

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

A report on

Westward House School

Date of inspection: November 2023

by

Estyn, His Majesty's Inspectorate for Education

and Training in Wales

About Westward House School

Name of provider	Westward House School
Proprietor	Harriet Harrison
Local authority	Carmarthenshire County Council
Language of the provider	English
Type of school	Independent
Residential provision?	No
Number of pupils on roll	20
Pupils of statutory school age	20
Date of previous Estyn inspection (if applicable)	
Start date of inspection	06/11/2023

Westward House is an independent school located in St Clears, Carmarthenshire.

The school provides education for up to 35 children and young people between the ages of seven to eighteen years who have specific learning difficulties, including: dyslexia, dyspraxia, dysgraphia, dyscalculia, as well as learning difficulties associated with autistic spectrum condition (ASC), and attention deficit disorder. In addition, the school provides education for pupils who have no specific learning need but whose parents wish to enrol their child as an alternative to local state schools. For example, as part-time provision where parents have elected to educate their child at home.

There are currently 20 pupils on roll. Four pupils have statements of special educational need and one pupil is part funded by a local authority.

The lead teacher has been in post since the school was established in February 2021 and is supported by a team of three teachers and two learning support assistants.

The proprietor is also the proprietor of two other schools; Eastward House in Cardiff and Castle School in Haverfordwest.

Data reported is sourced from the latest available Pupil Level Annual School Census. These figures may be slightly different to those observed during the inspection.

Further information is available from the Welsh Government My Local School website: mylocalschool.gov.wales

a. The term 'additional learning needs' is being used to describe those pupils on the SEN/ALN register of the school.

Overview

Many pupils at Westward House school arrive after a period of disruption to their education. They struggle in formal learning environments and lack confidence in their ability to learn. Over their time at the school, many pupils make sound progress in their social skills and confidence. Staff at the school support pupils to develop these skills effectively. As a result, pupils are happy to come to school, feel safe and have strong working relationships with the staff team. This represents sound progress.

Nearly all parents and carers value the regular communication with the school. They believe that the staff at the school know their children well and understand their social and emotional needs well.

During their time at the school, many pupils make suitable progress in their numeracy skills. However, overall, pupils' development of literacy and digital skills is limited due to the lack of opportunities for them to use these skills across the curriculum.

The school generally provides a balanced curriculum, which meets the requirements of the Independent School Standards (Wales) Regulations 2003. This curriculum offer is enriched with a range of engaging activities outside of the classroom, for example through visits to museums, or residential trips to Edinburgh. However, in a few areas of the curriculum such as personal and social education (PSE), relationships and sex education (RSE) and careers, the provision is limited.

Overall, teachers' planning is not sufficiently detailed and does not identify opportunities for the progressive development of skills across the areas of learning. In addition, teachers do not make sufficient use of the outcomes of individual pupil assessments in their planning of activities. As a result, many activities do not provide sufficient challenge or opportunity to build on pupils' previous experiences and learning.

The school has a clear rationale for offering a variety of classes face-to-face, or through online or blended learning. The rationale for the different types of provision is built on pupils' needs and preferences. Around half the pupils complete their learning using an online platform. However, the school does not have an appropriate strategic overview of the courses being delivered or the progress pupils are making in their learning. In addition, in many of these online sessions, many pupils do not engage consistently well enough in their learning.

Recently, there have been significant challenges to leadership and staffing at the school and these have had a detrimental impact on the learning experiences, well-being and progress for pupils. In addition, leadership is not distributed well enough across the school, which limits the school's capacity to drive improvements.

Processes for assuring the quality of provision for pupils' progress are ineffective. At the time of the inspection, leaders were not able to evidence that they had a clear understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses.

Policies to safeguard children are generally detailed and provide useful information for staff. However, the implementation of these policy is inconsistent across the

school. Leaders have failed to identify and address several safeguarding concerns at the school.

The school is not fully compliant with the Independent School Standards (Wales) Regulations 2003.

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 does not meet the regulatory requirements for this standard.

