

Re-inspection

of

**Bettws High School
Bettws Lane
Newport
NP20 7YB**

School number: 6804025

Date of re-inspection: February 2009

Bettws High School was inspected in November 2007 and judged as requiring significant improvement. As part of the Welsh Assembly Government's requirements for schools requiring significant improvement, Estyn undertook a follow-up inspection in February 2009 focusing on the key issues identified in the Section 28 inspection.

Outcome of the re-inspection

Bettws High School is judged to have made good progress in relation to the recommendations for improvement identified in the Section 28 inspection in November 2007. As a result of this progress 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

The school is making good progress against all the recommendations of the Section 28 report, though there is still room for improvement. Progress against each recommendation is described below.

Recommendation 1: satisfy statutory requirements for a daily act of collective worship for all students. Also comply with the requirement to teach Welsh to all students until they reach statutory school leaving age, and work towards satisfying the national priority for bilingualism.

Daily act of collective worship

The school has made good progress in addressing this recommendation. Relevant training has been provided for staff to ensure that tutor periods meet the requirements for a daily act of collective worship. Tutors now deliver a 'thought for the day' that includes one minute of quiet reflection. Tutor period collective worship is based on a booklet which sets out clearly what is expected and is informally monitored through visits by heads of house and other senior managers. These arrangements are good, although some inconsistencies remain in the quality of delivery.

Senior or middle managers lead a weekly programme of key stage and house assemblies, and a daily assembly for Year 7. These assemblies present thought-provoking subjects and provide an opportunity for reflection.

Welsh and bilingualism

The school has addressed the issue of non-compliance with statutory requirements regarding teaching Welsh to all pupils of statutory school age. Since September 2008, all pupils in key stages 3 and 4 have received Welsh lessons. This provision is enhanced beyond Welsh lessons by calendared days where pupils have extended opportunities to come into contact with Welsh. A recent example involved a visit to the Welsh Folk Museum in Sain Ffagan, where pupils and staff undertook activities through the medium of Welsh.

There have been other worthwhile initiatives to raise the profile of Welsh. A series of twilight sessions to help staff improve their grasp of incidental Welsh has been well received. A notable feature is that seven teaching members of staff have taken advantage of the opportunity to attend local Dosbarth Nos Welsh for adult classes, funded by the school. The school has set clear expectations about using incidental Welsh in its 'Bettws 10' lesson guidelines, which are monitored by managers during programmed lesson observations.

As a result of these initiatives, more staff now use incidental Welsh to greet pupils and to praise their efforts in subjects other than Welsh. A good proportion of teachers also use Welsh to specify the date, and display subject terminology on classroom walls in both languages. However, teachers did not use incidental Welsh in at least half of the lessons observed during the monitoring visit.

Since the appointment of a new subject leader for Welsh from September 2008, there have been significant developments in the planning and delivery of Welsh.

These have included producing a scheme of work and improving resources and reading materials. There has also been an improvement in the quality of teaching.

These improvements have had a positive impact on pupils' attitudes towards Welsh. A clear indication of this is the very good progress in eradicating disruptive behaviour in Welsh classes. Pupils are attentive and work productively in whole class, individual or pair activities. This represents a considerable improvement since the time of the November 2007 inspection.

Nevertheless, this improvement has not yet had sufficient impact on pupils' achievement and progress in both key stage 3 and key stage 4. The number of pupils entered for the full GCSE course examination in Welsh second language continues to be very low this year. Only 9% of the cohort of 214 gained an A*-G grade at GCSE in Welsh second language in summer 2008.

The weekly time allocation of one hour a week in both key stages 3 and 4 is not enough to enable pupils to make good progress in Welsh. The proposal to increase staffing capacity for Welsh from September 2009 will help the school address this issue.

Recommendation 2: continue to raise standards in all subjects, attempting to eradicate shortcomings that have been identified and especially in Welsh, where many important shortcomings have been highlighted

Examination results

Key stage 3 teacher assessment results for 2008 in the core subjects have improved since 2006. They compare well with similar schools.

In key stage 4, the percentage of pupils achieving the Level 2 threshold has increased significantly from 25.6% in 2007 to 43.5% in 2008. This is largely due to good outcomes in BTEC vocational qualifications.

The school remains in the bottom 25% of similar schools in all other key stage 4 attainment indicators. Significant challenges remain to improve the percentage achieving the Level 2 threshold including English and mathematics, and the percentage of pupils, particularly boys, leaving full-time education without a qualification. These indicators compare poorly with similar schools and with local and national averages.

Since September 2008, pupils on alternative learning pathways have followed accredited courses. This is likely to reduce the number of pupils leaving school without a recognised qualification. The school has realistic targets that predict improvement against most indicators in 2009, and it has good systems to track and monitor progress towards these targets.

