



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

**A report on**

**Date of inspection: July 2019**

**by**

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

## About Bettws Lifehouse

Bettws Lifehouse is an independent day school situated in a small, rural village in Powys. It provides day education for up to 30 pupils aged seven to nineteen years. Pupils have a range of complex needs including behavioural, social, emotional difficulties and autistic spectrum disorder (ASD).

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, often towards the end of their compulsory education, and at different points during the academic year. Many pupils receive multi-agency support outside of school to support their wellbeing. 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 a therapeutic and holistic education'.

There are currently 30 pupils in the school, a very few of whom are sixth form pupils. No pupils speak English as an additional language or speak Welsh as a first language.

The school's last core inspection was in May 2012. Since then, the school roll has increased by over 60%. The headteacher is one of the proprietors and has been in post since the school opened.

## Summary

During their time at the school, nearly all pupils make very good progress from their individual starting points. Over time, they develop their skills and knowledge consistently well across a range of subjects and topics. When leaving the school, nearly all pupils progress to appropriate further education provision where they continue to study academic, life skills or vocational courses.

Pupils make excellent progress in their wellbeing. This is particularly significant, as many pupils when they arrive at the school have difficulties in communicating their emotions, and this can have a negative influence on their behaviour.

Bettws Lifehouse provides a broad and exciting curriculum with enhanced learning experiences to enrich and extend pupils' motivation and learning. Teachers' careful planning reflects the school's person centred approach and meets pupils' needs well.

The school provides an exceptionally high standard of care support and guidance for pupils. This holistic support during their time at the school provides them with the resilience to overcome the impact of previous negative learning experiences and to thrive and achieve.

The proprietors, headteacher and senior leaders provide strong leadership and focused direction for the school. Staff at all levels are highly committed to providing pupils with the best possible learning opportunities. They work together effectively and engage well in developing and taking forward the school's priorities for improvement.

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

## **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 Review the vocational curriculum to increase the options available
- R2 Improve the planning and co-ordination of information and communication technology across the curriculum
- R3 Increase the opportunities for staff to learn from the good practice of other schools

## **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 preparing pupils for adulthood, for dissemination on Estyn's website.

## Main findings

### Standards: Good

During their time at the school, nearly all pupils make very strong progress from their individual starting points. Over time, they develop their skills and knowledge consistently well across a range of subjects and topics.

Nearly all pupils at the end of key stage 4 and 5 achieve a very wide range of appropriate qualifications and certificates of credit including GCSEs and BTEC. Older pupils attain qualifications in the core subjects and areas that particularly appeal to them such as law, classical civilisation and Spanish. A few pupils attain vocational qualifications in areas such as land-based studies and equine. Most older pupils achieve the Duke of Edinburgh's Award at bronze and silver levels.

When leaving the school, nearly all pupils progress to appropriate further education provision where they continue to study academic, life skills or vocational courses and qualifications.

In classes, most pupils make very good progress against their learning targets and lesson objectives. They can clearly identify the new knowledge and skills they have gained. They recall prior learning well and apply this effectively to new situations and the next stages of learning.

Many pupils across the school speak confidently to their peers and their teachers using appropriate tone and intonation. Younger pupils chat happily about their learning and describe their thoughts and feelings using appropriate vocabulary. Older pupils express themselves well and are confident to offer their ideas. They support these with thoughtful examples and explanations. Most pupils use specific language and terminology with fluency and accuracy. For example, in photography lessons, pupils talk confidently about the purpose of aperture, light meter and shutter speed and explain concisely how these impacts on the clarity of a photograph. Nearly all pupils listen attentively to teachers, staff and peers. They take turns to speak and listen during activities in class and in meetings such as the school council.

Most pupils read well. Younger pupils enjoy reading their chosen book with their teacher or learning support assistant. In line with their ability, they use a suitable range of strategies for reading new words. Many older pupils read with fluency and a minority enjoy reading out loud. Most effectively use skills such as skimming and scanning to extract information from texts. They then use the information appropriately to inform their writing. For example, in history pupils extract information from various sources to produce paragraphs of comparison between the Black Death and the Great Plague.

