



Rhagoriaeth i bawb – Excellence for all

Arolygiaeth Ei Mawrhydi dros Addysg
a Hyfforddiant yng Nghymru

Her Majesty's Inspectorate
for Education and Training in Wales

A report on:

Priory Talocher School

Date of inspection: June 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.

Every possible care has been taken to ensure that the information in this document is accurate at the time of going to press. Any enquiries or comments regarding this document/publication should be addressed to:

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Context

Talocher School is an independent special school for pupils aged 11 to 19 that is administered by Priory Education Services. This is part of the wider Priory Group, which has over 30 schools and specialist colleges across England and Wales.

The school provides education for young people who are resident within Priory children's homes, as well as pupils who are unable to attend mainstream education. All pupils have social, emotional and behavioural difficulties (SEBD) and associated complex needs.

There are currently 22 pupils at the school including 19 boys and three girls. Seven pupils are in key stage 3, 11 in key stage 4 and four are post-16. Pupils are grouped for lessons according to ability and need. Fifteen of the pupils are 'looked after' by local authorities in England and Wales. Twenty pupils have a statement of special educational needs (SEN). No pupils have English as an additional language.

The school has a clear vision and ethos, to provide a 'different and broader' type of education which allows pupils to find success. The motto of the school is: 'Small Steps; Positive Outcomes'.

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.

Since the last inspection in 2007, the number of pupils on roll has increased steadily, from six to 22. The accommodation has been developed to provide, for example, a new dining hall and sports hall, an information and communication technology (ICT) suite and a design and technology classroom.

The current headteacher took up her post in September 2008.

Summary

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

Current performance

Talocher School is a good school because:

- all pupils make good progress in relation to their prior attainment;
- nearly all pupils behave well in relation to their individual needs;
- the school provides a wide range of learning opportunities that are very well matched to the needs of the pupils;
- all teachers plan and deliver lessons well;
- the quality of care, support and guidance for all pupils is outstanding;
- the school works very effectively with outside agencies to ensure that the needs of individual pupils are met; and
- leaders and managers have very high expectations for pupils' learning and behaviour.

Prospects for improvement

The school has excellent prospects for improvement because:

- the headteacher provides strong, highly effective leadership;
- the senior management team has established a very clear, strategic vision for the school;
- the well-established distributed leadership approach is effective in moving the school forward;
- managers of the organisation provide robust challenge for the school;
- performance management and appraisal procedures are used effectively to identify whole school training and development needs; and
- the school has a very good track record of identifying areas for development and planning effectively to make improvements.

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 meets the regulatory requirements for this standard.

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 Increase opportunities for teachers to observe best practice in teaching both within the school and in other similar settings
- R2 Use data more effectively to evaluate the impact of teaching on pupils' progress and to inform planning
- R3 Increase opportunities for pupils to develop their ICT and numeracy skills across the curriculum
- R4 Increase opportunities for pupils to gain accredited qualifications in literacy, numeracy and ICT

What happens next?

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. Estyn will invite the school to prepare a written case study, describing the excellent practice identified during the inspection.

Main findings

Key Question 1: How good are outcomes?	Good
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Standards: Good

Pupils who attend the school have significant social, emotional and behavioural difficulties, and nearly all of them have previously found it difficult to attend and engage in education. Due to their individual needs, pupils' attainment and achievement are judged on an individual basis. In this context, all pupils make good progress in relation to their previous attainment.

Nearly all pupils engage well in lessons. They listen well to instructions, concentrate appropriately and complete tasks within expected timescales. They show good understanding of a range of topics, and are able to recall prior learning well.

Across the school, pupils make good progress against their individual targets. They all have a very good understanding of these targets, and work hard to achieve them.

Nearly all pupils make very good progress in developing their social and communication skills over time. They use these skills appropriately in a range of situations, for example when welcoming visitors to the school.

