



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

**A report on
Headlands School**

Date of inspection: April 2019

by

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

About Headlands School

Headlands School is an independent special school, situated in a residential area of Penarth in the Vale of Glamorgan. It is part of the Action for Children charity. The school provides term time residential and day placements for pupils aged 7 to 19 years with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties and autistic spectrum disorders (ASD).

The school currently educates 68 pupils from key stage 2 to post-16. Nearly all pupils come from Welsh local authorities, with a very few from English local authorities. All pupils have a statement of special educational needs (SEN) and 20 pupils have looked-after child (LAC) status.

The school's aim is to develop young people's wellbeing and independence through an individual approach to education and care.

The Principal has been in post since 2009.

The last full inspection by Estyn was in October 2012.

Summary

Pupils at Headlands School respond very positively to the school's nurturing ethos and highly effective strategies to support their social and emotional development.

Over time, nearly all pupils make very strong progress in developing the skills they need to manage their behaviour and improve their engagement in learning. As a result, pupils make strong progress in relation to their individual needs and abilities.

The extensive range of learning experiences and high-quality facilities meet the needs and aspirations of pupils well. The staff team work together outstandingly well to identify pupils' individual needs and ensure that the learning opportunities are stimulating and help pupils to develop the skills they need for future life.

Senior leaders and managers at all levels demonstrate exceptional leadership. They have developed a clear and ambitious strategic vision for the school that focuses strongly on providing a safe learning environment where pupils are shown respect and understanding. The therapeutic approach is a trauma-informed model that is highly effective in meeting the needs of pupils who have had adverse childhood experiences, (ACEs). Senior leaders have ensured that staff at all levels have received a high level of training to implement this approach successfully across the school.

Inspection area	Judgement
Standards	Good
Wellbeing and attitudes to learning	Excellent
Teaching and learning experiences	Good
Care, support and guidance	Excellent
Leadership and management	Excellent

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 2003. These regulations require an independent school to meet an appropriate standard in the following areas

The quality of education provided by the school

The school meets the regulatory requirements for this standard.

The spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils

The school meets the regulatory requirements for this standard.

Welfare, health and safety of pupils

The school meets the regulatory requirements for this standard.

The suitability of proprietors and staff

The school meets the regulatory requirements for this standard.

Premises of and boarding accommodation at schools

The school meets the regulatory requirements for this standard.

The provision of information

The school meets the regulatory requirements for this standard.

The manner in which complaints are to be handled

The school meets the regulatory requirements for this standard.

Recommendations

R1 Improve the consistency in quality of teaching to ensure that all lessons match the best practice in the school

R2 Improve pupil outcomes at the end of key stage 4

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.

Estyn will invite the school to prepare a case study on its work in relation to implementing a trauma-informed whole school approach to support pupils with adverse childhood experiences (ACEs), for dissemination on Estyn's website.

Main findings

Standards: Good

Nearly all pupils make very good progress from their individual starting points, in-line with their age and ability, during their time at the school. They advance well from one stage of learning to the next and develop their skills and knowledge progressively.

Over the last three years, all pupils have left the school with appropriate and relevant qualifications. As a result, they have all secured places within further education colleges, work-based learning or specialist provision.

Pupils in post-16 classes achieve very well in a beneficial range of academic and vocational subjects. They attain a wide range of accredited qualifications including GCSEs, Essential Skills Wales, Welsh Baccalaureate and vocational certificates or units of credit. Pupils in key stage 4 gain one or more qualifications from a diverse variety of subjects. However, in the academic year 2017-2018 a few did not achieve as well as they are able and many did not attain qualifications or certificates in important areas such as literacy and numeracy.

Across the school, most pupils in all key stages achieve well against their individual learning targets. In literacy, younger pupils use mind maps effectively to help start their lessons and a few more able pupils produce extended pieces of writing. Many older pupils write fluently for a range of purposes including fiction, report writing and to provide instructions. They use grammar, spelling and punctuation accurately in their work. In creative writing, pupils enhance their work well using imaginative adjectives. However, the presentation of pupils' written work is not consistently of a high standard.

Older pupils demonstrate very good research and reading skills. They explore topics through online research and use the information well to inform their written work. They make good use of a range of reading techniques such as skimming and scanning to extract relevant information from texts. Pupils across the school, who are confident to do so, read out loud with fluency and appropriate pace, tone and expression.

Most pupils use number skills accurately and in a wide range of contexts. They develop their numeracy skills across the curriculum and in everyday situations, such as in the school café, in vocational workshops and in outdoor learning activities. Older pupils use prediction, estimation and numerical reasoning effectively in advanced calculations. Younger pupils enjoy learning about data in exciting contexts such as prosecuting evidence in a fictional murder investigation.

