



A report on:

Bryn Tirion Hall School

Date of inspection: September 2013

by

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

During each inspection, inspectors aim to answer three key questions:

Key Question 1: How good are the outcomes?

Key Question 2: How good is provision?

Key Question 3: How good are leadership and management?

Inspectors also provide an overall judgement on the school's current performance and on its prospects for improvement.

In these evaluations, inspectors use a four-point scale:

Judgement	What the judgement means
Excellent	Many strengths, including significant examples of sector-leading practice
Good	Many strengths and no important areas requiring significant improvement
Adequate	Strengths outweigh areas for improvement
Unsatisfactory	Important areas for improvement 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.

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Publication Section

Estyn

Anchor Court

Keen Road

Cardiff

CF24 5JW or by email to publications@estyn.gov.uk

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Context

Bryn Tirion Hall School is an independent special school for boys and girls aged from seven to 18 years who have social, emotional and behavioural difficulties. The school is accommodated in a large detached property in a rural area between the towns of Mold and Wrexham.

There are currently 13 pupils on roll, seven of whom live in the children's home operated by the proprietor. Twelve of the pupils are from north Wales, and one is from England. All of the pupils have English as their first language. All pupils at the school are placed by local authorities. Eleven of them have statements of special education need.

The overall aim of the school is 'to promote personal achievement and the realisation of each young person's potential'. The school's objective is to provide education that gives each young person the opportunity to fulfil their potential in a calm and supportive environment.

The pupils are grouped into three classes, one for each key stage. The key stage 2 class is based on a 'nurture' model. Each pupil follows an individual programme, tailored to meet their needs.

It is not possible to compare the school's performance with national averages, as there is no benchmark data available. Pupils' attainment and achievement are judged on an individual pupil basis.

The school's proprietor is a limited company managed by a board of directors. The majority of directors are part of the senior management team at the school.

Bryn Tirion Hall School was registered as an independent school by the National Assembly for Wales in 2009. This is the school's first full inspection.

Summary

The school's current performance	Good
The school's prospects for improvement	Adequate

Current performance

Bryn Tirion Hall is a good school because:

- pupils achieve good standards in their learning and develop very good social and communication skills;
- nearly all pupils attend school very regularly;
- pupils engage very well in their work and take pride in their achievement;
- teaching is good and work is planned carefully to meet the needs of all pupils;
- pupils receive good quality care, support and guidance; and
- the calm environment and supportive ethos of the school help pupils to gain confidence and self-esteem.

Prospects for improvement

The school has adequate prospects for improvement because:

- managers have a clear vision for the school, which is shared by all staff; and
- managers and directors show a clear commitment to ensuring that the needs of individual pupils are met.

However:

- the school's self-evaluation processes are at an early stage and lack rigour;
- the directors of the school focus too much on operational matters and not enough on the strategic direction of the school; and
- the school is developing useful partnerships with other schools, but these are at an early stage.

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 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 Schools Standards (Wales) Regulations 2003 the school should:
 - have regard to any National Assembly guidance on health and safety responsibilities and powers of schools by ensuring that the heating oil tanks are placed on a suitable concrete base at an appropriate distance from the school building, and that they are bunded. [3 (5)]

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 Comply fully with the Independent School Standards (Wales) Regulations 2003
- R2 Continue to develop the process of self-evaluation and ensure that it leads to more effective strategic planning
- R3 Plan more effectively to develop pupils' key skills in subjects across the curriculum
- R4 Provide more opportunities for pupils to have access to scientific learning experiences
- R5 Develop more effective partnerships with other schools to ensure that staff are able to develop their knowledge and expertise through sharing good practice

What happens next?

Since the inspection report notes that the school does not meet one or more of the standards required for registration, the National Assembly for Wales will require the proprietor to submit an action plan within a specified period of time. This plan must set out the steps that the school will take to meet the standards, and the timescale within which it will complete each step.

Estyn inspectors will visit the school in about one year's time to review the school's progress to meet the standards.