Pupils develop good literacy skills in line with their individual ability. They express their views clearly, and use a good range of subject specific vocabulary across the curriculum, for example in mathematics and science. Many pupils read aloud with confidence. Many of them are able to read texts and write answers to questions accurately, using correct spelling and punctuation. More able pupils write extended pieces of work. These pupils write effectively in different styles, for example when writing stories and completing diaries. Pupils across the school make appropriate use of writing frames to plan their work.

Pupils who follow individual reading programmes make good progress in a short amount of time. This is beginning to have a positive impact on their work across the curriculum, and as a result they are beginning to gain in confidence.

Most pupils develop their numeracy skills well and learn to apply them in practical situations. For example, those pupils who study vocational subjects such as catering and construction weigh and measure materials and ingredients accurately.

Many pupils develop ICT skills well over time. They use ICT effectively to produce posters, presentations and spread sheets.

By the end of key stage 4, nearly all pupils gain appropriate qualifications in a range of subjects. These include GCSEs, Entry Level, City and Guilds, BTEC and ASDAN qualifications. For the past three years, all pupils have left school with at least one qualification.

Older pupils gain a good understanding of the world of work. Those who follow the catering course learn to prepare and serve food, take orders and clear the tables. In addition, pupils take part in valuable work experience, for example at an equestrian centre, a dairy farm and a local garage.

Last year, all Year 11 leavers went on to college or employment.

Wellbeing: Good

Nearly all pupils improve their behaviour over time. On the occasions when pupils' behaviour is challenging, they have the necessary skills to reflect, improve their behaviour and settle down.

All pupils are highly motivated to improve their behaviour through the end of day award ceremonies, where they receive recognition for achieving their targets. During these ceremonies, they show respect for each other and take pride in each other's achievements.

Most pupils attend school very regularly. A few pupils, who previously did not engage in education, improve their attendance significantly over time.

All pupils have a very good understanding of how they can become healthy, through their diet and physical exercise. They are involved in planning the lunchtime menu, and are able to choose healthy options. All pupils participate regularly in a wide range of sporting activities, for example kayaking, mountain biking and rock climbing. These activities help them to keep fit, and give them opportunities to co-operate with others and work as a team.

All pupils feel safe in school. They develop very good relationships with the teachers and support staff. This helps them to gain confidence and self-esteem. Many pupils feel that the school deals well with bullying, and they know whom to talk to if they have a concern.

Pupils express their opinions well through the school council and during tutor group sessions. They help to make decisions relating to school life, for example about the lunchtime menu, the school uniform and the timetable. Pupils have developed and agreed school rules, and this contributes to the good behaviour at the school.

Pupils enjoy interacting with the local community. For example, they volunteer at an animal rescue centre and participate in charity fund-raising activities.

Pupils gain valuable skills that prepare them well for the next stage in their education or the world of work.

Key Question 2: How good is provision?	Good
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Learning experiences: Good

The school provides a wide range of learning opportunities that are very well matched to the age and ability of all pupils. The curriculum meets the requirements

of the Independent School Standards (Wales) Regulations 2003. The school groups pupils carefully according to their individual needs so that they are able to learn effectively.

At key stage 4, all pupils are given the opportunity to obtain a range of appropriate qualifications. More able pupils take GCSEs. The well-organised vocational programme enables all pupils in key stage 4 to experience valuable work-related opportunities. These include accredited courses in catering and construction. However, opportunities to achieve accreditation in literacy, numeracy and ICT are limited.

The school makes good provision for the development of pupils' communication and literacy skills. Schemes of work and lesson plans identify opportunities to develop these skills and pupils are regularly reminded of their targets. The school makes good provision for pupils to develop their reading skills. However, there are not enough opportunities for pupils to develop and use their ICT and numeracy skills fully across the curriculum.

All pupils are able to broaden their experiences through a range of extra-curricular activities, for example cadets, gardening and cookery. The school makes extensive use of its rural location and access to the outdoors.

The school encourages pupils' interest in Welsh culture, through visits to places of interest and celebrations, for example St. David's Day.

