



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

A report on

**Ruthin School
Mold Road
Ruthin
Denbighshire
LL15 1EE**

Date of inspection: June 2022

by

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

About Ruthin School

Ruthin School is a co-educational boarding and day school catering for pupils from the age of 10 to 20 years. The school is situated on the outskirts of Ruthin, a small market town in the Vale of Clwyd, Denbighshire. The school is a charitable trust whose governing body is the Council of Management. The Welsh Government formally requested Estyn to undertake an announced focused inspection of Ruthin School under section 163 of the Education Act 2002. The inspection focused on the evaluation of the school's progress in meeting the recommendations made following the announced focused inspection in February 2021. The review also evaluated the school's capacity to meet standard 3 of the Independent School Standards (Wales) Regulations 2003, which relates to the welfare, health and safety of pupils. Inspectors from Estyn and Care Inspectorate Wales (CIW) visited the school between 22-24 June 2022. They considered evidence from a range of sources including:

- interviews with staff including the interim headteacher, senior leaders, bursar, groups of teachers, groups of support staff and other staff
- interviews with the designated safeguarding person and deputy designated safeguarding person
- interviews with the chair of the Council of Management and designated trustee with specific responsibility for safeguarding
- interviews with groups of pupils
- scrutiny of documents including policies, training records, meeting notes, staff and pupil files and records of concerns
- teacher and pupil questionnaires

Main findings

Strengths

Senior leaders and the Council of Management have responded suitably to the recommendations of the focused inspection in February 2021. Together, they have prioritised and established a significant change in the safeguarding culture of the school. This includes modelling the best possible professional conduct and setting high expectations to all staff. Leaders have now developed a supportive environment across all areas of the school's work, where pupils are valued and treated with respect. Since the focused inspection in February 2021, there have been substantial staff training and professional development opportunities around safeguarding and child protection procedures. As a result, most staff have a clear and secure understanding of when and how to share concerns about pupils or other staff and there are sound processes for both staff and pupils to report any concerns. Senior leaders regularly monitor and quality assure the effectiveness of their arrangements for safeguarding pupils and make necessary improvements where needed.

As a result of the findings of this focused inspection, it is the judgement of the team that the school meets Standard 3 of the Independent School Standard (Wales) Regulations 2003, that refers to the welfare, health and safety of pupils. A summary of progress against the recommendations made in February 2021 is provided here.

Recommendation 1: The school should implement robust arrangements for reporting safeguarding concerns to senior leaders and to the Council of Management. This includes ensuring that all staff understand their role and responsibilities regarding safeguarding and are clear about whom to refer to when they have concerns.

Since the time of the focused inspection in February 2021, senior leaders and trustees at Ruthin School have strengthened substantially the provision to support safeguarding. They appointed a new Designated Safeguarding Person (DSP) and created a team of deputy designated safeguarding leads who support the work of the DSP well. In addition, the school has strengthened its systems for reporting concerns about pupils and colleagues and these established processes are embedded effectively and are well understood by most staff. The school provides statutory safeguarding training at the appropriate level for all staff and trustees, including relevant and regular refresher training during the academic year. There is also a suitable advanced level of training for the designated safeguarding leads and designated safeguarding trustee. Senior leaders and the safeguarding team provide ongoing support for staff who may require further guidance.

All staff understand their responsibility for safeguarding children and young people and most use the school's digital system purposefully to report their concerns. Staff's written logs of concern contain sufficient detail to enable the safeguarding team to allocate cases to relevant case managers from within their team. Safeguarding team members manage their cases effectively. This includes keeping clear records and chronologies of actions and communication. Senior leaders and the safeguarding team understand when it is appropriate to refer concerns to external statutory

services and to other external agencies such as the child and adolescent mental health service or to the school counsellor.

The school safeguarding team, including the interim headteacher when appropriate, discuss and agree all safeguarding decisions, including when to refer or close cases. The team is also developing sound reflective practice. They have begun to evaluate the effectiveness of their responses to concerns and they discuss any lessons learned and any further training or professional learning required. This is contributing well to developing the safeguarding culture at the school. The safeguarding team has refined and reduced appropriately the number and types of categories of concern in its reporting system. This enables leaders to identify better any trends and plan for relevant professional learning and suitable provision for personal, health and social education. However, this is at an early stage of development.