Estyn advises the proprietor to amend its current development plan to show what action 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 at the school.

Main findings

Key Question 1: How good are outcomes?

Good

Standards: Good

Pupils who attend Bryn Tirion Hall School have significant social, emotional and behavioural difficulties, and nearly all of them have previously found it difficult to engage in education. As a result, they have not achieved well in line with their ability. The nurturing environment of the school enables pupils to gain in confidence. Nearly all pupils make very good progress with both their learning and their behaviour in a short time.

It is not possible to compare the school's performance with national averages, as there is no benchmark data available. Pupils' attainment and achievement are judged on an individual pupil basis.

Across the school, pupils make good progress against their individual targets. Most pupils are fully aware of their targets and work hard to achieve them.

Nearly all pupils develop very good communication skills. They listen attentively in lessons, and answer questions appropriately. They express their views clearly in group discussions. When they do not understand the work that they are doing, they have the confidence to ask for help.

Nearly all pupils behave very well in lessons. They engage well in their work, and concentrate for extended periods of time.

Nearly all pupils develop good literacy skills in line with their ability. They generally use accurate spelling and punctuation, and present their work very neatly. They recognise when they have made mistakes, and make appropriate corrections. The more able pupils are able to understand and analyse set texts, and write good quality extended pieces of work. These pupils have a good understanding of subject specific vocabulary. Many of the pupils read out aloud accurately and confidently.

Nearly all pupils make good progress with their numeracy skills and successfully apply these skills across the curriculum. For example, younger pupils use their knowledge of shape when completing topic work on air raid shelters in the Second World War. Older pupils have a good understanding of how measuring and calculation skills can be applied to a range of situations, for example construction and carpet fitting.

Most pupils develop good information and communication technology (ICT) skills and use these effectively across the curriculum. At key stage 2, pupils use the interactive whiteboard confidently and competently to complete tasks, for example when they match rhyming words. Older pupils use ICT well to research the internet, produce posters and create presentations.

By the end of key stage 4, all pupils achieve a range of qualifications appropriate to their abilities and interests. These include GCSEs, Entry Level, Pathways and NVQs. Over the past three years, all Year 11 pupils have achieved at least two qualifications. More able pupils achieve a wide range of higher level GCSE passes.

Last year, two pupils gained awards as part of the Duke of Edinburgh Award Scheme.

Where possible, pupils experience the world of work through placements in local businesses. Last year, two pupils successfully took part in work experience, looking after horses and working at a hairdressing salon. Many older pupils attend courses at a local college. This helps them to gain life skills for the future. In 2013, three quarters of school leavers moved on to college placements, to study courses in Business and Management and Land Based Studies. The school provides effective support to enable pupils to maintain these placements successfully.

Wellbeing: Good

Nearly all pupils at Bryn Tirion Hall School attend school very regularly. Many of these pupils did not engage well in previous settings.

Despite their difficulties, pupils generally behave very well both in lessons and during unstructured times. On the occasions when pupils' behaviour is challenging, they settle down quickly. The nurturing environment of the school helps them to stay calm.

Nearly all pupils display a very positive and mature attitude towards their work. They want to do well, and take pride in their own achievements and those of their peers. They carry out tasks enthusiastically. The pupils' motivation and desire to do well is a strength of the school.

All pupils feel safe at school. They develop very good relationships with staff, and this helps them to gain in confidence and self-esteem. They value the support they receive from staff, and feel able to talk to them about their problems or concerns.

Nearly all pupils develop very good social skills. They are polite to staff and visitors to the school. For example, they know how to behave appropriately at lunchtime, initiating conversations and pouring drinks for others at the table.

Across the school, pupils have a good understanding of the importance of healthy eating. Many pupils choose to eat salad at lunchtime. Pupils take part in a range of physical activities, for example horse riding, swimming and basketball.

Pupils are able to express their views about life at the school, through sessions with their key workers and within the classroom. The school has recently established a school council to enable pupils to be involved in making decisions about life at the school. However, it is too new to have had impact.

