

A report on

Summergil House School

Date of inspection: March 2025

by

Estyn, His Majesty's Inspectorate for Education

and Training in Wales

About Summergil House School

Name of provider	Summergil House School
Proprietor status	Orbis Education and Care
Language of the provider	English
Type of school	Independent special
Residential provision?	Yes
Number of pupils on roll	44
Pupils of statutory school age	34
Date of previous Estyn inspection (if applicable)	14/3/2022
Start date of inspection	31/03/2025

School context:

Summergil House School is an independent school for children with additional learning needs, located in Presteigne, near the Powys and Herefordshire border. The school opened in March 2017 and is owned by Orbis Education and Care. It forms part of the portfolio of August Equity, a private equity investment company.

The school provides education for pupils aged 4 to 19 years who have a diagnosis of autism spectrum condition. All pupils have an individual development plan (IDP) or education, health and care plan (EHCP).

Currently, there are 44 pupils on roll, many of whom are boys. Nearly all pupils are placed by local authorities in England, with the remainder from Wales. A few pupils are care-experienced, and a very few reside in the registered onsite children's home.

The head of school took up post in September 2024, having previously been the deputy head. The previous head of school is now the executive head of education for the two Orbis schools in Powys. The leadership team is supported by seven class teachers, a cover teacher, and 41 learning support assistants. In addition, a small number of care staff from the residential setting support pupils in lessons and activities when needed. The school also benefits from an onsite clinical team, which includes a speech and

language technician, a behaviour specialist, and an occupational therapy technician who work alongside the education team.

The school did not meet the Independent School Standards during its core inspection in March 2022. However, following a period of follow-up, it was evaluated as compliant in July 2023.

Summary

Nearly all pupils at Summertil House School make steady and meaningful progress, particularly in their communication, emotional regulation and social interaction. Over time, they grow in confidence and engage successfully in their learning. Staff know pupils well and use personalised one-page curriculum plans to tailor learning closely to individual needs and abilities.

The school uses well-established programmes for literacy and numeracy, and has recently introduced a new personal and social education curriculum. These approaches are supporting greater consistency in curriculum delivery across classes, although a few areas are still in the process of becoming fully embedded. The early years provision provides well-organised spaces and routines that is starting to support younger pupils well. However, curriculum planning for this stage is in the early stages of development.

Across the school, most pupils benefit from engaging lessons and have strong, trusting relationships with staff. In the most effective lessons, staff plan well and provide purposeful opportunities for pupils to develop independence and think for themselves. However, in a few instances, support from staff can be overly directive, and not all pupils are encouraged to work with enough independence or challenge.

Nearly all pupils take part in a wide range of meaningful learning activities in the local community, including placements at farms, shops and cafés, as well as contributing to roles within the school's own café and kitchen. These experiences help pupils to develop valuable life skills and prepare well for adulthood. Staff also support pupils effectively to manage their emotions and behaviour, using personalised strategies that reflect a deep understanding of individual needs.

The school environment is calm, welcoming and well resourced. It provides a safe and stimulating setting in which pupils feel secure, respected and able to thrive.

Compliance with the regulations for registration

Independent school inspections are governed by the Education Act 2002 and related regulations: the Independent School Standards (Wales) Regulations 2024. These regulations require an independent school to meet an appropriate standard in the following areas:

The quality of education provided by the school

On the basis of this inspection, there is no evidence that the school does not comply with this Standard.

The spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils

On the basis of this inspection, there is no evidence that the school does not comply with this Standard.

Welfare, health and safety of pupils

On the basis of this inspection, there is no evidence that the school does not comply with this Standard.

The suitability of proprietors and staff

On the basis of this inspection, there is no evidence that the school does not comply with this Standard.

Premises of and boarding accommodation at schools

On the basis of this inspection, there is no evidence that the school does not comply with this Standard.

The provision of information

On the basis of this inspection, there is no evidence that the school does not comply with this Standard.

The manner in which complaints are to be handled

On the basis of this inspection, there is no evidence that the school does not comply with this Standard.

Recommendations

We have made three recommendations to help the school continue to improve:

- R1. Ensure that all staff consistently plan for and deliver stretch and challenge opportunities, tailored to pupils' individual needs and abilities
- R2. Ensure greater consistency in promoting pupils' independence across all learning activities
- R3. Further develop the early years provision to ensure a coherent and progressive curriculum

What happens next

Estyn advises the proprietor to amend its current development plan to show what actions the school intends to take in response to the recommendations. It is also advisable to circulate this plan, or a summary of it, to all parents/carers at the school.

