school. The school has introduced a programme of subject reports where subject leaders present information to the governing body. These reports have provided governors with an improved understanding of standards and provision in subjects, and allow them to ask challenging questions of middle leaders about the effectiveness of planning and teaching in their subjects. This process, together with the development of link governors to departments, has increased governors' ability to hold middle leaders to account. In addition, governors have had an impact on developing the quality of teaching through the appointment of three teaching and learning advocates.

Recommendation 8: Strengthen systems to ensure that the analysis and monitoring of learning, teaching and leadership secure improvement

Strong progress in addressing the recommendation

Since the core inspection the school has strengthened its systems considerably to ensure that the analysis and monitoring of learning, teaching and leadership secure necessary improvement. The roles and responsibilities of senior and middle leaders are clear and staff understand well the monitoring processes.

Organisational changes have impacted positively on progress and secured an increased emphasis on improving pupils' standards and strengthening the quality of teaching. Accountability at all levels has increased, expectations of teachers are clearer and there is far greater consistency in the school's approach to leadership and monitoring critical aspects of its work.

The middle leadership team has been strengthened by the recent appointment of three teaching and learning advocates. They have responsibility for supporting teachers to reflect on, evaluate and improve their practice. These appointments are already starting to have an impact on improving learning and teaching. For example, improved guidance on classroom and behaviour management has helped a few teachers to introduce more effective strategies in their lessons.

The school monitors and analyses the quality of learning, teaching and leadership across the school systematically. Senior leaders, supported by subject leaders, undertake detailed and informative reviews of the performance of individual departments through a regular cycle of reviews. These reviews draw on a wide range of evidence, including thorough data analysis and evaluation of the quality of learning and teaching.

The school has a strong focus on improving learning and teaching and continues to undertake a rolling programme of lesson observations as part of its system of monitoring and analysis of teaching and learning. Additionally it undertakes targeted observations as part of a professional development programme to support individual teachers to improve their classroom practice.

Together these initiatives have helped the school to strengthen its systems for the monitoring and analysis of learning, teaching and leadership. It has secured a solid improvement in teaching and learning, strengthened good teaching further and reduced significantly the number of lessons with important shortcomings.

Recommendations

In order to maintain and improve on this progress, the school should continue to sustain the level of progress it has already made, and continue to address those inspection recommendations where further progress is required.