Arolygiaeth Ei Mawrhydi dros Addysg a Hyfforddiant yng Nghymru
Her Majesty's Inspectorate for Education and Training in Wales

A report on

Bettws Lifehouse

Date of inspection: February 2022

by

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

About Bettws Lifehouse

Bettws Lifehouse is an independent day school. The lower school is situated in a small, rural village in Powys and the upper school (key stage 4 and post-16) is located in Welshpool. It provides day education for up to 60 pupils aged seven to nineteen years. Pupils have a range of complex needs including behavioural, social, emotional difficulties and autistic spectrum condition (ASC).

All pupils have a statement of special educational needs or education health and care plan. Most pupils have experienced significant periods of disruption to their formal learning prior to their arrival at the school. Many join the school at times of personal crisis, and at different points during the academic year. Many pupils receive multi-agency support outside of school to support their well-being. As a result, there is considerable variation in pupils' individual starting points, motivation and learning ability.

The school describes itself as 'A truly child centred school, providing an intrinsic therapeutic and holistic education'.

There are currently 44 pupils in the school, a minority of whom are post-16 pupils. No pupils speak English as an additional language or speak Welsh as a first language.

The school's last core inspection was in July 2019. The executive headteacher is one of the proprietors and has been in post since the school opened.

Main findings

Strengths

Bettws Lifehouse provides a calm and nurturing environment where most pupils respond positively and thrive. The close collaboration between teaching staff, learning support staff and the therapy team at the school provides an effective approach to meeting the needs of all pupils. Over time most pupils make strong progress from their initial starting points in their social and emotional skills and develop a beneficial understanding and knowledge across many subject areas.

The school's embedded approach focusing on pupils' individual personal development is a strength. All members of the teaching and therapeutic team meet regularly to plan supportive strategies and to review and monitor each pupil's progress against their individual targets. This person-centred approach supports pupils well to develop their resilience, self-esteem and self-confidence as well as to acquire important life skills.

Teachers and learning support staff have a strong understanding of the needs and abilities of their pupils. As a result, pupils are well supported. They respond well to the caring and committed approach of staff and in particular to the staff well-being leads. These identified staff members are allocated to individual pupils to support their therapeutic and learning engagement. They build effective and purposeful working relationships with pupils that enable them to develop resilience, gain in confidence and improve their readiness for learning.

The school provides a flexible, broad and balanced curriculum that is well suited to the needs, interests and aspirations of pupils. In the lower school the stimulating curriculum allows pupils valuable opportunities to learn through play, exploration and authentic activities. This helps pupils to engage productively in lessons and to develop important skills for learning such as social and thinking skills. Pupils in the upper school are offered a broad range of relevant qualifications and experiences, which allow pupils to follow a pathway that meets their needs and interests successfully. As a result, pupils access qualification routes that are relevant and effectively support their post school pathways.

Transition arrangements at all stages are very effective at the school. As a result, staff know pupils very well and can respond appropriately to their needs. These transition arrangements include beneficial opportunities for pupils to prepare for their life after school.

Leadership of the school is highly effective. Leaders and managers have established and communicated a clear and strategic direction as well as ensuring effective day-to-day management of the school. They set high expectations for staff, pupils and themselves. This approach has enabled them to develop an effective, engaged team of teachers and support staff. In addition, the school has a valuable culture of professional learning, which is helping staff to understand and support pupils' needs skillfully.

Areas for development

As they progress through the school, pupils develop confidence to communicate sensitively with staff and visitors to the school. However opportunities for pupils to work in a meaningful way with their peers is underdeveloped.

Recommendations

The school should:

R1 Consistently implement strategies to improve pupils' interactions with their peers

R2 Evaluate the effectiveness of strategies to improve pupils' engagement with peers

Progress in addressing recommendations from previous visit or inspection report

Recommendation 1: Review the vocational courses to increase the options available

The school has made significant progress in extending the vocational offer to include a wider range of relevant qualifications. This includes BTECs at level 1, level 2 and level 3 in subjects such as animal care, workskills, engineering and hair and beauty. The increased breadth of options allows pupils to follow a pathway that meets their needs and interests appropriately. As a result, pupils access qualification routes that are relevant and effectively support their post school pathways.

