



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

A report on
Woodlands School

Date of inspection: September 2022

by

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

About Woodlands School

Woodlands School is owned by Woodlands Children's Development Centre Limited and aims to provide an integrated approach to education, care and therapy for the children in its care. The school provides highly specialised education and therapy for boys aged between 11 and 18 years of age who have significant and complex social, emotional and mental health needs and autism.

There are 18 pupils, aged between 11 and 18 years of age on roll at the school. Many have statements of special educational needs (SEN) or an education, health and care plan (EHCP). All pupils are looked after by their local authorities and live in the Woodlands children's homes in the local area. A few pupils are placed by local authorities in Wales; many are placed by local authorities in England.

The school is located within the town of Wrexham close to local amenities and leisure facilities. The school has recently extended the premises to improve facilities and to increase the number of classrooms. An outdoor education facility comprising of woodlands and a workshop is located on the site of one of the children's homes.

The headteacher has been in post for eight years.

The school's last core inspection was in April 2019.

Main findings

Strengths

The school provides a calm and welcoming learning environment. In lessons, most pupils settle quickly to their learning, and engage well with their classmates and staff. They respond confidently to visitors to the school, and talk positively about their progress and aspirations. Over time, most pupils improve their attendance and make strong progress in their learning. They achieve a range of meaningful qualifications and accreditation that supports them well to move on to the next stage in their life.

Teaching staff build highly effective working relationships with pupils. They know their pupils' needs and abilities well, and they plan carefully to address these. In lessons, they provide encouraging feedback which helps pupils to stay on task and ensures they understand what they need to do to improve their work.

The school makes particularly strong provision for pupils' personal, social and health education and includes taught sessions, assemblies and contributions from external speakers. This comprehensive programme is co-ordinated across the education, care and therapy teams to ensure that provision is made by the most suitable team according to individual pupils' needs and stage of development. Themes cover an extensive range of topics from life skills and sexual health to learning about democracy and radicalisation. This well-planned approach ensures that pupils have valuable opportunities to learn about a wide range of important topics, that ensures pupils understand how to keep themselves safe, and supports their personal and social development well.

The headteacher continues to provide assured and reflective leadership for the school. She has developed leadership roles across the school appropriately and together with the proprietor sets ambitious goals for the development of the school. At a time of considerable challenges caused by the pandemic, the school has continued to improve its facilities through the addition of a gym, library and outdoor education centre.

Areas for development

The school has suitable arrangements to track the progress of pupils. However, the robustness of information used to establish pupils' starting points on entry to the school, and to assess their progress against these as they move through the school, is variable.

Partly due to the pandemic, the school has experienced a number of staff changes to its core team recently. In a few areas this has impacted on the consistent quality of provision for pupils. However, the headteacher has taken suitable steps to minimise the impact of these changes on pupils and there are well-developed plans to ensure appropriate recruitment.

The school plans appropriately to support the transition of young people leaving the school to start their adult lives. However, in a few cases, this is without sufficient support from placing authorities and related agencies. This means that the school does not always have the information it needs to plan as effectively as it could to support pupils' transition to their future destinations.

Recommendations

The school should:

- R1 Strengthen arrangements to assess pupils on entry to the school and to assess their progress over time
- R2 Extend the provision for outdoor learning to include opportunities for design technology

Progress in addressing recommendations from previous visit or inspection report

R1. Ensure that pupils are provided with well-planned opportunities across the curriculum to practise and develop their skills in ICT

Since the inspection in 2019, the school has taken appropriate action to improve the provision of ICT equipment at the school. Classrooms now benefit from SMART boards and both staff and pupils are becoming increasingly confident in using them to enhance teaching and learning experiences. However, formal opportunities for staff to extend their learning further are at an early stage of development. Staff share information on pupils and resources through a shared drive. All pupils have access to their own laptop and where appropriate use these at home to support their schoolwork.

All pupils follow courses in computer science and develop their knowledge, understanding and skills in, for example, coding, networks and using different media. Where appropriate, for example, in art, pupils use electronic tablets to showcase their work and provide a commentary on the progress that they have made including how they plan tasks, reflect and improve their work. Pupils are also reminded on the importance of staying safe online.

Schemes of work are sufficiently detailed and there are appropriate opportunities for older pupils to follow courses that are externally accredited.

R2. Improve the planning of woodland and bush craft activities and provide pupils with suitable accreditation opportunities for their learning

The school has strengthened suitably its provision for outdoor education since the core inspection. Teachers plan carefully to meet the needs, interests and abilities of pupils through a wide range of bushcraft and woodland activities such as lighting fires, wood chopping, and building shelters and basic woodwork. This provision helps pupils to consolidate their well-being and improve their understanding of how to keep themselves safe, as well as developing valuable teamwork and social skills.

All pupils have an opportunity to access the provision as part of their timetabled learning. They complete portfolios of their work and time lapse videos to demonstrate the progress they make over time.

Since the core inspection, the school has implemented suitable arrangements to accredit this learning at level 1. However, opportunities to extend the provision and accreditation pathways to utilise further these facilities for the teaching of related design technology skills are underdeveloped.

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

Standard 3: Welfare, health and safety of pupils

On this visit, Estyn did not inspect Standard 3.

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

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 publication. Any enquiries or comments regarding this document/publication should be addressed to:

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