All pupils develop their information communication technology (ICT) skills well throughout the curriculum. They use a range of search engines and websites with ease to research topics. For example, pupils in key stage 3 use search engines very effectively to explore current issues such as air pollution and why the government is promoting electric cars. Older and more able pupils use their skills very effectively in areas such as web design, inserting hyperlinks and editing multi-media.

Nearly all pupils progress very well in developing their speaking, listening and thinking skills. This is a very strong feature of the school. Pupils listen very well in lessons. They take notice of their teachers, support staff and their peers. They are confident to give their own opinions and older pupils support these with appropriate rationale and explanations. Nearly all pupils communicate effectively with adults and pupils at the school and in the community. More able pupils learn to use a broad range of appropriate vocabulary and speak confidently about their hobbies, achievements and aspirations.

Many pupils across the school develop their fine and gross motor skills well through a comprehensive range of activities, sports and outdoor learning. Nearly all pupils engage very effectively in the school's drama programmes and as a result improve their communication skills and confidence. Older pupils use personal protective equipment appropriately and demonstrate an extensive understanding of health and safety, for example, when using hand tools in design and technology. Many pupils promote and extend their creativity skills well throughout the curriculum and around the school. They design adverts for broadcast on the school radio, create interesting pieces of work in art classes and a few use creative writing skills well to produce fiction that they publish on-line.

All pupils at the school develop very effectively the skills that will allow them to become more independent in the community and to be successful in social situations. Nearly all pupils learn valuable life skills such as shopping, cooking and staying safe online. Younger pupils particularly enjoy working at a local restaurant in Cardiff where they gain skills in cooking and learn appropriate social skills to engage with the local community.

Wellbeing and attitudes to learning: Excellent

Headlands is an extremely happy school where pupils thoroughly enjoy learning and achieve outstanding personal growth. Interactions between all members of the school community are nearly always cheerful, relaxed and positive. Pupils thrive on an ethos of mutual respect and understanding, and are well-mannered and polite. Nearly all pupils feel safe and extremely well supported by staff. Over time, pupils develop a strong awareness of their own personal safety needs, including how to stay safe online and in the community.

Prior to joining Headlands, pupils' experiences of education have usually been negative and they often display extremely challenging behaviour and disengagement from learning when they join the school. At Headlands, pupils learn to understand themselves and their needs extremely well and develop effective coping strategies. As a result, their behaviour improves significantly over time and nearly all pupils engage in meaningful learning and enjoy school life to the full.

Most pupils learn to manage their own behaviour exceptionally well. This has a positive impact on their attitudes in school and in the community. For example, pupils learn to travel with growing independence, particularly when cycling, and undertake beneficial voluntary work in the community.

Nearly all pupils learn to understand the rules of social communication and develop effective strategies to manage a range of social interactions successfully. They learn to tolerate the actions and views of others. As a result, over time, pupils learn to understand and embrace each other's differences and make strong friendships.

In lessons, nearly all pupils display extremely positive attitudes to their learning, are enthusiastic and bring their own ideas to learning tasks. They engage well in whole class lessons or, where required, in individual sessions.

Pupils across all key stages show a high level of independent learning. In many lessons, pairs of pupils work successfully to support and enhance each other's learning with minimal adult support. Pupils are proud of their achievements and are keen to problem solve and persevere when they find work difficult.

The degree to which pupils grow in confidence, develop resilience and engage in unfamiliar and new experiences is a strength of the school. Around half of pupils are active members of the drama club, taking on important roles in productions, from technician to performing on stage. Many pupils flourish through taking on new responsibilities and leadership roles across the school. For example, nearly half of all pupils currently have an active role within committees such as the student council.

During their time at the school, many pupils mature into ethical, informed citizens. They are aware of what they need to do to live healthy lives and how to make a positive contribution to their community. The school's eco-committee has been extremely proactive in reducing plastic waste and in encouraging all pupils to contribute. For example, the water bottles and recycling bin initiatives introduced by the committee have been embraced by the whole school. The bins are well used and water bottles are used daily in all classrooms.

Generally, pupils relish time spent in the school's vocational and sports facilities and respond exceptionally well to the outstanding opportunities and mature expectations within the vocational areas.

Teaching and learning experiences: Good

Nearly all teachers plan carefully to ensure lessons meet the needs of all pupils. They are clear about what they intend pupils to learn and how they will achieve their learning goals successfully. They use a range of appropriate teaching methods and interesting activities to engage pupils, stimulate their curiosity and maintain their interest. However, in a very few lessons, teaching does not actively meet the needs of all pupils. In these lessons, the pace is too slow, tasks are not sufficiently differentiated and are at too low a level to motivate learning. As a result, pupils do not improve their learning consistently across subjects.