The school is also working with a local partnership to provide supported internships where the pupil attends school for two or three days a week and a work placement for two days a week. This programme is an important first step into employment or apprenticeship and combines work experience with related vocational qualifications well.

This increased provision means that the school is now able to offer an academic pathway, a vocational pathway and a supported internship programme.

Since the core inspection in 2019, the school has made strong progress in meeting this recommendation.

The school has completed a useful audit of the delivery of digital competence skills in all curriculum areas. Staff meet regularly to plan, review and monitor each pupil's progress in these skills. The lead teacher for ICT also monitors and supports teachers' planning to ensure that skills are integrated appropriately in all areas of learning in the school. Staff have strengthened their professional development in the field of ICT. Lead teachers have produced helpful guides to support teachers relating to the use of technology within the classroom.

Pupils across the school have valuable opportunities to use ICT effectively. Examples include the use of software within art lessons to create digital art and using researching skills to select suitable recipes for cooking. Individual pupils with complex needs respond well to the use of software programs to support their learning across the curriculum. In addition, almost all pupils use ICT to share their learning and show a sound understanding of how to keep themselves safe online. By the time they leave the upper school, all pupils gain a suitable range of appropriate ICT qualifications in courses that are well matched to their needs and abilities.

Teachers' successful use of the digital competency framework (DCF) ensures that all pupils make progress in developing the particular skills that are most important to them.

Recommendation 2 : Improve the planning and co-ordination of information and communication technology (ICT) across the curriculum

Since the core inspection in 2019, the school has made strong progress in meeting this recommendation.

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Recommendation 3: Increase the opportunities for staff to learn from the good practice of other schools

Within restrictions imposed due to the pandemic, leaders at the school have taken several useful actions to strengthen the opportunities for staff to learn from the good practice of other schools.

Teaching staff have benefited from opportunities to collaborate with other providers both in person and virtually to develop understanding and good practice. As a result, the school has developed beneficial strategies to refine the curriculum as well as teaching and learning approaches. For example, in the lower school, leaders have adopted an exciting "Big Question" approach to develop pupils' skills and understanding. ICT subject leaders are developing a strong network of support and a good awareness of new developments within this area of the curriculum. As a direct result of visits to other providers, the school has increased the range of technology available to pupils. In addition, they have consolidated the resources already present in the school to maximise their benefit.

Compliance with the standards for registration

Standard 1: The quality of education provided by the school

On the basis of this visit, there is no evidence to indicate that the school does not meet the regulatory requirements for this standard.

Standard 2: The spiritual, moral, and cultural development of pupils

On this visit, Estyn did not inspect Standard 2.

Standard 3: Welfare, health and safety of pupils

On the basis of this visit, there is no evidence to indicate that the school does not meet the regulatory requirements for this standard.

Standard 4: The suitability of proprietors and staff

On the basis of this visit, there is no evidence to indicate that the school does not meet the regulatory requirements for this standard.

Standard 5: Premises of and boarding accommodation at schools

On this visit, Estyn did not inspect Standard 5.

Standard 6: The provision of information

On this visit, Estyn did not inspect Standard 6.

Standard 7: The manner in which complaints are to be handled

On this visit, Estyn did not inspect Standard 7.

Recommendation regarding continued registration

When considering this school's registration the Welsh Government may wish to have regard to the following recommendation:

On the basis of this visit, there is no evidence to indicate that the school does not meet the requirements of the Independent School Standards (Wales) Regulations 2003.

Inspectors' judgements on this limited inspection should not prejudice the findings of a future full Section 163 inspection.

Copies of the report

Copies of this report are available from the school and from the Estyn website (http://www.estyn.gov.wales)

The report was produced in accordance with section 163 of the Education Act 2002. The main purpose of inspection under this section is to report on compliance with the Independent Schools Standards Regulations 2003. In schools that provide non-maintained nursery education, this report also satisfies the requirements of Schedule 26 of the School Standards and Framework Act 1998.

Every possible care has been taken to ensure that the information in this document is accurate at the time of going to press. Any enquiries or comments regarding this document/publication should be addressed to:

Publication Section
Estyn
Anchor Court, Keen Road
Cardiff
CF24 5JW or by email to publications@estyn.gov.wales

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