Although the school meets many of the regulatory requirements for this standard, in order to comply fully with the Independent School Standards (Wales) Regulations 2003 the school should:

- Draw up and implement effectively a written policy on the curriculum supported by appropriate plans and schemes of work [1(2)]
- Ensure the subject matter is appropriate for the ages and aptitudes of pupils, including those with a statement [1(2)(b)]
- Ensure the curriculum provides the opportunity for all pupils to learn and make progress [1(2)(i)]
- Ensure the teaching at the school enables pupils to acquire new knowledge, and make progress according to their ability so that they increase their understanding and develop their skills in the subjects taught [1(3)(a)]
- Ensure teaching involves well planned lessons, effective teaching methods, suitable activities and wise management of class time [1(3)(c)]
- Ensure teachers show a good understanding of the aptitudes, needs and prior attainments of the pupils, and ensure these are taken into account in the planning of lessons [1(3)(d)]
- Ensure there is a framework in place to assess pupils' work regularly and thoroughly and use the information from such assessments to plan teaching so that pupils can make progress [1(3)(g)]
- Provide effective education for all pupils within a class to make progress, including pupils with statements and those for whom Welsh or English is an additional language [1(5)]

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 does not fully meet the regulatory requirements for this standard.

Although the school meets most of the regulatory requirements for this standard, in order to comply fully with the Independent School Standards (Wales) Regulations 2003, the school should:

- Prepare and implement written policies to safeguard and promote the welfare of children who are pupils at the school in compliance with Welsh Government Guidance 283 / 2022 Keeping Learners Safe [3(2)(b)]
- Prepare and implement a written policy to promote good behaviour amongst pupils which sets out the sanctions to be adopted in the event of pupil misbehaviour [3(2)(d)]
- Ensure the school has and implements effectively a satisfactory policy on First Aid [3(6)]
- Ensure the school keeps a written record of the sanctions imposed upon pupils for serious disciplinary offences [3(8)]

The suitability of proprietors and staff

The school does not meet the regulatory requirements for this standard.

Although the school meets almost all of the regulatory requirements for this standard, in order to comply fully with the Independent School Standards (Wales) Regulations 2003 the school should:

• Ensure that prior to the confirmation of the appointment of all staff, that appropriate checks are carried out to confirm their identity, medical fitness, previous employment history, character references and where appropriate qualifications and professional references, and that information must be taken into account in determining whether an appointment is confirmed [4(c)]

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 Strengthen the management of safeguarding and address the shortcomings identified during the inspection
- R2 Comply fully with the Independent School Standards (Wales) Regulations 2003
- R3 Establish procedures for quality assurance and improvement planning to focus on pupil progress and the standards they achieve

R4 Strengthen planning to develop skills and ensure increasing opportunities for pupils to develop their literacy, numeracy and digital skills, and give more attention to developing the most able pupils

What happens next

Since the school does not meet the standards required for registration, the Welsh Government will require the proprietor to submit an action plan within a specified period of time. This plan will set out the steps that the school will take to meet the standards, and the timescale within which it will complete each step.

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.

Main findings

Learning

Many pupils join the school following periods of disruption to their education. They frequently struggle with formal learning and the classroom environment. Over time, many pupils settle in well, and build constructive relationships with their staff and peers. For these pupils, this represents sound progress.

Nearly all pupils develop important social and communication skills over their time at the school. For example, they enjoy each other's company, work well in pairs of small groups and celebrate each other's achievements. Pupils listen carefully to teaching staff and respond appropriately to instructions and guidance. They take turns, display patience and co-operate with teaching staff and with each other well. They are confident in responding to questions and share their opinions suitably. At break times, most pupils socialise appropriately with their peers and staff.

Nearly half of the pupils at the school have attended a successful residential trip to Edinburgh. For many pupils this was their first experience away from home. These opportunities positively support the development of their independence and social skills.

A few more able pupils make good progress in developing their spelling, punctuation and grammar skills. However, for many pupils, these skills are underdeveloped.

The majority of pupils do not develop their progressive reading skills due to a lack of opportunity within the curriculum. This hinders their progress in developing these skills.

