

## **INSPECTION**

**of**

**Pontllanfraith Comprehensive School  
Coed Cae Ddu Road  
Pontllanfraith  
NP12 2YB**

**SCHOOL NUMBER: 6764032**

**DATE OF INSPECTION: 12 - 14 March 2008**

Pontllanfraith Comprehensive School was inspected in November 2006 and judged to be in need of special measures. As part of the Welsh Assembly Government's requirements for schools in need of special measures, Estyn has undertaken regular monitoring inspections, which have focused on the key issues and recommendations identified in the inspection in November 2006.

### **Outcome of the inspection on 12 to 14 March 2008**

Pontllanfraith Comprehensive School is judged to have made good progress in relation to the recommendations following the Section 28 inspection in November 2006. As a result of this progress, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education and Training in Wales is removing the school from special measures.

## Progress since the last inspection

Estyn inspectors visited Pontllanfraith Comprehensive School in March 2008 to monitor the progress that the school has made since the inspection of November 2006 that placed the school in special measures. Inspectors observed lessons, looked at a representative selection of pupils' work and observed standards of behaviour around the school. They also interviewed senior managers, LEA representatives, the chair of the governing body and heads of faculty. At the end of the visit, they reported their findings to representatives of the governing body and the LEA, the headteacher and other senior managers. The key findings are set out below.

## Outcome

In view of the good progress made since the school was placed in special measures, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education and Training in Wales is of the opinion that special measures are no longer required in relation to the school.

## Standards

Inspectors observed 24 lessons. The standards achieved in these lessons are shown in the table below:

| Grade 1 | Grade 2 | Grade 3 | Grade 4 | Grade 5 |
|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| 0%      | 54%     | 46%     | 0%      | 0%      |

The standards of achievement in all the lessons observed were grade 3 (good features outweigh shortcomings) or better. This is an improvement on the 88% of lessons that were judged to be grade 3 or better in the inspection of November 2006, and on the figures from previous monitoring visits. The proportion of lessons at grade 2 (good features and no important shortcomings) or better is also higher than during the inspection of 2006. Standards were particularly good in the lessons observed in key stage 4, where nearly two-thirds of lessons were judged to be grade 2. The improvement in standards is the result of improvements in teaching and in pupils' behaviour.

The performance of boys improved in 2007 and the percentage gaining 5 or more GCSE grades at A\*-C was the same as the LEA average. However, the performance of girls was well below national and local averages. When compared to similar schools, using the free school meals benchmarks, the school's performance is in the bottom quarter for nearly all indicators.

There is a positive learning ethos in most classrooms and little evidence of the low-level disruption evident at the time of the inspection of 2006. The number of recorded incidents of misbehaviour has reduced by over a quarter compared with the same period a year ago. There has also been a reduction in fixed-term exclusions over the same period, with significantly fewer days lost from school. There have been no permanent exclusions during the last 12 months.

Most pupils listen attentively in lessons and many contribute willingly to discussion. In a minority of lessons, pupils give extended responses to questions using correct subject terms, although generally pupils' speaking skills need

further development. Most pupils read competently and with understanding. A minority write well, although standards of writing, particularly extended writing, remain variable. Numeracy skills are also variable and many pupils do not transfer skills from their mathematics lessons and use them effectively in other contexts.

Nearly all pupils settle to work well and most concentrate on tasks and cooperate effectively in group and pair work. Pupils' independent learning and problem-solving skills are improving. The improvement in these skills reflects the wider opportunities they are given during lessons. More able pupils learn from their mistakes and know how to improve their work.

The overall attendance rate since September 2007 is 90%; an improvement on the same period last year. Attendance in Year 11 has increased by 2.5 percentage points over the same period. The number of pupils arriving late for school has decreased significantly over the last year. Nearly all pupils are now punctual at the start of the day and very few are late to lessons.

### **Quality of education**

The quality of teaching in the 24 lessons observed was as follows:

| <b>Grade 1</b> | <b>Grade 2</b> | <b>Grade 3</b> | <b>Grade 4</b> | <b>Grade 5</b> |
|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|
| 21%            | 46%            | 33%            | 0%             | 0%             |

Teaching and assessment were judged to be grade 3 or above in all lessons. This is well above the percentage of 86% in the previous inspection. The two-thirds of lessons where teaching is grade 2 or above and the one-fifth of lessons with outstanding features represent a significant improvement since the inspection of 2006 and since previous Estyn monitoring visits. No lessons were judged to be grade 4 or below, compared to 14% during the inspection of 2006.