Main evaluation

Nearly all pupils at Summergil House School make steady and meaningful progress from their individual starting points, particularly in their communication, social interaction, and emotional regulation skills. Over time, most pupils grow in confidence and develop improved resilience, which enables them to engage more effectively with learning activities.

Academic progress is carefully monitored through the school's bespoke one-page curriculum (OPC), which is closely aligned to each pupil's developmental stage and regularly reviewed. These personalised plans help ensure that teaching is generally well matched to pupils' needs and aspirations. Most teachers and support staff use these documents effectively to inform lesson planning and delivery. As a result, most pupils access learning that supports the progressive development of their literacy and numeracy skills.

The school makes effective use of specific, research informed programmes for literacy, numeracy and science, which contribute positively to the consistency and quality of teaching. The school has also recently introduced a package for personal, social and health education (PSHE) curriculum. However, this is not yet embedded across the school.

The school's recently established early years provision is developing steadily. Staff have begun to create an engaging and nurturing learning environment that supports early communication, numeracy, and social development. Pupils benefit from a structured daily routine and access to well-defined learning areas, including sensory-rich spaces. However, approaches to curriculum planning are still in the early stages of development and are not yet coherent or sufficiently focused on progression.

Across the school, teaching staff and learning support assistants work collaboratively to deliver well-structured lessons that are adapted to meet pupils' individual learning profiles. Many staff make effective use of visual supports such as daily schedules, 'now and next' boards, and symbols to enhance pupils' engagement and understanding. For example, in one classroom, pupils used personalised symbol boards to sequence a baking activity, which supported their engagement and reduced the need for adult prompts.

Where teaching is most effective, staff have a secure understanding of pupils' needs and plan purposefully to support progress towards individual targets. They use skilled questioning and adapt their communication approaches effectively to maintain pupils' interest and encourage independent thinking. In these cases, pupils are active participants in their learning and make strong progress. However, in a few lessons, expectations are not high enough, the level of challenge does not match pupils' ability and support is overly directive. As a result, pupils have limited opportunities to make choices, solve problems, or develop resilience. In addition, a few staff do not challenge pupils who do not engage in learning well enough.

Offsite learning experiences form an important part of the curriculum at Summergil and support pupils to access their learning in meaningful, real-life contexts. For example, a few pupils participate in community-based activities such as placements at a local farm, charity shops and a café. These experiences help them develop independence, responsibility, and communication skills. However, during some regular activities, such as snack times or work in the school café, a few staff miss opportunities to promote pupils' independence, particularly where pupils use avoidance strategies.

The school has embedded the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) throughout its curriculum. Pupils engage with these rights through class-based activities and assemblies. Each class has its own charter aligned with the school's overall rights-based approach, and pupils are encouraged to make choices and contribute to decision-making in line with their individual communication needs. For instance, pupils voted to name the school café and helped design its logo. This inclusive approach fosters a sense of belonging and respect and helps pupils develop a secure understanding of their rights and responsibilities, which contributes positively to the school's respectful and inclusive ethos.

Careers education and preparation for adulthood are strong features of the school's provision, particularly for older pupils. Nearly all older pupils access a wide range of work-related learning experiences within school and the wider community. These include placements in local libraries, retail outlets and animal care settings, as well as onsite roles such as grounds maintenance, and office administration. A recent initiative allowed pupils to apply for the role of manager in the school's new café, 'The Wave' through an authentic application and interview process. These experiences enable most pupils to develop valuable communication, employability, and life skills. Pupils also benefit from independent travel training, which helps build their confidence and supports their transition to adult life.

Nearly all staff foster calm and purposeful learning environments, underpinned by strong, trusting relationships between adults and pupils. Staff respond promptly and appropriately to pupils' needs and help them regulate their emotions using well-established strategies. For example, pupils who display self-injurious behaviours are supported by staff who carry backpacks with soft pads and sensory distraction tools. These approaches are closely aligned with pupils' behaviour support plans and contribute to a safe and settled environment. Behaviour incidents are addressed constructively, and behaviour data is used effectively to refine support and reduce risks.

The school is located on a spacious, well-maintained site comprising five distinct buildings. Facilities include a gym, dining hall, swimming pool, sensory and imagination rooms, and woodland learning areas. Specialist spaces, such as a teaching kitchen, laundry, and café, are used purposefully to promote the development of pupils' life skills. The physical environment is bright, welcoming and well resourced, and it supports pupils' engagement and well-being effectively.

