



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

**A report on
Woodlands School**

Date of inspection: April 2019

by

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

About Woodlands School

Woodlands 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 behavioural needs.

There are 18 pupils, aged between 12 and 18 years of age on roll at the school. Twelve of the pupils have statements of special educational needs (SEN). All pupils are looked after children (LAC) placed by their local authorities and are resident at the Woodlands children's homes in the local area.

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 outside classroom is located in the extensive woodland on the site of one of the children's homes.

Pupils at the school have a range of learning, social and emotional needs. Most pupils have experienced significant periods of disruption to their formal learning prior to their arrival at the school. Many join the school and its care homes at times of personal crisis, at different points during the academic year and often towards the end of their compulsory education. As a result, there is considerable variation in pupils' individual starting points, motivation and learning ability. It is therefore not appropriate to compare the standards pupils achieve at Woodlands School with national averages or to analyse trends in performance over time because of the wide range of pupils' needs.

The headteacher has been in post for five years.

Summary

Pupils at Woodlands School achieve excellent standards and exhibit extremely high levels of wellbeing. Nearly all pupils gain GCSEs at grades A*-C, AS levels and A levels. This represents outstanding progress for pupils looked after by their local authorities. Pupils' attitudes to learning are a notable strength of the school.

The school offers a well-balanced curriculum and programme of academic, therapeutic and life skills, that provides exceptionally well for pupils to develop their skills, knowledge and independence.

Across the school, teaching captures the interests of pupils and motivates them to learn. Rigorous assessment ensures that the school maintains up-to-date information on pupils' progress and enables teachers to intervene with specialist advice and guidance wherever necessary.

Highly effective liaison between school, therapy and care staff ensures that pupils receive the nurture, support and the understanding they need to progress positively from their earlier negative life experiences.

Senior leaders communicate a coherent vision that drives a culture of high expectations. All staff share this across the school. The high level of commitment to improving the life chances of pupils on the part of all staff is a notable feature of the school's work and enables nearly all pupils to make exemplary progress in their wellbeing and learning from their individual starting points.

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

Inspection area	Judgement
Standards	Excellent
Wellbeing and attitudes to learning	Excellent
Teaching and learning experiences	Excellent
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 Ensure that pupils are provided with well-planned opportunities across the curriculum to practise and develop their skills in ICT
- R2 Improve the planning of woodland and bush craft activities and provide pupils with suitable accreditation opportunities for their learning

What happens next

Estyn will invite the school to prepare a case study on its work in relation to the improvement journey made over the past five years for dissemination on Estyn's website

Main findings

Standards: Excellent

On entry to the school very few pupils achieve in line with their peers nationally. However, once they settle into their new environment, nearly all pupils achieve excellent progress in subjects, such as English, mathematics, science and personal and social education. Nearly all pupils at key stage 4 and post 16 gain a range of qualifications including GCSE, AS level and A level passes. In 2018, most key stage 4 pupils gained the level 2 threshold, equivalent to five GCSEs at grades A*-C. Over the past three years, all pupils leaving the school at the end of key stage 4 and post 16 gained externally accredited qualifications matched to their interests and aspirations for adulthood. The academic outcomes attained by pupils at Woodlands represent outstanding progress for young people looked after by their local authorities.

Pupils make excellent progress in developing their reading and literacy skills. Most pupils read fluently with confidence and clear expression. Many enjoy reading and read widely beyond the subject matter of their courses to extend their learning and deepen their understanding. As a result, they have extensive subject knowledge and can present credible arguments, both orally and in writing, for and against theories such as those presented by Richard Dawkins. Most pupils develop a suitable understanding of writing for different audiences and purposes, such as narrative accounts, instructional pieces and fiction. However, a few pupils' written work contains too many basic spelling and punctuation errors.

Nearly all pupils achieve exceptionally well in mathematics. In lessons, most pupils practise and consolidate their basic numeracy skills successfully, such as calculation, quadratic equations and geometry. They enjoy practising their skills in weekly sessions where they compete with each other and staff.

Nearly all pupils apply their literacy and numeracy skills effectively across the curriculum to support their learning. For example, in science lessons, pupils make good use of persuasive writing to argue the validity of ethics related to DNA testing and profiling and use their numeracy skills effectively to analyse electro-cardiogram data. In religious education, they use technical vocabulary well orally to describe Theravada and Mahayana as the two branches of Buddhism. Most pupils practise their numeracy skills to budget for weekly food shopping and estimating the cost of furnishing a flat.

Pupils develop valuable thinking and listening skills to analyse evidence, consider implications and provide balanced arguments to justify their position, for example on the use of palm oil and the impact of deforestation on climate change. They reflect carefully on political current affairs and sociological issues, such as the potential implications of Brexit and the causes of racism.