When writing, younger pupils form their letters neatly and develop the basics of punctuation and grammar, including how and where to use capital letters and full stops. Older pupils write accurately for a wide range of purposes and audience. They are familiar with formats such as reports, letters and writing instructions. They use mind maps and lists effectively to plan their writing and take time to edit and correct their drafts. A few more able pupils write interesting fictional stories and use exciting adjectives such as 'looming' and 'towering black figures' to enhance their writing.

In numeracy, younger pupils develop their basic number skills effectively over time. They learn their times tables and practise these in both numerical order and within other calculations such as long division. Many older pupils talk fluently about mathematical concepts and use correct terminology to explain clearly how to carry out specific calculations. They produce accurate and neat charts and graphs to display information. Pupils working towards GCSEs learn advanced concepts such as how to construct a bisector on an angle.

Many pupils use information and communication technology (ICT) confidently. They produce well designed and planned word-processed documents that reflect and enhance their learning well. A minority of pupils insert pictures effectively to make their work more interesting. Many pupils develop their ICT skills to a high standard through activities such as gaming and coding. A few use this work well to develop databases and spreadsheets. However, only a very few pupils develop their ICT skills systematically across the curriculum.

Pupils particularly enjoy their outdoor learning experiences in areas such as small animal and horse care, woodland studies and in the school garden where they grow fruit and vegetables for school lunches and a wide variety of herbs, such as mint, which they experiment with to make mint sauce.

Nearly all pupils participate well in a wide range of creative subjects. They enjoy taking part in drama lessons and engage enthusiastically in activities such as role-play, for example playing the part of a car salesperson to sell their chosen car to their teacher. In dance, nearly all pupils use the opportunity to explore movement and emotions and thoughtfully express themselves.

Many older pupils develop their thinking skills well across the curriculum and particularly in design and technology lessons where they design, plan and construct items such as Chinese musical boxes and voting booths for use in the school council elections.

### **Wellbeing and attitudes to learning: Excellent**

Pupils at Bettws Lifehouse respond extremely well to the consistent and highly effective therapeutic approach at the school, which helps them manage well their emotions and effectively regulate their behaviour. This is excellent progress because many pupils when they arrive at the school have difficulties in communicating their emotions, and this can negatively influence their behaviour. They develop highly positive relationships with the staff, and this helps them feel safe and secure at school. They trust staff to sort out their worries and know whom to go to when they feel unhappy or concerned.

Nearly all pupils respond particularly positively to the carefully planned, supported transition to the school. Mostly, they settle quickly to their new environment and develop to a high level, their curiosity and skills. This supports their confidence and enables them to ask questions and explore new concepts, without the fear of failure, such as in science lessons, when learning about the role of genes, DNA and chromosomes.

Nearly all pupils enjoy regularly attending school. For most pupils, this is significant progress from their previous placements, from where they had long periods of absence. As they progress through the school, nearly all pupils make tremendous progress in improving their tolerance and understanding of others. As a result, they learn to work well in pairs and small groups. As their confidence and self-esteem improve, they develop their resilience and enjoy new experiences, interacting with new people and developing friendships, many for the first time in their lives.

Many pupils have sensory difficulties and because of this, prior to attending the school, may have experienced restricted diets. However, over time, these pupils develop the confidence to try out new, healthy foods and they learn how these affect their wellbeing. Their role in growing food in the school garden informs this life changing progress.

Pupils enjoy and highly value taking part in the school's outdoor learning such as hiking, camping out overnight, bush craft in the school's woodlands, gardening and growing crops to use in cookery lessons. They regularly visit the school's equine centre where they develop their confidence and self-esteem when learning to ride and care for the horses. They benefit from the bond they form with the school pets which supports them to regulate their behaviours and express their emotions. In addition to PE lessons, many pupils make regular use of the daily lunchtime games organised in the hall.

Pupils take seriously, through democratic election, their role within the school council, and other positions of responsibility that can make a difference to the school. Across the school, pupils are polite and respectful, make good use of the opportunities to contribute their views appropriately and listen to the views of their peers.