Progress in addressing recommendations from previous inspection

R1. Ensure that the proprietor pays appropriate regard to the registration and operational guidance for independent schools in Wales

The school has taken appropriate steps to address this recommendation. Since the core inspection in 2022, the proprietor has made a number of material change requests. These include the addition of three new teaching buildings and an amendment to the school's age range. These actions indicate a secure understanding of the guidance for independent schools. In addition, the school is compliant with the Independent School Standards (Wales) Regulations 2024.

R2. Continue to adapt the curriculum, resources, and opportunities for accreditation to meet the needs of pupils as the school cohort continues to grow

The school has continued to refine its curriculum through comprehensive research, adopting programmes for literacy, numeracy and science, and more recently for personal, social and health education (PSHE). As a result of the strengthened curriculum, the introduction of new resources and effective training, teachers and learning support assistants have a clear understanding of the curriculum's structure and delivery expectations.

The introduction of core teaching teams has further enhanced the role of learning support assistants, providing them with a deeper understanding of pupils' individual needs. This development has helped to strengthen relationships between staff and pupils and enabled teaching staff to offer more targeted coaching and mentoring on effective teaching strategies and assessment.

Strong partnerships with local schools and colleges have broadened the school's provision, allowing older pupils to access formalised learning and recognised qualifications that are well matched to their abilities and aspirations.

The strategic reorganisation of classrooms and learning environments has enabled the grouping of pupils by age and learning style. This focused approach ensures that nearly all pupils receive tailored support appropriate to their developmental stage, supporting more effective progression in learning.

R3. Develop community partnerships to allow pupils to widen their learning experiences, particularly in aspects of spiritual, moral, social, and cultural education

Since the last inspection, the school has strengthened its use of community partnerships to enhance pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.

Experiences such as work placements in libraries, charity shops and community cafés help pupils to develop a sense of responsibility, teamwork and service to others. Visits to external organisations, including the local fire station, broaden pupils' understanding of roles within the community and promote respect for public services.

The school also provides meaningful opportunities for reflection and empathy, such as interacting with newborn lambs during a farmer's visit to the school, which support pupils' spiritual and moral development in a nurturing context. These well-planned activities enrich the curriculum and help pupils to develop as thoughtful, informed citizens.

R4. Continue to develop professional learning opportunities for staff to develop further their skills to support pupils with complex additional learning needs

The school has made worthwhile progress in developing professional learning opportunities to help staff meet pupils' needs. Since the core inspection, leaders have introduced weekly training sessions and strengthened the mandatory training programme. All employees now complete a six-day induction programme before starting their roles. Ongoing training is delivered by professionals from within the organisation, including onsite therapists who provide insight into pupils' individual needs and diagnoses

The broader Orbis organisation has also heavily invested in developing the skills and expertise of its staff. Staff now benefit from access to online education-focused e-learning platforms and targeted resources that support the teaching of phonics, numeracy, science and PSHE. As a result, staff are well equipped to support pupils effectively within the school.

Leaders evaluate the effectiveness of training as part of regular quality assurance processes, with appropriate attention to its immediate impact on teaching quality and pupil outcomes. However, the routine revisiting of training or review of its longer-term impact to ensure that improvements in staff practice are sustained over time is in the early stages of development.

Evidence base of the report

Before an inspection, inspectors:

- analyse the outcomes from parent/carers and pupil questionnaires and consider the views of teachers and support staff through their questionnaire responses

During an inspection, inspectors normally:

- hold a meeting with parents/carers to hear their views on the school and its effectiveness
- meet the headteacher, governors/proprietor(s), leaders and individual teachers to evaluate the impact of the school's work
- meet pupils to discuss their work and to gain their views about various aspects of their school
- meet groups of pupils in leadership roles, such as representatives from the school council and eco-committee
- visit lessons and undertake a variety of learning walks to observe pupils learning
- look closely at the school's self-evaluation processes
- consider the school's improvement plan and look at evidence to show how well the school had taken forward planned improvements
- scrutinise a range of school documents, including information on pupil assessment and progress, records of meetings of staff and the governing body (where appropriate), information on pupils' well-being, including the safeguarding of pupils, and records of staff training and professional development

After the on-site inspection and before the publication of the report, Estyn:

- review the findings of the inspection alongside the supporting evidence from the inspection team in order to validate, moderate and ensure the quality of the inspection

Appendix 1: Numbers – quantities and proportions

The report makes references to different quantities and proportions e.g. '*most pupils...*' or '*very few pupils...*'. We use these terms to describe quantities and proportions as outlined in the table below:

nearly all =	with very few exceptions
most =	90% or more
many =	70% or more
a majority =	over 60%
half =	50%
around half =	close to 50%
a minority =	below 40%
few =	below 20%
very few =	less than 10%

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 (Wales) Regulations 2024. 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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