Many pupils use subject specific vocabulary appropriate to their needs. For example, in maths lessons, most pupils can use the terms multiple, perimeter and area accurately.

Many pupils develop appropriate number skills and, over time and where appropriate, these become more relevant to real life contexts. For example, being confident to use money when purchasing their lunch and snacks in the local shop, measuring ingredients for recipes in cookery or taking weather readings during outdoor school.

Nearly all pupils develop suitable creative skills. For example, they produce clay models of what they imagine Egyptian Gods to be and a few pupils participate in GCSE art.

Around half of pupils develop their physical skills well both through regular, timetabled activities at the local leisure centre and activities at the outdoor school. Pupils' use of information and communication technology (ICT) across the curriculum is generally limited to word processing and accessing online lessons. Opportunities for pupils to develop their digital skills progressively across the curriculum are underdeveloped.

A few pupils over the past academic year have achieved GCSE qualifications in English language, mathematics and biology. Nearly all school leavers go on to the world of work or volunteering.

It is not appropriate to compare the standards that pupils achieve at the school with national averages or to analyse the performance trends of groups over time because of the nature of the pupils' additional learning needs and the small size of the cohort.

Well-being and attitudes to learning

Westward House is a happy school, where pupils are polite and welcoming to all. Nearly all pupils arrive at school well-presented and ready to learn. Over time, they develop a strong sense of pride and belonging.

Nearly all pupils feel safe and secure in their learning environment and many demonstrate positive attitudes to learning. Nearly all pupils like school and enjoy attending. They know who to speak to if they are worried. Nearly all pupils welcome the family atmosphere and feel that staff know them well.

Around half the pupils attend the school on a part-time basis as part of a flexischooling model alongside home education. However, nearly all pupils attend the school regularly when expected to do so. Many of these pupils positively improve their attendance compared to their previous placements. For these pupils, this represents significant progress.

Nearly all pupils are polite and courteous to visitors and most are enthusiastic about sharing their views. Many pupils appreciate the opportunity to talk to teachers or use the 'worry-box' to share ideas or concerns. However, pupils do not develop leadership skills well enough due to the limited opportunities.

Most pupils have a clear understanding of how to keep themselves healthy through undertaking regular exercise and eating a well-balanced diet. They are confident to discuss the nutritional benefits of ingredients, whilst enjoying opportunities to create meals linked to their topic of study. For example, during the inspection around half of the pupils made a tasty Egyptian koshari and ghorayeba biscuits. This supports them in developing their understanding of different cultures.

Due to the flexi-schooling arrangements for around half the pupils, generally only those pupils who attend school on a full time basis have the opportunity to attend a weekly lesson in physical education. These sessions are tailored appropriately to pupils' individual interests. For example, a very few pupils take part in fitness activities using gym equipment and a minority of other pupils enjoyed games of badminton and football.

Over their time at the school, most pupils build positive relationships with their peers based on mutual respect. Around half of the pupils also build beneficial relationships with pupils from the sister school in Cardiff, which are strengthened during shared residential trips. This has a worthwhile effect on the development of their social skills.

Many pupils have positive attitudes towards their work and demonstrate enthusiasm and enjoyment in their learning, particularly the younger pupils. In a few instances, pupils develop perseverance through problem solving activities, for example when deciphering hieroglyphics to complete challenges in PE.

A minority of pupils show resilience when working independently. These pupils are confident, capable learners, who are ready to learn. However, in many online lessons and a minority of classroom lessons, pupils are too passive and do not engage consistently well enough. This has a negative impact on their learning

Teaching and learning experiences

Positive working relationships between staff and pupils are a strong feature of Westward House school. All staff at the school work together well to provide valuable support for pupils. They intervene skilfully to promote effective engagement and concentration for many pupils and, in a few cases, offer beneficial support to pupils engaging in independent learning. As a result, learning environments are generally calm and stimulating and nearly all pupils demonstrate positive behaviour.