In the lessons where there are outstanding features, teachers consolidate and extend pupils' understanding particularly effectively by setting very high expectations and using probing questions that challenge pupils to think carefully, to justify their opinions and refine their responses.

In lessons where teaching was judged to be grade 2 or above, the most common good features are:

- well-planned lessons with clearly-stated objectives and a variety of effective learning activities that successfully engage pupils' interest;
- effective classroom management strategies and good use of praise that builds mutual respect between teachers and pupils;
- well-organised pair and group work that develops pupils' ability to work with others; and
- good use of interactive white boards and other appropriate resources.

In the one-third of lessons graded 3, the most common shortcomings include:

- learning activities that do not challenge pupils enough, particularly the more able;
- questioning that does not encourage pupils to give extended responses and does not include all pupils fully; and
- too few opportunities for pupils to work independently and solve problems for themselves.

Most teachers mark pupils work regularly and many offer supportive comments that help pupils know how well they are doing and what they need to do to improve. Where assessment is less effective:

- comments refer to presentation or completion of work rather than providing subject specific advice; and
- teachers do not correct basic spelling and grammatical errors.

In a majority of classes, teachers provide regular feedback for pupils and, in the best cases, there are good opportunities for pupils to evaluate their own and other's work. However, there are still inconsistencies between and within departments in the quality of formative assessment in lessons.

The school has established a clear and effective behaviour code and good procedures for recording incidents of misbehaviour. It uses data well to monitor pupils' behaviour and set targets for improvement. Teachers are introducing a wider range of activities and teaching strategies to engage pupils more fully in lessons.

The school monitors attendance closely and uses a range of effective strategies which are beginning to have a measurable impact on attendance. The social inclusion centre has helped to reduce exclusions.

### **Leadership and management**

The headteacher has established rigorous procedures for monitoring and evaluating the work of the school and has a good understanding of performance in individual subjects. She has also established a clear vision and high expectations. There is an ongoing programme of faculty reviews that provide a systematic analysis of standards and teaching. These reviews identify shortcomings as well as strengths. Faculty leaders are increasingly involved in monitoring procedures and faculty self-evaluation is improving. Teachers have opportunities to observe teaching in other classes, including in other faculties. These initiatives have improved teaching and marking.

The role of several members of the senior leadership team in monitoring and evaluation is not fully developed and they are not sufficiently involved in challenging performance in the faculties they manage. There are no systems in place for systematic reporting that enable the headteacher to undertake a more strategic role in monitoring and evaluation.

Middle managers receive an extensive range of performance data and comparative analyses. A system of tracking the progress of pupils has been established. This provides middle managers with useful information on individual pupils' comparative progress across subjects. However, performance and tracking data is not yet used consistently by middle managers as a means of self-evaluation and identifying areas for improvement. The school has identified the training needs of middle managers and has planned a comprehensive training programme.

There are regular consultations to seek the views of stakeholders through parental, staff and pupil questionnaires. These surveys are predominantly positive.

The governing body are well-informed about the school's progress in implementing the post-inspection action plan through regular reports and a programme of presentations by subject leaders. The school is seeking ways to resolve its financial difficulties. Even so, the school's budget remains in considerable deficit.

Overall, good progress has been made in establishing a number of worthwhile whole-school systems and practices. Together with higher expectations, these practices are having a significant impact on the key areas of attendance, behaviour and teaching. As a result, the school is well-placed to move forward and ensure further improvement in pupils' standards.

### **Recommendations for improvement**

In order to maintain and improve on this progress, the school should:

- improve standards in examinations results in key stage 4 and further improve pupils' speaking, writing and mathematical skills;
- continue to build on the effective strategies that are already having a positive impact on the quality of teaching;
- further develop the roles of the senior leadership team and faculty and subject leaders in monitoring and evaluating pupils' achievements in classes, written work and in external examinations; and
- establish reporting systems that enable the headteacher to play a more strategic role in monitoring and evaluation.