Key Question 2: How good is provision?

Good

Learning experiences: Adequate

The school provides an appropriate range of activities that are well matched to the ages and abilities of pupils across all key stages. At key stage 2, a nurture group approach offers pupils a highly structured and caring environment to support their learning. Pupils in key stage 4 are given opportunities to obtain appropriate qualifications, including Entry Level and GCSE. Older pupils have the opportunity to follow vocational courses of their choice, for example brickwork and catering, in a local college.

The curriculum meets the requirements of the Independent School Standards (Wales) Regulations 2003. However, opportunities to study science are limited.

There are opportunities in many lessons for pupils to develop their key skills. However, at a strategic level, planning is not co-ordinated effectively enough across the school. As a result, opportunities for promoting these skills in lessons are missed.

The school encourages pupils' knowledge of Welsh culture through visits to places of interest and cultural events, for example the Llangollen International Eisteddfod. The school provides Welsh language sessions as an option for pupils.

Most pupils are able to widen their experiences through a range of extra-curricular activities. For example, pupils grow vegetables for the school kitchen. They also make good use of local leisure facilities, such as the swimming pool.

The school has appropriate provision for education for sustainable development and global citizenship. Pupils participate in activities such as class recycling schemes. The school has developed useful links with a number of countries. This has included organising visiting speakers from Sierra Leone and Cambodia, and arranging a trip to Uganda as part of an exchange programme.

Teaching: Good

In nearly all the lessons observed, teaching is good. Teachers plan lessons well and ensure that activities match the individual needs of pupils.

Teachers and support staff use positive language and praise well to support pupils to remain on task. Staff work well together to manage challenging behaviour and to make sure that pupils return quickly to the learning activity after a difficult incident.

Staff have high expectations of what pupils can achieve in lessons and pupils respond by producing work that is of good quality.

All staff have a good understanding of the needs of individual pupils. They use this information well to select appropriate teaching strategies and relevant resources to keep pupils engaged and interested in lessons.

The school uses a wide range of assessments to measure and track pupils' progress in literacy, numeracy and ICT. Most teachers use assessment data well to ensure that individual pupils have appropriate targets identified on their individual education plans. However, teachers do not use this data well enough to evaluate the effectiveness of their work or to inform their planning.

Teachers use a good range of assessment strategies in lessons to encourage pupils to judge their progress and think about how they might improve. Teachers are effective in encouraging pupils to discuss their work in pairs and small groups. As a result, most pupils can make productive comments about the work of others.

Teachers generally mark pupils' work promptly and nearly always include positive comments to encourage pupils. However, marking is not consistent across the school and does not always outline what pupils need to do to improve.

The school has effective systems in place for sharing pupils' progress with parents and carers. These ensure that parents and carers feel well informed about what their child is learning in school and how well they are doing.

Care, support and guidance: Good

The school makes good provision to promote pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. There are good induction arrangements when pupils first join the school. Staff are very successful in developing pupils' confidence and self-esteem through a variety of activities, for example celebration assemblies and key worker meetings.

The school promotes healthy living effectively through a number of physical activities, for example basketball and swimming. It also takes care to ensure pupils have a range of healthy food choices at lunchtime.

The school engages well with a wide range of specialist services and makes effective use of professionals to support the personal and social education of pupils. For example, a local nurse provides valuable sessions on drug and alcohol abuse, sex and relationships.

The school offers formal personal and social education, and the majority of pupils have access to well-planned programmes that are appropriate to their needs.

The school has an effective behaviour management system and staff work hard to create an environment that is caring and nurturing. This ethos contributes significantly towards improving pupils' emotional wellbeing.

There are appropriate systems for identifying and supporting pupils' additional learning needs. These include a comprehensive baseline assessment when pupils start at the school and analysis of any information from pupils' previous placements. Staff use this data effectively to produce targets for individual education plans that are well matched to pupils' needs.