Overall, the school provides an adequate curriculum, which covers the areas of learning required in the Independent School Standards (Wales) Regulations 2003. However, a few aspects of the curriculum, such as technological and personal social and health education (PSE), lack rigour and regularity.

Curriculum plans are underdeveloped and do not always deliver worthwhile activities to support pupils' learning. Learning experiences do not challenge pupils well enough.

Aspects of the personal, social and health education (PSE) curriculum, including substance misuse and internet safety, are delivered suitably at appropriate times in pupils' development. The school benefits from the input of a community police officer to support the delivery of aspects of this curriculum. However overall, the provision for PSE at the school is limited and the provision for relationships and sex education (RSE) and careers education is underdeveloped.

The curriculum has an appropriate focus on developing individual pupils' literacy, numeracy and social skills. However, pupils' ability to apply these skills across the curriculum is underdeveloped. There are too few opportunities for pupils to develop their digital skills progressively across the curriculum. There is no clear approach to

how reading skills are taught, which limits the opportunities within the curriculum for pupils to develop their reading skills. Furthermore, the provision designed to foster and develop a love of reading is inconsistent.

A minority of the pupils participate in online learning platforms for the delivery of their GCSE qualifications. There is a lack of strategic overview by the school on the learning content that pupils are covering and at what stage pupils are in their learning. This restricts the schools ability to accurately assess pupils progress on these courses. In addition, Pupils who are accessing online learning are too passive and engagement is inconsistent. This hinders pupils' progress.

Where teaching is most successful, teaching staff are effective in ensuring that pupils make secure progress in their learning. For example, in history, pupils discuss the Rebecca Riots and debate the effectiveness of rioting in the 19th Century. In these lessons, the pace is purposeful. Where lessons are less successful, teachers rely too heavily on worksheets and learning activities do not always place sufficient demand on the more able pupils. This constrains the opportunities for pupils to develop their skills, such as writing freely and at length in their work across the curriculum.

Staff collect a suitable range of pupil assessment information, which focuses on pupils' literacy and numeracy skills. However, this is not well established and staff do not use these assessments effectively enough to track and monitor pupil progress. The information from assessments does not inform future planning or the delivery of appropriate interventions to meet the needs of individual pupils well enough.

In many lessons, verbal feedback is positive and encourages pupils to engage in their learning. In these lessons, pupils are confident to learn from their mistakes and to continue with their efforts and achievements. However, feedback across the school does not consistently identify what pupils need to do to improve their learning and make progress.

The school provides a suitable range of enrichment opportunities that supplement pupils' wider experiences. For example, they arrange trips to the Tenby museum and art gallery to deepen pupils' understanding of local architecture. In addition, they organise engaging events, for example talks from local organisations such as the British Legion on the importance of Remembrance Day and St Clears own Council on the coronation of King Charles III.

The school organises opportunities for pupils to develop effective partnerships with an appropriate range of local organisations. These links provide pupils with valuable opportunities to apply and practise important skills outside the classroom. For example, pupils take part in weekly visits to an allotment where they grow produce and make jam to sell locally.

The school encourages valuable opportunities for parents to talk to pupils in the school about their careers, for example what it is like to be a paramedic or the work involved in running a farm.

Annual reports to parents are appropriate and provide useful information on attitudes to learning and topics covered by pupils but do not indicate expected levels of progress well enough.

Care, support and guidance

Westward House school provides a calm and nurturing environment that successfully promotes the development of pupils' confidence and self-esteem. Teaching and learning support staff understand pupils' emotional needs well. Over time, nearly all pupils develop trusting working relationships with them and each other. For pupils who have previously struggled in formal education settings, this represents significant progress.

Staff at the school liaise effectively with parents and carers on a regular basis. The lead teacher, alongside relevant staff, establishes productive relationships with parents and carers by maintaining effective lines of communication. This supports the parents well and enables them to raise any issues that may affect their child's well-being.

Pupils have a useful 'one page profile' that outlines their aspirations, what is important to them and what is important to support them to learn. These profiles show the detailed knowledge that school staff have of the individual qualities of each pupil and help to support their learning and well-being.