Recommendation 2: As part of the culture of safeguarding in the school, every member of staff should promote and model the highest levels of behaviour in all aspects of their work.

Since the focused inspection in February 2021, senior leaders have placed substantial focus on improving the school's culture of safeguarding. During this time, leaders have reviewed all relevant policies and strengthened internal processes in order to ensure that there is clear and comprehensive guidance for all staff on safeguarding, learner welfare and well-being matters.

Senior leaders model respectful, professional behaviour and values. They have high expectations of all staff in terms of their professionalism, conduct and attitudes towards the well-being of learners and colleagues. Where leaders identify behaviour that falls below the expected standard, they provide a swift and suitable response.

Leaders have prioritised professional learning and guidance to ensure that staff understand their roles and responsibilities in keeping learners safe. This includes strengthening the staff Code of Conduct and including comprehensive, clear information on expectations in the Staff Handbook.

The school has ensured that all teaching staff have now registered with the Education Workforce Council (EWC). This is a strength and means that staff agree to the EWC principles of professionalism and integrity in their work and follow the EWC's Code of Professional Conduct and Practice set out by the Council. School leaders have also ensured that support staff and pastoral staff agree to a suitable code of conduct. This sets out clearly the standards expected of them in their roles in working with children and young people.

Leaders have introduced an internal 'Low Level Concerns' policy and self-referral system, which is designed to enable staff to reflect on their behaviour and discuss ways to address any possible shortcomings with relevant middle and senior leaders. Although this system is at an early stage of development, it is having a positive impact in supporting a very few members of staff who require further guidance. Overall, this policy is well-received by most staff.

The school has strengthened its processes for gathering learners' views on aspects of its work and the curriculum. For example, leaders have begun to consider learners'

views and the findings of the School Health Research Network (SHRN) survey in order to review its personal, health and social education (PHSE) curriculum and has introduced a very few relevant topics in PHSE lessons. Leaders are currently reviewing the PHSE provision but this is at an early stage of development. Although there are well-considered plans to strengthen this provision, including the consideration of pupil voice, trends identified through the SHRN report and safeguarding referrals, this aspect is not improving at a rapid enough pace.

Overall, there has been a considerable improvement in the culture of safeguarding at the school since the time of the focused inspection.

Recommendation 3: The school should secure stable leadership arrangements as a matter of urgency to ensure timely progress in building an appropriate safeguarding culture and to oversee safeguarding arrangements.

Following the focused inspection in February 2021, the school initiated a suitable restructure of leadership in order to strengthen the provision for and leadership of well-being and safeguarding. This included appointing an interim headteacher and a deputy headteacher with a specific and comprehensive role of overseeing the pastoral provision of the school. The pastoral deputy headteacher is also the designated safeguarding person and this model of distributed leadership has ensured that the school has a strong oversight of the quality of its pastoral and academic provision. In addition, the school appointed a new head of boarding as well as new external Chair and designated safeguarding trustee to the Council of Management. This has added stability and expertise to the management of the school.

As a result of clear policies and processes, the Council of Management now has strong oversight of the school's work. As part of their self-evaluation processes, leaders recently commissioned the Association of Governing Bodies of Independent Schools (AGBIS) to conduct a review of the work and effectiveness of the COM. Overall, their findings were positive.

A new headteacher has been appointed and will take up her post in August 2022. The appointment of the new headteacher, together with the external appointments to the Council of Management, are vital to enable the school to move forward and further develop its safeguarding culture. Overall, as a result of suitable changes to the leadership arrangements, including changes in the distribution of responsibilities, there has been a strengthening of accountability since the time of the focused inspection in February 2021

Recommendation 4: The school's recording of Council of Management meetings should include detailed safeguarding reports and should record members' acceptance or rejection or query of the detail in each safeguarding report, along with relevant actions arising. These reports should be routine on a regular basis and include an analysis of patterns of activity. Reports should pay particular regard to the use of sanctions, recording of incidents of physical restraint, exclusions and safeguarding referrals to the local authority social services or the police.