The school successfully promotes education for sustainable development and global citizenship through practical activities such as recycling and environmental study. The school has an active eco-committee and has recently achieved a bronze eco-schools award.

Teaching: Good

In nearly all the lessons observed, teaching is good. All staff have very high expectations of pupils in terms of both learning and behaviour. They plan lessons carefully and fully take into account the needs of individual pupils.

Where teaching is good, teachers use a range of approaches and strategies to deliver interesting lessons. They make sure that pupils understand the purpose of the lesson and know what they are expected to achieve. Lessons are broken up into short manageable activities, and this helps the pupils to remain on task.

All staff have a very good understanding of the needs of the individual pupils, and manage their behaviour effectively. On the few occasions when pupils display challenging behaviour, teachers and support staff work well together to help them settle down and carry on with their work.

The school uses a wide range of appropriate assessments to measure and track pupils' progress. These include a comprehensive baseline assessment when the pupils start at the school. The school uses this assessment data well to ensure that individual pupils receive appropriate support. However, overall teachers do not use

data well enough to analyse the impact of teaching on pupils' progress or to plan for curriculum development.

Marking is up-to-date and includes positive comments to encourage pupils. However it does not always tell pupils what they need to do to improve. Teachers are beginning to involve pupils in assessing how well they are doing. However, this is not consistent across the school.

The school has robust systems in place for sharing information with parents and carers. The annual Pupil Development Day is particularly effective in giving parents and carers the opportunity to be involved in their child's review and target setting.

Care, support and guidance: Excellent

The quality of care, support and guidance at the school is excellent.

The school promotes pupils' health and wellbeing very effectively by encouraging them to take regular exercise and eat healthily. All pupils participate in an extensive range of sporting and outdoor activities such as climbing, walking and kayaking.

There is highly effective provision for pupils' personal, social and emotional development. The school engages a wide range of external agencies to support the delivery of sex, relationships and drug education. Regular assemblies provide good opportunities for the pupils to develop an understanding of right and wrong, and to learn to respect each other.

The school operates a very successful behaviour strategy that is well understood by both staff and pupils. Pupils are encouraged to reflect on their behaviour and how it affects others. They are consistently rewarded for good behaviour and for meeting their targets, during the end of day award ceremony.

Pupils' individual education plans are well written with appropriate and measurable targets. The school holds regular reviews and communicates very effectively with all stakeholders.

The school works very well with a wide range of specialist services in order to meet the diverse needs of individual pupils. Where necessary, the school is proactive in engaging outside agencies very quickly, to provide highly specialist advice. This allows accurate and timely diagnosis of pupils' needs, and ensures that appropriate support is put in place promptly. As a result, pupils with complex difficulties remain in full-time education and achieve positive outcomes. This is sector leading practice.

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

Learning environment: Good

The school has a fully inclusive ethos which respects the diversity of individual pupils. It provides equal access to the curriculum for all pupils. The school provides a

relaxed and nurturing environment, and this helps pupils to remain calm and behave well.

Classrooms are of appropriate size and are very well maintained. Wall displays are attractive, and reflect the good quality of work achieved by the pupils and the wide range of activities available. Resources are of a high standard and are well matched to the varied needs of the pupils. All classes benefit from digital learning resources such as interactive whiteboards and computers. All pupils respect their classrooms and the resources that are available.

The school buildings are welcoming, safe and secure. A very effective barn conversion has enabled the school to extend its opportunities for sporting activities, assemblies and award ceremonies, regardless of the weather.

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

The headteacher provides strong, highly effective leadership. She is very well supported by a skilful senior leadership team. Together they have established a clear, strategic vision for the school, which is shared by all staff.

The managers of the organisation share the school's vision, are exceptionally supportive of the school and monitor the school's performance rigorously. They hold the school to account for the standards and quality it achieves and focus very effectively on school improvement. The school benefits from a planned programme of visits from members of the organisation.