Pupils' progress in developing their communication skills is a strength of the school. They listen well, take turns in class in responding to questions and ably follow social conventions. Over time, nearly all pupils develop an extensive vocabulary that they use skilfully to express themselves. This supports the progress they make in lessons across the curriculum effectively.

Pupils enjoy daily team games at lunch times and regularly take part in a wide range of out of school sports and other healthy activities, such as football, ultimate frisbee and the monthly sporting challenge. As a result of their regular exercise, most boys are agile and enjoy competing, and a few play in external teams.

Nearly all pupils develop their creative skills effectively. In art lessons, they produce well-researched, thoughtful pieces of a high standard and are proud of their work. They use a variety of formats and media skilfully, such as watercolours, papier mache and time-lapse recordings, to support their work making masks of comic book characters. In outdoor education, pupils develop their appreciation of woodland and bush skills, produce basic wooden tools and hand-carved pieces and have a good understanding of the correct machinery, such as log lifters and power tools, to use in construction of wooden shelters.

Pupils who learn Welsh make significant progress from their starting points with a few pupils gaining a GCSE. They all use basic greetings well and answer simple questions with accuracy. A few pupils develop a sound grasp of vocabulary and develop their verbal skills confidently.

Pupils use information and communication technology (ICT) to develop their research and presentation skills using appropriate software. However, overall, pupils do not develop their ICT skills in line with their other skills.

Wellbeing and attitudes to learning: Excellent

Pupils are proud of their school, and their place in it.

Pupils' attitudes to learning are a notable strength of the school. In lessons, many pupils demonstrate a real interest in the work that they are completing, and present as confident and capable learners. They are proud of what they do and are enthusiastic to share their work with others. There is a strong culture of support and encouragement between pupils. For example, pupils are aware of work completed by others and want to share this with visitors, alongside their own.

Most pupils demonstrate very good social interaction with each other and staff, throughout the school day. They engage with others effectively during communal social times. For example, most pupils eat lunch together with staff, in the common room. Most pupils interact confidently with visitors to the school, and engage positively with them. They act as ambassadors for the school's culture and ethos, and this is a strength of the school.

Nearly all pupils respond positively to the opportunity to play a role in the school community. Many have designated leadership roles related to the school council or the school's health and safety group, and all are encouraged to have a voice in the decision-making processes of school life. They produce a vibrant school newsletter that is appreciated by all. Pupils support one another to engage in school initiatives and charity events, for example a recent school-wide competition to promote recycling introduced by the school council.

Many pupils demonstrate a sound awareness of the individual needs of other pupils. They speak respectfully to one another and are supportive of each other throughout

the school day. All pupils participate in training to improve their understanding of the needs and experiences of others, and many discuss with deep understanding the implications of what they have learned, for example in the recent Prevent and training about Autism. School assemblies, researched and led by pupils, include worthwhile opportunities for pupils to reflect on and raise their awareness of contemporary issues in modern society relating to health, sexuality, politics and current affairs.

All pupils feel safe in the school, and know who to talk to if they feel worried or upset. There are very few reports of pupils feeling bullied in school and all pupils are confident that the school deals effectively with bullying when it arises. Nearly all pupils develop secure and positive relationships with the staff in school. All pupils engage in particularly beneficial individual therapy work to consider online safety, as part of their therapeutic plan.

Most pupils engage well in the valuable range of opportunities available to them to support making healthy choices. They prepare healthy lunches to bring to school and keep a record to evidence their success in working towards their five-a-day fruit and vegetable target. Pupils engage enthusiastically with an external provider, to support them in developing cooking skills and eating healthily. They nearly all gain a certificate to evidence their skills in food hygiene. Every Friday in the school kitchen, pupils enjoy illustrating their cooking skills by preparing lunch for all pupils and staff to eat together.

All pupils access a wide range of physical activities, and the school football team is a sporting focus for many pupils. Most pupils engage positively with the outdoor education provision. Here, pupils engage readily in a wide range of creative activities in the school's own extensive woodland environment. They challenge themselves to explore woodworking, forestry and nature, whilst developing skills to manage risks safely within an exceptionally nurturing learning environment.

Most pupils have consistently high levels of attendance. There is very little recorded lateness, and most pupils arrive on time and ready to start the school day. Most pupils are punctual for lessons, and readily engage in learning with a positive attitude. They enjoy school and feel that they are doing well. Pupil behaviour at the school is usually excellent.