### **Teaching and learning experiences: Good**

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

Bettws Lifehouse provides a broad and exciting curriculum with enhanced learning experiences to enrich and extend pupils' motivation and learning. The school employs specialist teachers where required to ensure that all pupils can follow a curriculum that fully meet their needs. It plans learning programmes well to prepare pupils for their destinations, next steps of learning beyond the school and adulthood. Older pupils have suitable access to qualifications including BTEC and a good range of GCSEs and A levels. However, opportunities for post-16 pupils to follow vocational routes are underdeveloped.

Teachers make exceptionally good use of topic based learning to meet pupils' individual needs. They plan these topics thoughtfully across the curriculum based on pupils' interests, such as water, air and weather, earth and space, fire, people of the world, and transport. Teachers seek out purposeful opportunities for out-of-school learning related to the topics to reinforce pupils' learning, for example a trip on the local steam railway and visit to the airport as part of the transport topic. This approach motivates pupils and contributes well to the high levels of pupil engagement.



Teachers' planning reflects the school's pupil centred approach. Nearly all teachers plan carefully to ensure lessons meet the needs of all pupils. They take very good account of the subject objectives and plan well for these to reflect individual pupils' targets. Their plans ensure that pupils' educational and wellbeing needs are considered and will enable pupils to engage in all their learning experiences. Nearly all teachers plan very effectively to develop and reinforce literacy and numeracy skills within all lessons. However, planning for the development of ICT across the curriculum is underdeveloped.

Staff work very effectively in partnership to provide appropriate teaching and support for individual pupils. They set appropriate short, medium and long-term goals and these are shared frequently with pupils.

Nearly all teachers use a stimulating range of strategies and interesting activities to motivate pupils, engage their curiosity and maintain their interest. For example, teachers in mathematics and English use puppets to facilitate communication and, in history, a model of London is set fire to under controlled conditions to illustrate the Great Fire of London.

Teachers at the school promote a positive learning environment and have high expectations for behaviour. All staff establish valuable and productive relationships with their pupils. They demonstrate an exceptional understanding of the pupils' emotional and behavioural needs, adapting their teaching and planned learning experiences expertly to encourage pupils in their learning. All staff are excellent role models. They explain tasks well and nearly all staff give clear instructions.

Across the school, staff make particularly effective use of questioning to assess pupils' knowledge, understanding and progress and to support their learning. Most staff use extended questions very effectively to enable pupils to develop their thinking skills.

Teachers evaluate pupils' work regularly to support their planning for the next steps of learning. In nearly all lessons, teachers provide encouraging verbal feedback to pupils and offer relevant advice as to how they can improve the quality of their work. They provide useful written feedback, where relevant, to allow pupils to reflect on their learning. All staff at the school make very effective use of pupils' learning diaries to record academic, personal, social or emotional progress. Staff provide pupils with useful time each day to reflect and discuss their progress and challenges they have faced during daily "champion time". As a result, most pupils know well their strengths, areas for development and targets for improvement.

### **Care, support and guidance: Excellent**

The school provides an exceptionally high standard of care support and guidance for pupils. This holistic support during their time at the school provides them with the resilience to overcome the impact of previous negative learning experiences and to thrive and achieve.

The school's consistent focus on pupil centred planning ensures that the diverse needs of individual pupils are identified, recorded and addressed thoughtfully on a regular basis. This ensures that pupils receive highly effective care, support and

guidance that is personalised to provide them with the best learning opportunities. The school undertakes a very beneficial range of baseline and initial assessments with all pupils, which it uses well to inform planning.

The school allocates pupil 'champions' and key workers thoughtfully to each pupil. This provides pupils with an exceptionally high level of personalised support and guidance and has a very positive impact on the exceptional level of good behaviour around the school.

The school works very well in partnership with an appropriate range of specialists and agencies to ensure the needs of all pupils are met. The school plans well to include specialist support strategies into pupils' daily learning. This ensures structured ongoing support throughout the curriculum. Where appropriate, the school includes parents and carers in the support programmes to achieve a continuous support strategy between the school and the home. These partnerships support curriculum development and are very effective in enabling pupils to engage effectively in their communities.

The school outreach service supports parents and children very well, particularly at times of transition. Communication with parents and carers is a very strong feature of the school. Staff are keen to share with them the positive achievements of the pupils and the triumphs of the day. Termly reports to parents and carers are detailed and are very individual to the pupil. They reflect the exceptional understanding staff have of the pupils in the school.