The school has good arrangements for meeting statutory requirements of assessment, recording and reporting. The school provides valuable support to school leavers if they move on to college.

The school's arrangements for safeguarding pupils meet requirements and give no cause for concern.

Learning environment: Good

The school has developed an ethos that is nurturing, supportive and inclusive. Pupils and staff treat each other with respect and the school makes good use of peer mentoring to encourage pupils to be tolerant and understanding of each other's needs. Pupils respond well to staff support and their views are listened to and acted upon. The calm environment and individualised curriculum enable pupils to learn and make progress.

Pupils look after their classrooms and resources well. Classrooms are clean, tidy and well-resourced to meet the learning and social needs of each pupil. Good quality wall displays enhance the learning environment and celebrate pupils' achievement. The buildings and grounds are well maintained and provide good facilities in which pupils feel safe. Pupils benefit from using the school grounds and venues in the local community for sport and leisure.

Key Question 3: How good are leadership and management?	Adequate
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Leadership: Adequate

The Head of Service and Head of Education work together effectively to lead staff and promote an ethos where, through good teaching, understanding and care, pupils thrive. They have established an environment where, despite the difficulties that pupils experience, their progress in learning is a priority.

School leaders have high expectations that staff will achieve their best for the pupils at Bryn Tirion Hall School. Their vision for the school is communicated well, for example through comprehensive and appropriate policy documents. Staff understand their roles and are fully committed to improving the lives of the pupils at the school.

The senior management team meets regularly and maintains an efficient record of its work. However, these meetings spend too much time on day-to-day operational details. Although managers collect a wide range of data and are beginning to use this to evaluate outcomes, they do not focus enough on planning for school improvement or monitoring the school's performance at a strategic level.

The school has an appropriate system of performance management and supports staff to develop their skills and practice by offering useful training and development opportunities. However, managers do not consider whole school training needs that are linked to pupils' performance or self-evaluation well enough.

The directors' group meets frequently, and shows a commitment to the work of the school. The directors have a sound understanding of the needs of the pupils, and the wellbeing of the pupils is their priority. For example, when considering new referrals to the school, directors are careful to consider the impact of the placement on other pupils. However, they do not hold regular, scheduled meetings to discuss strategic matters.

The school meets nearly all the Independent School Standards (Wales) Regulations 2003.

Improving quality: Adequate

Leaders and managers are developing a good understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses. They have introduced a regular process of self-evaluation but recognise that it is at an early stage. The activity is not systematic or embedded firmly enough. It does not clearly identify priorities for improvement or help leaders and managers understand how the work of the school impacts on pupils' progress.

Leaders and managers are beginning to use a range of performance data to plan effectively. They have prioritised five areas for improvement and allocated a realistic timescale and funds for the delivery. However, it is unclear how these priorities were identified.

Nevertheless, the school is developing its improvement planning procedures. Leaders of the school initiate appropriate processes and strategies to improve the school. For example, in the last academic year they have undertaken a curriculum review, introduced weekly therapy sessions for pupils and developed a nurture class for pupils at key stage 2. Although they are at an early stage, these changes are already beginning to impact positively on outcomes for pupils.

The overall findings from Estyn's annual monitoring inspections have been positive and the school has made good progress in addressing the recommendations of these visits.

Partnership working: Good

The school has developed an effective relationship with a small number of local authorities to provide placements for children from those areas. A range of partners, including local health services and the Youth Offending Team, helps to maintain a consistent approach to pupils' education and care. This contributes to improvements in pupils' wellbeing.

Parents and carers value the quality of support they receive from the school. The school arranges multi-agency co-ordinated planning that provides a useful forum for parents and services to plan provision. The school support is flexible and responsive to individual pupils' needs. For example, in agreement with the local authority, a recent initiative enables the school to provide support at home for pupils who are due to start at the school. This helps to develop pupils' trust and confidence, and enables staff to assess and plan for the levels of support that will be required at school.