Teaching and learning experiences: Excellent

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

Through a well-balanced curriculum and programme of academic, therapeutic and life skills, the school provides exceptionally well for pupils to develop skills, knowledge and independence both inside and outside the classroom. This is a strength of the school's provision. The school offers a wide range of GCSEs and other qualifications in subjects of specific interest to pupils' individual needs. It encourages pupils to take responsibility, such as setting up the school library, monitoring health and safety of the site and producing the school newspaper. Provision for pupils to develop outdoor learning is motivating and inspiring. Staff share their respect and knowledge of woodland management, woodwork and use of suitable machinery enthusiastically. However, planning for this area is under-developed.

Teachers accurately identify pupils' individual needs on entry to the school and prepare a comprehensive and informative support plan that they regularly review. Carefully planned programmes of learning cater extremely well for pupils' needs and interests. This enables the school to address gaps in earlier learning and to motivate pupils' aspirations for their future. The approach is responsive, with staff keen to listen, answer pupils' requests, and ensure continuity in learning, such as continuing with qualifications started in another school or with a different examination board.

Teachers meet pupils' learning needs very well. They have good subject knowledge and provide suitable and interesting books to support learning across the curriculum. They provide pupils with engaging and age-appropriate subject matter to encourage them to read independently. This results in a marked improvement in the reading ability of nearly all pupils. Staff provide purposeful opportunities for pupils to develop their oracy across the curriculum, such as through video blogs describing the strengths and areas for development of their work. Where appropriate, across the curriculum, pupils have worthwhile opportunities to practise their numeracy skills. However, teachers do not plan well enough to ensure that pupils develop their ICT skills across the curriculum.

Most teachers demonstrate sensitive understanding of pupils' needs and make highly skilled use of a range of approaches to inspire and motivate pupils' learning. This flexible approach means that, when required, teachers support anxious pupils at the start of an activity by scribing until the pupils are confident enough to produce work independently. Alternatively, teachers use notes to support pupils to improve their writing structure to produce an interesting school newspaper article.

All staff have very high expectations of pupils' behaviour. They treat pupils with respect and develop strong and supportive relationships. Teachers are aware of pupils' preferred learning styles and work very hard to accommodate their wide range of particular interests and needs. For example, to aid revision for an external English examination, an innovative booklet has been prepared using video games to help pupils with aspects such as story openings, structure and characterisation.

Many teachers are creative in their approach and show a strong awareness of current cultural trends of interest to young people. They use this well for instance, citing the work of a rap artist to explain metaphor and juxtaposition. In lessons, many teachers use resources thoughtfully to support pupils' learning. These help pupils to make good use of their skills to record and evaluate their work appropriately such as encouraging pupils to use numeracy skills to estimate shrinkage when using latex to create facemasks based on comic characters.

Teachers maintain daily recording systems to chart pupils' individual progress and attitudes to learning efficiently. They use the system well in conjunction with the school reward system, designed with input from the school council. Staff encourage pupils to monitor their own progress on wall charts in their classrooms to motivate them to succeed.

Generally, staff use closely focused questioning well to help pupils' engagement in their work. They use verbal feedback effectively, but their feedback comments in books do not drive improvement consistently enough.

In order to improve their practice, staff visit other schools and share their knowledge across the school. This has led to a more consistent approach towards assessment.

Care, support and guidance: Excellent

Woodlands School provides an exceptionally high level of care, support and guidance. It provides pupils with the nurture, support and the understanding they need to progress positively from their earlier negative life experiences. The extremely effective joint work between education, care and therapy staff ensures that pupils receive support well planned for their individual needs. Staff have a secure understanding of pupils' needs and are highly skilled in a suitable range of highly specialised interventions and pedagogy to support pupils' development.

Teachers have clear and up-to-date understanding of pupils' progress across a range of subjects and their wider learning and emotional needs. They offer valuable help within and beyond the classroom to meet pupils' needs effectively. They discuss progress with colleagues from care and therapy on a daily basis and respond suitably to pupils changing needs. Examples include changing timetables spontaneously to fit in additional therapy sessions when pupils need it, providing literacy interventions to support pupils' specific learning difficulties, and developing provision so that pupils may study additional qualifications that better meet their needs and interests.

Teachers' regular updates of pupils' individual progress trackers capture pupils' learning, attendance and development effectively. The trackers ensure that all staff have comprehensive, up-to-date information to support their planning for pupils. This helps staff to set consistent and appropriate learning and behaviour targets that motivate pupils to succeed.

Communication between the school and care staff at the pupils' homes is highly effective. This supports carers in addressing issues that may be affecting pupils' learning. One outcome of this is that pupils respond well to homework, because there are high expectations from both the school and home for them to succeed.