The school ensures that pupils and parents or carers have appropriate opportunities and guidance to consider carefully careers choices at a timely point in their education. This has a very positive impact on the success of pupil destinations and helps to ensure that they remain and achieve in their selected choice of provider. This is tremendous progress for these pupils for whom transition and coping with new experiences have previously been extremely difficult.

The school tracks and monitors pupils' attendance and behaviour very well. Nearly all pupils attend well at the school and most achieve attendance way beyond any previous learning placements. Given their backgrounds this is an exceptional achievement of the school and a reflection of the positive care, support and guidance. Attendance data shows an improving trend over the last four years.

The personal development of all pupils is a very high priority at the school. Personal and social education is taught across all areas of the curriculum as well as through discreet lessons. Topics such as sex and relationships, healthy lifestyles and drugs and alcohol awareness are matched well to the needs of individual pupils. This flexible approach allows the school to address areas of need as they arise. All pupils attain certificates or qualifications in aspects of personal development before they leave the school.

Teachers encourage pupils to take on responsibilities and leadership roles and to play an important part in their school. Membership of the school council provides pupils with frequent opportunities to influence school decisions such as furnishing and rejuvenating zones within the school.

The school has developed an innovative and valuable life skills curriculum for pupils between 14 and 19 years of age. This allows pupils to choose from a range of over 40 topics to form a self-selected learning programme. As a result, by the time the pupil leaves school they have a supportive and influential 'Handbook for Life' that is full of information they have created or adapted for themselves in a language and format that best suits them. Topics include areas such as ironing and cleaning, household bills, social care, hair and hygiene and mindfulness. This work underpins the work of the personal and social education programme and the Duke of Edinburgh's Award.

Safeguarding arrangements meet requirements and give no cause for concern.

### **Leadership and management: Good**

The headteacher provides reflective and inspirational leadership. Along with the proprietors, she has developed an ethos of care and nurture where planning and provision is child-centred. They successfully achieve the school aim for pupils to 'feel safe and supported to become confident, happy and enthusiastic members of society...achieve realistic goals and leave with qualifications and skills that set them up for a sustainable pathway into adulthood'.

The proprietors, headteacher and senior leaders provide strong leadership and focused direction for the school. Since the school opened in 2007, pupil numbers have grown steadily and staff and resources have developed accordingly.

The senior leadership team provides useful direction to all areas of the school's work. Roles and responsibilities are clear and line management provides all staff with appropriate levels of support. Leaders take suitable action to ensure that all staff provide pupils with the opportunities and experiences they need to help them learn and make progress. They take suitable actions to support the development of the school such as appointing staff to new roles to ensure the headteacher and proprietor have enough time to plan the future business needs of the school.

The school has an effective timetable and procedures for quality assuring its work. These include lesson observations and learning walks, book scrutiny and departmental reviews. Senior leaders work closely with staff to analyse pupils' individual progress carefully and review their targets regularly. These activities help the school to understand its strengths and take action to make improvements where necessary.

Well-considered and appropriate plans and policies, focused on meeting pupils' needs, steer the work of the school. A range of regular meetings ensure leaders maintain effective communication with staff and have ongoing opportunities to model and promote professional values and behaviours in line with the school's aims.

Staff at all levels are highly committed to providing pupils with the best possible learning opportunities. They work together effectively and engage well in developing and taking forward the school's priorities for improvement. They seek out appropriate training to develop their skills and maintain up-to-date knowledge of pedagogy through research and professional dialogue with colleagues. However, they do not have enough opportunities to learn from the good practice of others outside the school.

The proprietors work extremely closely with senior leaders to guide the work of the school and monitor its progress. They understand the strengths and areas in need of development and take suitable action to sustain improvement, for example taking on specialist staff, improving accommodation and recognising the need for pupils to study a wider range of vocational subjects and have work experience placements.

The school manages its resources effectively. There is a suitable number of well-qualified and experienced staff to deliver the range of subjects and therapeutic experiences.

Wherever possible the school collaborates with the local community to increase pupils' experiences and support village activities. For example, as part of the Village of the Year award, a heritage map, designed by the pupils, won an award for the village. This demonstrates the inclusive nature of the school within the community.

The school complies with 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](http://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:

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