Teachers are skilled in recognising and responding to pupils' emotional and behavioural needs and adapt their teaching and planned learning experiences deftly when necessary. In class, all staff expect pupils to behave well and engage in learning. They use their knowledge and understanding of the whole school therapeutic approach effectively to plan for the individual needs of their pupils, whom they know and understand very well.

Across the school, teachers and support staff work outstandingly well as a team. They have highly positive working relationships with pupils. They understand their individual needs, manage behaviour successfully and develop very positive learning attitudes in their pupils. Support staff provide seamless support to teachers in motivating pupils to maintain their engagement.

Teachers evaluate pupils' work regularly to support their planning for pupils' next steps of learning. They undertake useful joint assessments with colleagues of key pieces of pupils' work at regular intervals. Across the school, staff make particularly effective use of questioning to assess pupils' progress and support their learning.

Headlands School provides all pupils with a rich and exciting range of curriculum and wider learning experiences to stimulate their learning and motivate them to succeed. The curriculum has thoughtfully considered schemes of work to support pupils' learning as they progress through the key stages of the school. At key stage 4 and post-16, the curriculum offer includes a beneficial range of academic courses. However, the range of accredited courses is not broad enough to meet the needs of all pupils.

The learning for older pupils through the vocational curriculum is a strength of the school. A well-planned range of learning opportunities at the high-quality on-site facilities meets pupils' individual needs and interests extremely well. These motivational opportunities include bicycle maintenance at Spokes, customer service in the café, design and technology in the workshop and digital media at the school radio station. Where appropriate, the school arranges off-site work experience and college link courses that are well matched to pupils' individual interests and skills.

The imaginative use of physical education lessons and outdoor learning to support pupils' physical development and team-building skills is a strong feature of the school's curriculum. Opportunities include trampolining, circuit training, cycling, ball games and the forest school. The school also provides a wide variety of off-site sporting and outdoor experiences around Wales and beyond which enhance the curriculum, such as the Duke of Edinburgh's Award, cycling in Spain and snowboarding in the French Alps. Pupils enjoy these activities and understand how they support their healthy lifestyles.

The school plans purposeful opportunities for pupils to make use of their literacy, numeracy and ICT skills across the curriculum. In all curriculum areas and wider learning experiences, there are valuable opportunities for pupils to practise their skills. For example, the school radio station supports pupils to communicate effectively and develop their digital literacy and creative skills.

There are beneficial opportunities for pupils to develop appropriately their appreciation of Welsh heritage and culture, such as through a celebration of Welsh cuisine, visits to St Fagan's museum and the Wales Millennium Centre. Curriculum planning includes a suitable range of topics related to Wales.

The school provides a broad and balanced curriculum and meets the Independent Schools Standards (Wales) Regulations 2003.

Care, support and guidance: Excellent

The school has highly effective arrangements to promote the progress and wellbeing of its pupils. Staff across the school share high expectations of pupils' behaviour and engagement in learning. They apply the school's policies and procedures consistently and in line with the school's therapeutic approach, to create a safe and nurturing learning environment. Nearly all pupils respond very positively to this highly consistent and supportive approach.

The school has robust procedures to assess, monitor and track pupils' progress in each subject area and in important aspects of their wellbeing, such as behaviour, attendance and attitudes to learning. As a result, staff have very high levels of detail on all aspects of pupils' progress and understand their needs exceptionally well. Staff at all levels use the results of assessment very well to set relevant and ambitious targets for individual pupils and to identify appropriate strategies and additional support where necessary.

The school makes highly effective use of a team of clinical psychologists who provide outstanding support and advice for staff to help them develop the skills they need to implement successfully the school's wellbeing curriculum and therapeutic approach. The wellbeing curriculum has an exceptionally positive impact on pupils' self-awareness, resilience and confidence.

The exceptional programme of personal, social education (PSE) underpins the ethos, character and curriculum of the school. The PSE programme covers important issues such as healthy relationships, personal safety, and emotional wellbeing. An outstanding feature of the programme is its flexibility to respond swiftly to issues as they arise. For example, senior leaders analyse behaviour records each week and inform the PSE team of any emerging issues that need to be built into the following weeks work with individual pupils or class groups.

The extensive range of sports and exercise activities to help pupils keep fit and healthy is an outstanding feature of the school's work. Activities in physical education include cycling, football, fitness training and cricket. Teachers also provide worthwhile opportunities for pupils to take part in extra-curricular sports activities, regional sports competitions and outdoor education adventure challenges.

The school provides valuable opportunities for older pupils to develop their understanding of the world of work through high quality careers advice, learning about employability skills and beneficial work experience placements. This programme includes useful opportunities for pupils to develop important work-related skills working on-site in the school grounds, bike maintenance workshop and cafe. The provision prepares pupils effectively to make informed choices about what they want to do when they leave school.