Teachers, along with care and therapy colleagues, provide exemplary support and guidance to improve pupils' future life choices. Their work in promoting pupils' understanding of the impact of lifestyle choices on their present and future wellbeing is a particularly strong feature. The personal and social education programme encourages pupils to reflect appropriately on their personal values, experiences and responsibilities. As a result, this supports the development of all pupils effectively. The ethos of the school provides pupils with first-hand experience of the values of tolerance, respect and understanding of the implications of discrimination and racial harassment. Staff model these behaviours particularly well. They encourage pupils to make informed choices about their learning, health and personal wellbeing.

The school provides interesting and varied experiences from which pupils develop their spiritual beliefs, for example through learning about religious education in GCSE, and through developing the spiritual garden at the outdoor provision.

Woodlands is an inclusive school. It provides all pupils with regular opportunities to take on responsibilities and leadership roles and play an important part in their school. Membership of the school council, representation on the health and safety committee and the school news team promote pupils' skills and experiences of decision-making well.

Lunch and break times provide pupils with excellent opportunities to enjoy quality time with peers and staff. The focus on healthy eating and drinking supports pupils to make informed choices about their diet and lifestyle. These relaxed, informal periods offer pupils valuable time to interact with staff and peers within a family atmosphere.

Safeguarding arrangements meet requirements and give no cause for concern.

Leadership and management: Excellent

Senior leaders communicate a coherent vision for the school. This focuses strongly on improving the quality of provision to enable all pupils to make secure progress towards positive outcomes in their future lives. The vision drives a culture of high expectations, which all staff share within a highly caring and supportive environment. The high level of commitment to improving the life chances of pupils on the part of all staff is a notable feature of the school's work and enables nearly all pupils to make exemplary progress in their wellbeing and learning from their individual starting points.

The headteacher provides assured and reflective leadership. She maintains a strong presence around the school throughout the day and has a thorough understanding of the abilities and needs of individual pupils. She works closely with other members of the strategic leadership team, drawn from across the company's care and therapy teams, to provide highly effective direction for the strategic leadership of the school.

The proprietor plays an active and energetic role in the life of the school. For example, he attends school assemblies regularly and contributes to the school's monthly magazine. This engagement gives him detailed knowledge of the daily life of the school and its pupils and enables him to provide a high level of support and challenge to the headteacher, and to contribute purposefully to the strategic leadership of the school.

Working together with other senior leaders, and supported by the school's governing body, the headteacher has secured significant improvements to the quality of the curriculum and standards of teaching and learning over the last five years. This sustained period of improvement has helped to ensure that no pupil remaining until the end of key stage 4 leaves without a qualification. This prepares them well for the next stage of their life.

The school has comprehensive arrangements to evaluate its work that draw suitably on first-hand evidence, including lesson observations, work scrutiny and regular progress reviews. These processes provide staff with valuable information on the achievements and progress of individual pupils. Leaders and teachers use this information effectively to make beneficial adaptations to the provision to ensure that individual pupils can draw maximum benefit from their time at the school. For example, the school has extended the range and level of qualifications available to accommodate the interests and aspirations of individual pupils. The school considers the views of its major stakeholders carefully through regular surveys of pupils, teaching and care staff, and responds promptly to the areas for development they identify. For example, it has reviewed its assembly programme to provide more information on healthy eating and cultural diversity in response to feedback from pupils.

Roles and responsibilities are distributed well across the teaching team and all staff have a thorough understanding of their responsibilities. This sensible distribution of roles helps to build capacity for leadership and ensures the smooth day-to-day running of the school. Suitable arrangements to monitor the performance of staff help to identify relevant training that enables staff to develop professionally and supports successfully the emotional and academic needs of pupils.

The school's coherent meetings structure ensures there are secure processes in place to communicate important information on a daily basis about pupils' wellbeing and progress, as well as to gather feedback about what is working well and plan for further improvement. Senior leaders from across the company meet regularly to ensure its education, residential care and therapy services work together to support pupils' holistic development in an integrated and efficient way.

The school works well with a range of external partners to secure comprehensive challenge and ensure it remains up-to-date with developments in its field. For example, it is collaborating with a local university to research outcomes of children who have accessed the service over the last 20 years. This work is helping to inform the school's evaluation of its work, and assess how well its provision meets the long-term needs of its pupils.

The school deploys its resources successfully to ensure these meet pupils' needs. Classrooms provide welcoming learning environments that support the delivery of the school's curriculum effectively. The school makes productive use of its woodland area and local park to extend the opportunities for sport, exercise and the development of practical skills.

The school has an established track record in addressing recommendations from previous Estyn monitoring visits, and meets all 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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