Standards in lessons

The inspection team observed 28 lessons in key stage 3 and 4. Grades are shown in the chart below:

Grade	1	2	3	4	5
Number of lessons	0	11	9	7	1
Percentage	0	39%	32%	25%	4%

These grades continue to be well below the national average. However, the sample is small and HMI focused mainly on subjects which had received the lowest grades in the Section 28 inspection. The majority of grade 2 lessons were in key stage 3.

The good features in the lessons observed were that pupils:

- listened well to the teacher and to each other;
- were engaged and productive;
- presented their work with care and pride;
- expressed their opinions clearly and used subject vocabulary well;
- used apparatus and equipment skilfully in practical subjects; and
- produced good extended writing in a few subjects.

Significant shortcomings contributing to a lack of progress in lessons included:

- inattentiveness, low-level disruption and occasional rudeness;
- a negative attitude and unwillingness to learn;
- a lack of ability to apply knowledge acquired in previous lessons; and
- poor basic skills, including weak listening skills, a lack of extended spoken responses and weakness in simple mathematical calculations.

The school has good strategies to address shortcomings in standards and has made progress in addressing some of them. However, significant challenges remain.

Recommendation 3: continue to raise standards of teaching and learning, with particular reference to raising teachers' expectations of what students can achieve and then providing appropriate and adequately challenging tasks for them to do so. Also focus upon improving class management where this is ineffective.

Grades for quality of teaching were as follows:

Grade	1	2	3	4	5
Number of lessons	2	13	9	4	0
Percentage	7%	46%	32%	14%	0%

This pattern is similar to the grades for key stages 3 and 4 in the Section 28 inspection, but represents an improvement when taking into account the focus on subjects with the lowest grades in that inspection. The four grade 4 lessons were in different subjects.

Overall, there are signs of improvement in teaching. There is a greater consistency of routine and expectation because staff generally adhere to the school's guidelines in 'the Bettws 10'. In the lessons inspected, the best features were:

- clear lesson objectives with high expectations and detailed planning;
- effective class management, with good relationships;
- good explanation of activities, with modelling of how to carry them out;
- a range of effective teaching techniques and classroom activities, including good use of whiteboards and computers that ensured pupils engaged with the work;
- good pace, including the use of time limits; and
- questioning that probed pupils' understanding and encouraged more detailed answers.

There are also many examples of good marking and assessment, including opportunities for pupils to assess and comment on their own work and the work of others. Many teachers mark in detail and provide good, constructive feedback to pupils on how to improve.

There were still shortcomings in nearly half of lessons, though in most lessons these were outweighed by good features. The main shortcomings were:

- inadequate differentiation to cater for pupils of different abilities, and lack of awareness that some pupils were not keeping up with the work;
- poor timing and slow pace, with teachers sometimes not allowing enough time to sum up or consolidate what pupils had learnt;
- lack of clarity in tasks;
- activities that did not interest pupils, leading to bad behaviour;
- weak class management with tolerance of poor behaviour or inattentiveness;
- lack of development of key skills in general and pupils' language skills in particular;
- in Welsh, not enough use of the target language, with a tendency for unnecessary translation into English, and insufficient intense oral practice to consolidate new language; and
- in Welsh, a lack of planned opportunities, such as role-play, for pupils to practice what they had previously learnt.

In most classes, teachers' use of the school's behaviour management procedures contributes significantly to better learning (see later). Classroom assistants also

provide good support here, but often do not take an active enough part in helping pupils during lessons.

Actions to improve standards of achievement and quality of teaching

Staff at the school, effectively led by senior managers, have worked together well to improve teaching and learning. This work has been supported very effectively by the local authority and many staff have contributed.

Staff recruitment and changes in responsibilities in the wake of curriculum developments have been effective and produced an increased focus on learning and on monitoring of pupils' progress. Middle managers are more aware of their responsibilities and how to undertake them. They are supported and encouraged well in this by regular meetings with their line managers.

A well-planned staff development programme is supplemented by a comprehensive programme of lesson observation. The monitoring report by managers provides a useful summary of the main features of teaching and learning, though some lesson observation forms seem too generous. Teaching staff have not yet received training in lesson observation and feedback, which would make peer and managers' lesson observation more effective. There have also been thorough reviews of behaviour, assessment and other aspects of learning.

A radical re-design of the curriculum has led to reduced movement around the school, better behaviour and an increased focus on lesson planning for Years 9 and 10 because of the need to teach several lessons to the same class in the same day. A number of pupils are benefiting from courses outside school, monitored by a full-time alternative-provision manager. New arrangements for teaching Year 7 mean that pupils have got to know fewer staff well and have settled in quickly. Some subjects receive less teaching time than before, and the school needs to ensure that, as the curriculum develops further, enough time is provided to cover the National Curriculum programmes of study in key stage 3.

The school's system of half-termly assessments enables good tracking and monitoring of pupils' progress. Targets are based sensibly on objective data, moderated by teachers' knowledge of the pupils. Pupils needing support are mentored and all pupils can receive additional help through workshops and revision sessions. New academic review days provide good opportunities to provide regular formal reports to pupils and their parents, and parental attendance has increased.