Staff listen attentively to pupils and respond well to their changing emotional needs. This consistent approach helps pupils to build secure attachments with staff and to improve their engagement and motivation. Staff provide a high level of support for pupils through regular and meaningful opportunities to discuss what and how they learn.

The school makes strong provision for pupils to contribute to decision-making processes and influence the work of the school. The school encourages older pupils to mentor younger pupils and provides support for pupils to represent the school at national conferences and meetings with the proprietor. There are many opportunities for pupils at each key stage to take part in shaping aspects of the school's work, for example in providing feedback to senior leaders and being members of the school council or eco committee.

The school has effective arrangements to communicate with parents, carers and local authorities. Parents value highly the weekly telephone or email contact with staff. Annual reports clearly identify pupils' progress against their targets and identify their next steps in learning.

The school's arrangements for safeguarding meet requirements and give no cause for concern.

Leadership and management: Excellent

Senior leaders communicate very effectively a clear and ambitious strategic vision for the school. They focus on providing all pupils with a safe and consistent learning environment and a wide range of high-quality learning experiences. The trauma-informed therapeutic approach to meeting the needs of pupils who have had adverse childhood experiences complements the vision very well.

Leaders ensure that all staff receive appropriate and high-quality training opportunities to fully support the school's approach to supporting pupils' social and emotional development. This training gives staff the confidence and skills they need to implement the school's vision successfully. As a result, staff at all levels and across the school show an outstanding commitment to the school's vision and implement it enthusiastically.

The proprietors and governing body provide a high level of challenge and support for senior leaders and carry out their roles diligently. They are frequent visitors to the school and know the school's strengths and areas for development well. The proprietor provides valuable support for important aspects of the school's work including improvement planning, financial management, safeguarding, health and safety and human resource procedures.

Leaders have established robust systems to evaluate regularly pupils' standards and the quality of provision. These draw on a wide range of first-hand evidence such as lesson observations and the scrutiny of pupils' work. The school collects and responds well to the views of major stakeholders including staff, pupils and parents. The extended leadership team works together highly effectively to analyse the findings of self-evaluation and plan further improvements. There is a strong link between the self-evaluation outcomes and the priorities in the development plan.

School improvement planning takes good account of national initiatives where these align well with the school's own aims and ethos. For example, leaders have recently reviewed the curriculum to ensure that learning experiences develop pupils as healthy, ambitious, confident individuals and have set appropriate targets to improve the provision for ICT. The school allocates suitable resources and realistic time frames to support these school improvement priorities. Staff at all levels are highly supportive of school improvement activities. For example, middle leaders produce regular detailed reports on pupil progress in areas identified for improvement. Teachers make particularly effective use of this information to review and set targets for individual pupils and to address school improvement targets when planning lessons. This whole staff approach has secured consistent progress in addressing priorities such as improving pupil behaviour, professional learning and the provision of vocational education programmes.

Senior leaders organise and deploy learning resources well to provide highly effective support for pupils' needs. Facilities include separate teaching areas for younger and older pupils that are resourced to a high standard to meet their differing needs. Specialist teaching areas such as the well-equipped gymnasium, all weather pitch and music recording studio provide high quality learning environments. The recent addition of a café and a school radio station to the innovative bike workshop, Spokes, has strengthened the on-site provision to develop pupil's work-related skills. These facilities are of an exceptionally high quality. The school makes very good use of the local community to enhance the curriculum and offer valuable life experiences for the pupils. For example, pupils visit places of historic interests, take part in beach cleaning initiatives and perform drama productions in local theatres.

Leaders have developed a strong culture of teamwork and, as a result, the school is developing as a highly successful learning community. Leaders provide a wide range of high-quality training and development opportunities for staff such as supporting teaching assistants to qualify as teachers and for staff to complete university accredited training in courses that link well to priorities for school improvement. The school's experienced and very well-qualified staff are deployed effectively to ensure outstanding support for the pupils. This ensures that, over time and in relation to their needs, pupils make exceptional progress with their personal and social development.

The school has a proven track record in addressing recommendations from previous Estyn monitoring visits and in securing improvements to the quality of teaching and pupils' outcomes.

The school meets all of the requirements of the Independent School Standards (Wales) Regulations 2003.

Copies of the report

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

Under the Independent School Standards (Wales) Regulations 2003, the school must provide copies of the report to all parents of the school. Where a pupil is subject to placement by a local authority, a copy of the report should be sent by the school to each relevant authority.

Estyn evaluates a provider's effectiveness using a four-point judgement scale:

Excellent	Strong, sustained performance and practice
Good	Strong features, although minor aspects may require improvement
Adequate and needs improvement	Strengths outweigh weaknesses, but important aspects require improvement
Unsatisfactory and needs urgent improvement	Important weaknesses outweigh strengths

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:

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