



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

A report on

Aran Hall School

Date of inspection: March 2023

by

Estyn, His Majesty's Inspectorate for Education

and Training in Wales

About Aran Hall School

Aran Hall is an independent special school situated close to Dolgellau in Gwynedd. The school is one of six specialist schools operated across England and Wales by the SENAD group.

The school provides education, care and therapy for pupils aged 11 to 19 years who have a range of learning disabilities, autistic spectrum conditions and associated challenging behaviours.

The school currently has nine pupils on roll, all of whom are boys who live in the children's home that shares the school's site. Nearly all pupils have an education, health and care plan (EHCP) and are looked after by local authorities in England. A very few pupils have a statement of special educational need and are looked after by Welsh local authorities. Nearly all of the pupils are from English-speaking backgrounds.

The principal has been in post since 2020. The head of learning was appointed in September 2019. Both are supported by a director for education who took up their post this academic year.

Main findings

Strengths

Aran Hall is a welcoming and nurturing school. Pupils are confident and engage positively with staff and visitors. Staff build positive working relationships with pupils based on mutual respect and understanding.

Staff at the school have high expectations of pupils' behaviour. As a result, nearly all pupils make positive progress in managing their behaviour during their time at the school. During this visit, pupil behaviour and engagement were exemplary.

Staff provide pupils with a broad range of interesting and authentic learning experiences, for example making skin care products and supporting site maintenance works.

During their time at school, pupils make strong progress in their learning from their individual starting points. For example, pupils develop important speaking and listening skills, and apply these across a range of contexts.

Staff place a strong focus on preparing pupils for their future pathways. Plans are effectively tailored to the specific needs of each pupil. For example, pupils access a range of relevant accreditation and work experience placements, and a minority attend college on a part-time basis.

School leaders are caring and reflective. They are knowledgeable and have a strong understanding of the school's strengths and areas for development.

Areas for development

Since the time of the last inspection, there have been changes at all levels of leadership at the school. New leaders are developing useful plans for school improvement. However, these plans do not consistently focus sharply enough on the few areas for improvement.

Current assessment processes do not consistently track the small steps of progress pupils make when applying their skills across the curriculum. The school has identified a need to refine assessment processes. However, this is at an early stage of development.

Recommendations

The school should:

- R1 Ensure that school improvement processes focus clearly on the identified areas for development.
- R2 Refine assessment arrangements at a whole school level to ensure a clear understanding of pupil progress in skills across the curriculum.

Progress in addressing recommendations from previous visit or inspection report

R1. Ensure pupils have regular opportunities to build systematically on their knowledge and understanding of numeracy across the curriculum

Since the time of the last inspection, leaders have made several beneficial changes to the systematic planning for the development of numeracy skills across the curriculum.

Staff use individual education plan targets effectively to plan for progression in these skills across a range of authentic contexts, for example measuring when cooking, budgeting for a gardening project and calculating required materials when building planters for the school garden. Staff adapt their approach to skills development dependant on the specific needs of pupils.

Teachers use software systems effectively to track the small steps of progress that pupils make in numeracy. As pupils progress through the school, they benefit from a range of appropriate accreditation opportunities. Where required, pupils access booster sessions to strengthen their basic mathematical skills, such as times table recall.

R2. Increase opportunities for pupils to use the outdoor environment in the development of their learning and skills

Since the time of the last inspection, the school has taken several useful steps in providing opportunities for pupils to use the outdoor environment in the development of their learning and skills.

Opportunities for outdoor learning experiences feature within curriculum maps and, when relevant, pupils use the school grounds to contextualise learning, for example in science and humanities. The school has also created a subject leadership role to oversee outdoor learning experiences. These activities effectively engage pupils and successfully develop practical skills. Through project work, there are good opportunities for pupils to apply their literacy and numeracy skills, for example when costing materials for a cat house and subsequently purchasing these materials from a shop.

Pupils routinely and successfully complete accredited certificates in outdoor activities such as hiking, cycling and preparing land for planting.

The school has improved its facilities with the addition of a large gardening classroom, which has been creatively decorated by pupils. Pupils use this classroom purposefully to complete a range of learning activities, for example planning developments such as introducing a school poly tunnel.

Compliance with the standards for registration

Standard 1: The quality of education provided by the school

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

On this visit, Estyn did not inspect Standard 2.

Standard 3: Welfare, health and safety of pupils

On this visit, Estyn did not inspect Standard 3.

Standard 4: The suitability of proprietors and staff

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

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.

Copies of the report

Copies of this report are available from the school and from the Estyn website (<http://www.estyn.gov.wales>)

The report was produced in accordance with section 163 of the Education Act 2002. The main purpose of inspection under this section is to report on compliance with the Independent Schools Standards 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 publication. Any enquiries or comments regarding this document/publication should be addressed to:

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