Good work with local colleges of further education ensures, where appropriate, that school leavers can continue their learning in a more adult environment. Links with local businesses have given pupils opportunities to take part in relevant work placements.

The school has developed a useful partnership with a similar school in England in order to learn from their good practice. It is also developing local links and this has resulted in staff from a local maintained school visiting Bryn Tirion Hall in order to build its own capacity to manage pupils' difficult behaviour. However, opportunities for staff from Bryn Tirion Hall to observe and learn from the good practice of other schools are underdeveloped.

Resource management: Good

The school employs a suitable number of qualified and skilled staff. They are deployed effectively across the three key stages to make best use of their qualities and experience.

Leaders and managers identify appropriate professional development opportunities for individual staff effectively through the performance management procedures. The school supports staff well to access a good range of training and development opportunities. This encourages them to pursue their interests to enhance teaching and learning.

The organisation manages resources well to support and improve the learning environment. Resources are of good quality and are well matched to the interests and abilities of the pupils.

In view of the pupils' good outcomes and wellbeing, the school offers value for money.

Appendix 1

Stakeholder satisfaction report

Responses to learner questionnaires

Due to the small number of pupils in each age group no data will be shown.

Responses to parent questionnaires

The number of responses received was fewer than 10. No data will be shown.

Appendix 2

The inspection team

Caroline Rees	Reporting Inspector
Sw Roberts	Team Inspector
Anthony Mulcahy	Team Inspector
Paul Scudamore	Team Inspector
Matthew Burns	Peer Inspector
Ben Chadwick	Nominee

Copies of the report

Copies of this report are available from the school and from the Estyn website (www.estyn.gov.uk)

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.

Year groups, the Foundation Phase and key stages

Schools use a common system of numbering year groups from the start of compulsory schooling to 18 years of age. This system emphasises the importance of continuity and eases communication among schools, governing bodies, parents and local authorities.

The following table sets out the age ranges relevant to each year group. For example, Year 1 refers to the group of pupils who reach the age of six and Year 13 is the year group who reach the age of 18 during the academic year.

Primary phase:

Year	N	R	Y1	Y2	Y3	Y4	Y5	Y6
Ages	3-4	4-5	5-6	6-7	7-8	8-9	9-10	10-11

Secondary phase:

Year	Y7	Y8	Y9	Y10	Y11	Y12	Y13
Ages	11-12	12-13	13-14	14-15	15-16	16-17	17-18

The Foundation Phase and key stages cover the following year groups:

Foundation Phase	Nursery, Reception, Year 1 and Year 2
Key stage 2	Year 3 to Year 6
Key stage 3	Year 7 to Year 9
Key stage 4	Year 10 and Year 11

Glossary of terms

Core subject indicator (CSI)	This relates to the expected performance in English or Welsh, mathematics and science, the core subjects of the National Curriculum.
Level 1	This represents the equivalent of a GCSE at grade D to G.
Level 1 threshold	This represents a volume of learning equivalent to five GCSEs at grade D to G.
Level 2	This represents the equivalent of a GCSE at grade A* to C.
Level 2 threshold including English or Welsh first language and mathematics	This represents a volume of learning equivalent to five GCSEs at grade A* to C including English or Welsh first language and mathematics
Level 2 threshold	This represents a volume of learning equivalent to five GCSEs at grade A* to C.
Level 3	This represents the equivalent of an A level at grade A*-E.
Level 3 threshold	This represents a volume of learning equivalent to two A levels at grade A* to E.
Average wider points score	This includes all qualifications approved for use in Wales at the relevant age, for example at aged 16 or at aged 18.
Capped wider points score	This includes the best eight results from all qualifications approved for use in Wales at aged 16.
Proprietor	The term 'proprietor', as defined in the Education Act 1996, means the person or people responsible for managing an independent school and can include a sole proprietor, governing bodies, trustees or directors. The ways that independent schools are governed and owned varies a great deal. A proprietor or trust may own a school or the school may have a governing body that appoints a headteacher. Some schools have a combination of these.