



Report summary for parents and carers on Blackwood Comprehensive School

Date of inspection: May 2023

by Estyn, His Majesty's Inspectorate for Education and Training in Wales

Overview

Pupils at Blackwood Comprehensive School are friendly, courteous, well-rounded young people who convey strong pride in their school and their personal achievements. There is a highly inclusive ethos in the school and wide-ranging provision and support for pupils' well-being and their social and moral development. As a result, they develop successfully as responsible, well-informed citizens who know that their individuality will be celebrated and respected by the school community.

Effective teaching means that pupils make good progress in their knowledge, understanding and skills in many lessons. In a few cases, pupils make particularly strong progress. Their oracy skills are a notable strength, as is the pride with which they present their work in their books. Most display excellent attitudes to learning and behave very well. Their enthusiastic participation in extra-curricular activities and leadership opportunities is of particular note.

Leaders' belief that pupils' well-being is an important precursor to learning permeates all aspects of the school's work. All leaders take pupils' views into account on a regular basis and the school has developed a range of valuable provisions to meet the evolving needs of vulnerable pupils. There is a well-established culture of safeguarding pupils and most feel safe and secure in school. The school has robust procedures to monitor attendance and helpful processes to support pupils with low attendance. However, despite improvements in attendance from last year, it remains a cause for concern, particularly for pupils eligible for free school meals.

The central importance of high-quality teaching is strongly emphasised and is at the heart of the school's approach to the curriculum. The school has a clear vision for Curriculum for Wales. Staff within the school and across partner primary schools have worked collaboratively to develop an authentic, purposeful curriculum and plan for appropriate progression. The programme of professional learning around teaching has been successful in promoting core principles that are evident in lessons. The programme also introduces staff to a menu of additional strategies, but they have the freedom to choose what is right for their pupils and subject. Teaching is of consistently good quality in many lessons. Many teachers use assessment information effectively to plan lessons and they provide helpful feedback to pupils.

Staff across the school work extremely effectively as a team. Their attitudes and their work reflect their commitment to the pupils and the school's values, as well as a clear sense of shared accountability.

The skilful way in which the headteacher balances caring, compassionate leadership with a highly reflective, strategic and evaluative approach has inspired and influenced the work of other leaders. The consistently strong leadership skills demonstrated by many leaders at all levels is a notable feature. There is a culture of regular, rigorous self-evaluation leading to effective action planning and supported by purposeful professional learning. Governors are supportive of the school and are beginning to improve their understanding of the school's work and their role. However, mainly because many of the governors are new, they lack a detailed knowledge of the school's strengths and weaknesses and therefore do not provide sufficient challenge.

Recommendations

R1 Improve attendance, especially that of pupils eligible for free school meals

R2 Strengthen the role of governors as critical friends of the school

What happens next

The school will draw up an action plan to address the recommendations from the inspection.

Estyn will invite the school to prepare a case study on its work in relation to self-evaluation and developing pupils' digital skills for dissemination on Estyn's website.



School context

Name of provider	Blackwood Comprehensive School
Local authority	Caerphilly County Borough Council
Language of the provider	English
Type of school	Secondary
Number of pupils on roll	986
Pupils of statutory school age	986
Percentage of pupils eligible for free school meals over a three-year average (The national percentage of pupils eligible for free school meals over a three-year average in Secondary is 20.2%)	25.3%
Percentage of pupils identified as having additional learning needs (a) (The national percentage of pupils identified as having an additional learning need in Secondary is 17.8%)	20.9%
Percentage of pupils with English as an additional language	2.4%
Date of headteacher appointment	01/09/2018
Date of previous Estyn inspection (if applicable)	01/11/2015
Start date of inspection	15/05/2023

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