



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

A report on

Priority Childcare

Date of inspection: January 2024

by

Estyn, His Majesty's Inspectorate for Education

and Training in Wales

About Priority Childcare

Priority Childcare is an independent school providing education for up to 22 children aged 8 to 18 years who have social, emotional and behavioural difficulties. The school opened in 2015 and initially operated in classrooms at four of the company's seven children's homes. Priority Childcare was taken over by Orbis Education and Care in April 2021. Orbis Group owns four other independent special schools in Wales and is part of the portfolio of August Equity, a private equity investment company.

Many pupils are looked after by their local authorities and are resident in the company's children's homes, although a few pupils attend on a day basis. Most pupils have statements of special educational needs, an individual development plan (IDP) or education, health and care plan (EHCP) for social, emotional and behavioural difficulties.

The head of education has been in post since December 2021. The executive head has been overseeing the running of the school since April 2023. They are supported by a deputy head and an assistant head. The school has four teachers, 27 teaching support assistants and a school administrator. The delivery of the school curriculum is undertaken by the teachers and supported by teaching assistants and a clinical team.

Main findings

Strengths

Since the last visit, leaders have made significant progress in addressing the issues of non-compliance with the Independent School Standards (Wales) Regulations 2003.

Overall, since the last visit, leaders have made strong progress in improving practice at the school. They have a good understanding of the strengths and areas of development and a clear vision for the strategic development of the school.

Leaders set high expectations for themselves, staff and pupils. In addition, they provide effective support for staff and pupils and manage the day-to-day running of the school efficiently and effectively.

The school has implemented the new FLIGHT curriculum, which is based on friendship, life skills, independence, goals, health and trauma. This curriculum is designed to better meet the needs of the pupils. As a result, pupils have bespoke learning plans which appropriately address their learning needs and help them to develop valuable skills for the future.

The school has recently introduced positive behaviour support plans for all pupils. Pupils contribute to the creation of their individual plan which explains to staff how best to work with them. As a result, staff at the school have a well-understood and positive approach to behaviour management. Further, there has been a significant decrease in the number of incidents of challenging behaviour. In addition, most pupils show a positive improvement in their attendance levels over time.

Pupils are highly supportive of each other and their interests. Pupils appreciate the individuality of peers and show tolerance and acceptance. This is a strength of the school.

Areas for development

Since September 2023, the school has made important improvements to the curriculum and includes valuable opportunities for pupils to develop a wide range of skills. However, whole-school planning of these skills, across the curriculum, is in the early stages of development.

Teaching staff are beginning to use a variety of methods to both record and track pupil progress. This links appropriately to the curriculum framework and allows staff to record the small steps of progress that pupils make in a range of valuable skills. Due to the relative newness of this approach, it is too early to evaluate the impact of these systems.

Recommendations

The school should:

- R1 Continue to strengthen the planning for and assessment of pupils' skills across the curriculum

Progress in addressing recommendations from previous visit or inspection report

R1. Ensure that the school complies fully with the Independent School Standards [Wales] Regulations 2003

Since the last monitoring visit in March 2023, the school has made significant progress in meeting this recommendation.

Leaders have reviewed the curriculum and from September 2023 implemented the FLIGHT model. As a result, there has been a positive impact upon pupil engagement, improved attendance levels and reduction in behavioural incidents.

Further, the school has strengthened its procedures for target-setting and monitoring pupils' progress through the introduction of its 'achievement continuum'.

As a result, the school is compliant with the Independent School Standards (Wales) Regulations 2003.

R2. Ensure that tracking systems provide a clear picture of the progress pupils make over time

The school has developed new arrangements to assess and to review pupils' progress. Staff are beginning to collect a range of worthwhile information to track pupils' progress, including data on the achievement of their small steps of learning based on the new FLIGHT curriculum model. This includes a new method of recording progress, including using photographic evidence on a digital platform. However, this work is at an early stage of development and it is too early to evaluate the impact.

R3. Ensure that teaching consistently challenges and meets the needs of all pupils

Nearly all teachers effectively use pupils' interests to deepen their understanding of key concepts and develop valuable skills. This has a positive impact to increase the level of pupils' engagement in learning over time. These teachers provide suitable pace and challenge during their activities to ensure that pupils develop appropriate skills and knowledge.

R4. Evaluate the impact of professional learning on teaching and learning

The school has made appropriate and purposeful progress against this recommendation.

The school has a strong focus on the professional learning and career development of all staff. Staff are highly trained and, as a result, effectively support pupils within the school.

The wider organisation has significantly invested in the professional learning of all staff. Staff at all levels of the school have clear career progression routes and specialised training to support with meeting the additional learning needs (ALN) of pupils. Leaders have implemented valuable 'road maps' to enable professional development for staff, which is regularly evaluated. This approach is enabling the organisation to continue to develop an effective and engaged team of teachers and support staff.

Staff collaborate regularly with staff from other schools within the organisation to further enhance partnership working, effective sharing of best practice and sharing of expertise to support pupils' ALN.

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

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

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.

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:

Publications Section
Estyn
Anchor Court, Keen Road
Cardiff
CF24 5JW or by email to publications@estyn.gov.wales

This and other Estyn publications are available on our website:
<http://www.estyn.gov.wales>