

RE-INSPECTION

OF

**DARLAND HIGH SCHOOL
DARLAND LANE
ROSSETT
WREXHAM
LL12 0EN**

SCHOOL NUMBER: 6654034

DATE OF RE- INSPECTION: June 2009

Darland High School was inspected in October 2007 under section 28 of the Education Act 2005 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 June 2009 focusing on the key issues identified in the section 28 inspection.

Outcome of the re-inspection

Darland High School is judged to have made good progress in relation to the recommendations for improvement identified in the section 28 inspection in October 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 progress with all of the recommendations of the section 28 report, although there is room for further improvement with a few.

Recommendation 1: Continue to work with the local authority to ensure that standards of mathematics improve even further.

The school has made progress in addressing this recommendation. Progress is less evident than with other recommendations and there remain shortcomings in standards and teaching in mathematics.

The mathematics department has made progress in implementing the useful advice and support provided by the local authority. The school will need to continue with this work to ensure the necessary impact is achieved on pupils' standards.

Teaching is improving. All lessons begin within an interesting starter activity to engage pupils' interest. In the majority of lessons, teachers use questioning well during whole-class teaching and make good use of the interactive whiteboard where this is available. However, too many lessons lack pace. In these lessons, there is often not enough direct teaching and pupils are left to work individually for too long.

The department has begun to track the progress of individual pupils. This is not yet sufficiently rigorous to identify underachievement quickly enough. A few pupils' books are not marked regularly or thoroughly enough for pupils to know how to improve.

At key stage 3, 77.5% of pupils gained at least level 5 in mathematics in 2009 National Curriculum assessments. This is below the school's target of 83%. It is also below the Fischer Family Trust (FFT) estimate based on pupils' attainment at previous key stages, while the same pupils outperformed the FFT estimate for English and science.

Key stage 4 results for 2009 are not available yet. The performance of Year 11 pupils in completed module tests is below that of 2008, while pupils in Year 10 have performed better than the two previous cohorts in completed modules.

Recommendation 2: ensure that pupils attain the standards of which they are capable at both key stages

The school is making progress with this recommendation.

During the visit, the inspection team visited a small number of lessons. Overall, pupils achieve good standards and recall previous work well. In a minority of lessons, where pupils are provided with too narrow a range of activities and a low level of challenge, pupils do not concentrate on the tasks set nor achieve the standards of which they are capable.

Since the last monitoring visit, free school meal benchmark tables for 2008 in both key stages have become available. This enables the school to compare its performance against similar schools for that year.

For key stage 3, benchmark information now places the school in the third quarter of schools for mathematics, science and the core subject indicator, but in the bottom quarter for English. The school has recently completed teacher assessments in key stage 3 for the current Year 9 and these show a further improvement. For the first time in recent years, these results are broadly in line with estimates based on pupils' previous performance in English and science. However, they remain below in mathematics and this affects the percentage of pupils achieving the core subject indicator.

For key stage 4, performance in most indicators is below average when compared to similar schools with the percentage achieving the level 2 threshold in the bottom quarter. The school predicts an improvement in GCSE results for 2009 based on module results and coursework marks already known.

Recommendation 3: continue to ensure that the best teaching practice is shared across the school.

The school has made good progress in addressing this recommendation. A few departments have not yet fully implemented strategies that the school has introduced.

The good and outstanding features of teaching observed during the visit include:

- very good questioning that deepens pupils' understanding and responses;
- excellent lesson planning;
- very good use of ICT to support learning;
- high expectations of pupils;
- a good range of activities provided that actively engage pupils;
- interesting and challenging tasks to promote pupils' understanding;
- clear explanations of lesson objectives;
- assessment of pupils' work according to clear success criteria which are shared with pupils; and
- good subject knowledge and the ability to communicate that knowledge effectively.

A minority of lessons have shortcomings, including:

- undemanding activities that fail to engage pupils fully or probe their understanding; and
- too few opportunities for pupils to evaluate their own learning, particularly at the end of the lesson.