Overall, there are good indications that the school's strategies are improving learning and shortcomings in teaching and learning can gradually be eradicated.

Recommendation 4: continue to seek ways of reducing students' high levels of absenteeism.

The school is working hard to improve attendance. Recent initiatives include the setting up of a pupil attendance focus group, consisting of representatives of pupils with poor attendance records. The school is increasingly working with parents to improve the attendance of pupils with high levels of absenteeism. Governors, who are members of a recently established attendance sub-committee, participate in interviews with these parents. 'Attendance matters', a newsletter for parents issued in October 2008, clearly outlines the importance of good attendance. Extensive

collaboration between the school and the education welfare service includes identification of pupils in feeder primary schools showing early signs of disaffection.

The school has introduced alternative pathways this year for groups of disengaged learners. The 'Learnabout project' provides 24 pupils in Years 10 and 11 with an opportunity to gain qualifications in the Welsh Baccalaureate and key skills in a centre outside the school. Their attendance of over 80% is a considerable improvement on their previous attendance of around 20%. A small group of disaffected Year 11 students who have not been attending school are now being taught by school staff for ten hours a week at the Bettws Community Centre. These pupils are on track towards gaining an OCR qualification later this year.

The whole-school attendance figure for 2007-2008 of 88.4% continues to be below the average for similar schools, but is nearly two percentage points higher than the figure for the school for the previous year. This represents considerable progress. Current initiatives have the potential to further improve whole-school attendance levels.

Recommendation 5: continue to seek ways of improving students' behaviour, especially in classes where disruptive behaviour adversely affects overall standards of achievement.

The school, supported by the local authority, has worked hard and successfully to improve behaviour and procedures are now good.

The clear referral system is managed on a computerised database administered by support staff. It ensures intervention at appropriate levels. Most staff use the system effectively. The inclusion centre, staffed by four teaching assistants, provides a good environment for re-integrating pupils after exclusion. A separate time-out room provides support for dealing with day-to-day incidents.

Curriculum changes as described above, and arrangements for education outside school for specific pupils, have had a beneficial effect on pupils' behaviour.

Along with the consistent approach to discipline, the school offers praise and rewards for pupils. Merit marks allow them to buy goods or, if they have collected enough, to get bigger rewards such as free school trips. An increased focus on rewarding pupils for effort led to a five-fold increase in the amount of merits given to pupils over the last year. As part of this strategy, tutors have a fortnightly lesson in which they contact parents and make as many positive comments as possible.

The school consults pupils well. It listens to what they have to say about teaching, and welcomes suggestions about procedures, for example regarding uniform and catering. As a result pupils are beginning to feel more a part of the school community and to support its work rather than fight against it.

The school's procedures are having a measurable effect. Referrals for serious misbehaviour have reduced by more than 25% since last year. The number of fixed-term exclusion days has also reduced significantly, partly because of fewer referrals and partly because incidents are dealt with increasingly in the inclusion unit.

Despite this success, the school is aware that there is still some way to go, but expects continued improvement as new procedures increasingly take effect.

Recommendation 6: improve students' key skills through their co-ordinated use and development across the curriculum.

The school has made good progress with this recommendation, with clear strategic direction from senior leaders. A monitoring system maps key skills across every subject's programme of study at each key stage.

From September 2008, the school has introduced a 'key skills passport scheme' for Years 7 and 8 to develop level 1 key skills in communication, application of number and information and communication technology. Every subject is responsible for delivering aspects of key skills that are tracked through the school's computerised assessment programme. A key skills working party, with representation from all subject areas, meets regularly to review progress. This initiative is in an early stage of development but early indications are that it is working well.

Staff have undertaken training and guidance on delivering key skills from local authority advisers and senior leaders. Much of the training has focused on literacy skills, with an emphasis on the Year 7 curriculum, and there has also been training and guidance on developing numeracy. The skills of problem-solving, working with others and improving performance have been developed through training on assessment for learning strategies and pupil review days. The school plans to include these wider key skills in its passport scheme.

Literacy and numeracy intervention programmes target pupils in key stage 3. Year 9 and 12 pupils sit online tests to determine their competence in these skills.

The school plans to develop the Welsh Baccalaureate Qualification in key stage 4 by explicitly teaching key skills to Year 9 and 10 pupils from June 2009 so that they gain level 1 and 2 key skills qualifications.

Management

The senior management team is working very energetically and effectively to improve the school. They have strong support from the staff, governors and the local authority. They have a good knowledge and understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the school, and a clear vision about future progress.

Recommendations

In order to improve further, in addition to continuing with current actions, the school should:

- raise the proportion of lessons in which standards and teaching are good;
- increase the time allocation for Welsh in key stages 3 and 4 and increase the number of pupils entered for both the full and short GCSE courses in Welsh second language;
- ensure that there is adequate time to provide the National Curriculum programmes of study for all subjects in key stage 3; and
- provide training for staff in lesson observation and feedback.