The school produces an appropriate baseline of pupil attainment and identifies pupils' additional learning needs (ALN) on entry. However, the school does not use this information to set appropriate targets for pupils. As a result, the school is unable to effectively track and monitor pupil progress well enough.

The school's provision for pupils with ALN generally meets their needs appropriately. Staff ensure that pupils' ALN are not a barrier in examinations by supporting them with suitable access arrangements. Across the school, staff support pupils with ALN with an appropriate range of resources. For example, they may provide coloured overlays or sensory toys to support pupils in the classroom. Further, online one-to-one sessions are provided for a few pupils with dyslexia and a very few pupils benefit from local authority occupational therapy support. However, across the school, the impact of ALN provision on the progress pupils are making is not evaluated well enough.

The school provides appropriate opportunities to help pupils make healthy lifestyle choices, for example in relation to healthy eating and drinking and how to keep themselves safe online. Staff link with an appropriate range of external providers to enhance the curriculum. For example, the police visit the school to deliver sessions to pupils on substance misuse. However, coverage of important areas such as relationships and sex education is underdeveloped.

The school provides pupils with suitable opportunities to raise money for charitable causes. For example, many of the pupils work on the school allotment and support the local food bank by donating half of the collected produce. In addition, the school has developed beneficial links with schools in India. Pupils have been supported to raise money to send overseas. They create fun videos of the school community singing and dancing to a Christmas song with links to an online donation page. However, opportunities for pupils to gain a deeper understanding of culture, the local community and the wider world are limited. In addition, the provision for pupils to

learn about democracy and the dangers of extremism and radicalisation is underdeveloped.

Over their time at the school, staff encourage pupils to explore their passions and interests and expand on their experiences. However, overall, opportunities to develop a wider understanding of their next steps in employment or education are underdeveloped.

Throughout the school, staff provide an appropriate emphasis on the development of life skills such as cookery, housekeeping and personal care. In addition, the school uses valuable off-site trips to help support and prepare pupils in developing their confidence in social situations.

Pupils value the opportunity to talk to staff and share their concerns in the 'worry box'. However, the ability of pupils to influence the work of the school and take on leadership roles is limited.

The school does not always record pupil attendance accurately. It does, however, contact parents when pupils are absent. Overall, there is limited analysis of pupil attendance or engagement in lessons. This hinders the school's ability to recognise any patterns, trends or the progress pupils may make in their attendance or engagement in learning.

The school has clear procedures in place to make appropriate and timely referrals to other agencies when it has a safeguarding concern. However, the school's record keeping in these matters, including actions taken by staff to protect pupils, is not sufficiently robust.

The school does not consistently implement its own safeguarding policies and these policies do not refer to the most recent Welsh Government guidance. Consequently, the school's arrangements to keep pupils safe do not meet requirements and give cause for concern.

Leadership and management

Since the school was established in February 2021, leaders have a developed a clear vision for the school. This vision is shared by the whole staff team and well understood by all, including pupils and their parents and carers. This vision of 'a school for every child' underpins the work of the school.

The school has developed successful systems for communicating with parents and carers. Parents and carers value the regular updates regarding their child and their achievements at school.

The school has recently experienced a period of significant disruption to the management and strategic leadership of the school. During the period of absence of the lead teacher, oversight of the school has been provided by the proprietor and leaders in the sister school in Cardiff. This hiatus has limited the progress the school has made and impacted on the proprietor's ability to quality assure the standard of provision. This wider leadership team do not have a robust understanding of the strengths and areas for development within the provision, which limits their ability to plan strategically for improvement.

The school employs a small teaching team who are supported by a team of learning support assistants. All staff have clear roles and responsibilities, documented in suitable job descriptions. Regular communication within the team ensures that everyone is kept well informed about what is happening in school, and about any relevant staff or pupil concerns.

In recent months, the school has faced changes to this team and crucially, challenges in recruiting and retaining suitably qualified and experienced staff. Due to the limited numbers of teaching staff and current staff vacancies, in addition to challenges in teaching, the proprietor has not been able to secure a consistent quality across the school. Furthermore, middle leadership roles are underdeveloped.