The school is developing a more open and reflective culture among teachers. The senior management team has arranged an effective staff development

programme. Senior managers share the good practice identified during lesson observations and give departments specific areas to develop. These include:

- improving teachers' understanding of what makes an effective lesson;
- adapting materials to meet the needs of pupils of different abilities; and
- developing effective assessment strategies.

Subject department managers observe lessons and scrutinise pupils' work effectively to improve consistency in teaching and assessment. Staff share good practice in many department meetings and shortcomings become the focus for future development.

The school has also provided appropriate training for support staff and cover supervisors to improve their skills. As an example of good practice, many departments are developing effective interactive web pages.

Recommendation 4: ensure all middle managers monitor the quality of teaching and learning in order to share good practice and identify shortcomings;

Recommendation 5: ensure that the process of self-evaluation is consistently implemented and accurately identifies good features and shortcomings

Recommendation 6: ensure that SMT provide support and on-going challenge for all departments in order to secure continual improvement.

The school has made good progress towards meeting all three of these recommendations. There are effective procedures for co-ordinating the school's work on self-evaluation. Establishing a line manager system for subject departments has led to a marked improvement in how self-evaluation process is monitored in each subject. It has also helped middle managers to develop a clearer understanding of their role in securing improvement.

Middle managers are now held more accountable for standards. They meet regularly with their line managers to review progress. Most subjects now make better use of performance information, including comparisons with similar schools across Wales and with other subjects within the school. The use of data for target setting continues to improve, although a few departments still do not set sufficiently challenging targets.

Senior and middle managers have developed good systems to monitor and track pupils' progress in individual subjects against available data. Learning coordinators track the performance of pupils from Year 7 to Year 11 and identify pupils who are performing below their expected level in a range of subjects. They liaise well with parents and arrange additional support to suit the pupils' individual learning needs. Each subject also identifies a group of pupils at risk of underachieving and most have recently provided extra support for these pupils, particularly those preparing for GCSE examinations.

A monitoring schedule now provides an effective framework for monitoring teaching and learning and this has improved consistency across departments. Middle managers carry out cycles of lesson observations and scrutinise pupils' work. They make more consistent use of lesson observation forms that are concerned with identifying the standards pupils achieve and the shortcomings that need to be addressed. They discuss strengths and shortcomings with line managers and agree appropriate actions to improve the quality of teaching and learning. However, there is still inconsistency in completing a few observation forms, particularly in identifying and communicating shortcomings clearly enough.

The school has improved further its guidance on self-evaluation procedures and the format of self-evaluation reports now gives greater prominence to identifying shortcomings. The school has started to use a broader evidence base to support its self-evaluation, for example by using parental questionnaires and pupil surveys. The overall quality of area team self-evaluations has improved and many are now of good quality. However, a few are still not self-critical enough and do not have a strong enough focus on standards.

There is a secure link between the findings of self-evaluation processes and the production of improvement plans, with the priorities for development based on identified shortcomings. More priorities are appropriately concerned with raising standards.

Recommendation 7: continue to improve the quality and effectiveness of development plans and develop procedures to assure their quality and to monitor and evaluate their implementation

The school has made good progress in addressing this recommendation, although procedures are at an early stage.

Overall, planning has improved. All development plans follow a common format and are completed in accordance to school procedures. The school has refined its guidance so that there are clear expectations of what plans should contain. Plans now generally identify specific outcomes for actions and have clear timescales. A few plans do not identify the need for further improvements clearly enough. There are still too many plans of differing scale and function, although the school intends to rationalise these.

The school has established suitable procedures for monitoring and evaluating plans through line managers and the monitoring schedule. The schedule provides a clear and appropriate agenda for this process. The timetable for producing departmental plans now allows the inclusion of examination results before they are finalised. There are also suitable procedures to approve plans at the end of the process.

Recommendations

In order to improve further, the school should continue to:

- raise standards in mathematics; and
- make sure that actions already being implemented have a positive impact on the standards.