Since the focused inspection in February 2021, leaders have strengthened arrangements to ensure that the Council of Management receives detailed

safeguarding reports from the safeguarding sub-committee. These reports are scrutinised thoroughly by members of the Council of Management who challenge the decisions, actions and proposals contained within each report. As a result, the ability of the Council of Management to hold key individuals to account when quality assuring safeguarding policy and practice across the school is developing well.

The appointments of the school's DSP and the designated safeguarding trustee have been integral to the school's improvement since February 2021. They have a close working partnership, which provides an important liaison between the school and the Council of Management. Together, they ensure that the monthly reports provide a comprehensive and informative up-to-date overview of progress towards agreed actions and also their impact on pupil and staff well-being and safety. The reports provide a valuable oversight of the work of the safeguarding sub-committee and its impact on the school's safeguarding culture.

The monthly reports also provide a detailed account of the trends and patterns identified in safeguarding concerns recorded in the school's digital system. For example, a recent report identified an increase in concerns that related to pupils' emotional health, which peaked at certain times of the year. The Council of Management discussed ways of addressing this and used the data effectively to develop a valuable whole school approach to provide guidance for staff to address pupils' pre-examination anxiety. This approach also included planned assemblies and effective mentoring sessions for pupils. As a result, pupils are well supported to develop successful strategies to self-regulate and overcome apprehensions when preparing for tests or external examinations.

Safeguarding reports to the Council of Management also contain the outcomes of any pupil and staff surveys. Members agree on actions in response to the findings of surveys and allocate responsibility to key members of staff. Subsequent progress reports are used to monitor and evaluate the impact of these actions. For example, following a recent pupil survey on equality and diversity, the school responded by reviewing and re-launching its LGBTQ+ policy to address concerns around inclusivity and equality. In addition, this led to the introduction of a gender-neutral uniform policy that takes effect from September 2022. The Council of Management is also providing gender-neutral changing rooms for pupils who would feel more comfortable using them. However, outcomes from pupil surveys are not used effectively enough to inform the PHSE curriculum, for example to tackle peer-on-peer sexual harassment and homophobic bullying, or promote healthy relationships.

The safeguarding reports provide appropriate assurances that the safeguarding team considers each reported concern in their weekly data meetings. All cases are annotated, contain detailed chronology of actions and developments and provide the Council of Management with a clear rationale when the team decide to keep cases open or to file them. The monthly reports by the safeguarding team also provide the Council of Management with an overview of sanctions and exclusions and, if needed, records of physical restraint.

When necessary, the DSP records and shares referrals to external agencies such as children's services or the police with the Council of Management. However, in a few cases, the safeguarding reports prepared for the Council of Management contain sensitive safeguarding information. Information shared with all members of the

Council of Management is not always proportionate to the need and level of risk and, in this respect, the role of the Council of Management is not clear enough. In particular, there is a danger that the Council of Management has now become too involved in the day-to-day, operational management of the school's safeguarding procedures. This does not always allow the DSP and her deputies to undertake their responsibilities effectively and make informed decisions independently of the Council of Management. This potentially may limit the ability of the Council of Management to act as a critical friend who evaluates the effectiveness of their work. The school is beginning to mitigate against this shortcoming and is making suitable plans to change this practice from September 2022.

Compliance with the standards for registration

Standard 1: The quality of education provided by the school

On this visit, Estyn did not inspect Standard 1.

Standard 2: The spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils

On this visit, Estyn did not inspect Standard 2.

Standard 3: Welfare, health and safety of pupils

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

Standard 4: The suitability of proprietors and staff

On this visit, Estyn did not inspect Standard 4.

Standard 5: Premises of and boarding accommodation at schools

On this visit, Estyn did not inspect Standard 5.

Standard 6: The provision of information

On this visit, Estyn did not inspect Standard 6.

Standard 7: The manner in which complaints are to be handled

On this visit, Estyn did not inspect Standard 7.

Recommendation regarding continued registration

When considering this school's registration the Welsh Government may wish to have regard to the following recommendation:

On the basis of this visit, there is no evidence to indicate that the school does not meet the requirements of the Independent School Standards (Wales) Regulations 2003.

Inspectors' judgements on this limited inspection should not prejudice the findings of a future full Section 163 inspection.

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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