The proprietor has the best interests of the pupils at heart and keeps in close touch to support the school community and its leaders. They meet regularly to discuss and make decisions to support the smooth running of the school at an operational level. However, whilst demonstrating a commitment to supporting leaders, the proprietor does not challenge the strategic leadership of the school well enough or ensure that policies and procedures in the school meet the requirements for registration as an independent school

Processes for assuring the quality of provision for pupils' progress are ineffective. Leaders do not gather or analyse first hand evidence of standards and provision, including teaching. As a result, they do not know if pupils consistently make the progress they are capable of achieving.

Lesson observations and scrutinising pupils' work across the curriculum are not formally in place across the school. This means that teachers do not receive feedback on their performance, opportunities to share best practice are missed and leaders are not able to prioritise areas for improvement in teaching well enough.

The school benefits from its links with the other schools within the group. This includes the sharing of specialist teaching staff, access to online sessions delivered by teachers at the other schools and sharing of good practice. Further, leaders have recently appointed a member of staff to oversee teaching and learning across the three schools. However, it is too early to evaluate the impact of this role.

Performance management for staff is in the very early stages of development. As a result, the opportunity for staff to have formal professional dialogue with leaders and to set relevant targets is limited. Further, the very few targets set within performance management do not link well enough the school's priorities for improvement.

Nearly all staff across the school value the opportunity to complete a narrow range of professional learning, which covers important areas such as safeguarding and the Prevent duty. A minority of staff complete additional courses that are linked to additional learning needs. Leaders have recently introduced a professional learning calendar, which covers weekly sessions in teaching and assessment methods across the three schools. However, the range and quality of professional learning opportunities for staff are limited.

Generally, the school has an appropriate range of policiesthat contain clear guidance for staff and contain useful information in relation to the policy area. However, a few

policies do not have sufficient regard to Welsh Government guidance and do not reflect the practice seen in school. Leaders do not monitor the implementation of school policies across the school well enough. At a strategic level, leaders do not evaluate and review the school's policies and documentation robustly enough in a timely manner.

Leaders and staff are committed to promoting a caring and nurturing culture where pupil well-being is at the heart of all their work. They aim to ensure that the school provides a safe, caring environment that meets the needs of its pupils well. However, across the school, inconsistencies in the application of school policies and a lack of formality within procedures and record keeping impact on the school's ability to ensure that pupils are safe. As a result, a few important aspects of the school's provision do not meet requirements and are a cause for concern.

The school is not fully compliant with the Independent School Standards (Wales) Regulations 2003. As a result of the areas of non-compliance with the Independent School Standards (Wales) Regulations 2003 and the safeguarding concerns raised during the inspection, the Welsh Government may wish to recommend formally to the school that it should not accept new pupils until these matters have been addressed.

Evidence base of the report

Before an inspection, inspectors:

• analyse the outcomes from parent/carer and pupil questionnaires and consider the views of teachers and support staff through their questionnaire responses

During an inspection, inspectors normally:

- hold a meeting with parents/carers to hear their views on the school and its effectiveness
- meet the headteacher, governors/proprietor(s), leaders and individual teachers to evaluate the impact of the school's work
- meet pupils to discuss their work and to gain their views about various aspects of their school
- meet groups of pupils in leadership roles, such as representatives from the school council and eco-committee
- visit lessons and undertake a variety of learning walks to observe pupils learning
- look closely at the school's self-evaluation processes
- consider the school's improvement plan and look at evidence to show how well the school had taken forward planned improvements
- scrutinise a range of school documents, including information on pupil
 assessment and progress, records of meetings of staff and the governing body
 (where appropriate), information on pupils' well-being, including the safeguarding
 of pupils, and records of staff training and professional development

After the on-site inspection and before the publication of the report, Estyn:

 review the findings of the inspection alongside the supporting evidence from the inspection team in order to validate, moderate and ensure the quality of the inspection

Copies of the report

Copies of this report are available from the school and from the Estyn website (<u>Estyn Website</u>)

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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