All teachers are encouraged to take responsibility for whole school leadership in curriculum areas. The well-established distributed leadership approach is beneficial in moving the school forward and developing staff. All staff contribute very effectively to school planning and improvement.

All leaders have very clear roles and responsibilities and focus appropriately on school improvement targets. They work exceptionally well together to create an inclusive school ethos where staff, pupils and others who work in the school on a regular basis feel highly valued. Team work at all levels is an outstanding feature.

Staff are consulted regularly and kept informed appropriately about the school's comprehensive policies and plans. Communication throughout the school is a strong feature.

Members of the senior leadership team work very effectively across the school to support and challenge colleagues. They monitor and evaluate staff performance regularly. To do this they use an inclusive and secure performance management and appraisal system well. They set helpful written targets for improvement.

Performance management and appraisal procedures are used effectively to identify whole school training and development needs. As a result, the school is able to meet the changing individual needs of the pupils. A few members of staff train colleagues

in-house and also provide valuable training, for example, to local mainstream primary and secondary schools.

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

Improving quality: Good

The process of self-evaluation is well-embedded in the school. All staff at the school, as well as managers of the organisation, are fully involved in the self-evaluation process. The school also regularly seeks the views of pupils, parents and carers. These views are valued and used to inform planning. However, a few sections of the self-evaluation report are too descriptive and are not evaluative enough.

As a result of the self-evaluation process, leaders have clearly identified the school's strengths and the areas for improvement. They have produced a detailed school improvement plan which links appropriately to the self-evaluation report and to the recommendations from previous annual monitoring inspections.

There is a strong culture of professional development. Staff have access to effective and purposeful training, which impacts positively on improving the wellbeing, behaviour and attainment of pupils.

The school has established valuable networks of professional practice with their partner schools and local mainstream schools. This is impacting positively on the outcomes for pupils. Opportunities for sharing good practice within the school and with other schools in the organisation are well established. However, opportunities for peer observation are not as well embedded.

The school accurately identifies individual pupils' progress over time. Leaders are developing and using an increasing range of data to monitor and track the progress of individual pupils. However, robust analysis of this data is at an early stage.

Recent 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 works very well with a range of key partners, including placing authorities and parents or carers. This helps pupils to settle well in the school and has a positive impact on outcomes for pupils. Staff from Talocher School regularly share expertise with staff from other Priory schools to develop strategies for improving teaching and learning and managing behaviour.

Individual members of staff have established valuable links with local special and mainstream schools. These partnerships enable staff to increase their expertise and improve outcomes for pupils, for example through developing literacy interventions and resources.

The school works very well with local businesses to enable pupils to experience the world of work and access appropriate work experience placements. These opportunities prepare pupils well for their future lives.

The school has established good partnership arrangements with training providers. These provide valuable opportunities for individual pupils to gain qualifications in areas such as catering and construction. These pupils benefit from working alongside their peers from other special and mainstream schools.

The school engages the services of a wide range of specialists, to ensure that the individual and specific needs of the pupils are met. These include an art therapist, speech and language therapist, occupational therapist, clinical psychologist and assistant psychologist.

Resource management: Good

The school manages its resources effectively. It has a good range of specialist teachers with relevant knowledge and experience. Staff are deployed well within the school and make a valuable contribution to the pupils' learning experiences and to the quality of their care and guidance.

Professional development opportunities and planning, preparation and assessment time are used well to ensure that staff skills are updated on a regular basis.

Spending priorities and training programmes link closely with the school's improvement plan and are reviewed regularly. School staff attend daily morning briefings at which they share valuable information regarding pupils' wellbeing and ability to engage in lessons. School teams meet at the end of each day to record pupils' outcomes for each session and review their learning.

The organisation manages resources well to support and improve the learning environment, for example by investment in the fabric of the buildings. Resources are of good quality and are well matched to the interests and abilities of the pupils.

As a result of this robust financial management and the standards pupils achieve, the school provides value for money.

Appendix 1

Stakeholder satisfaction report

Responses to learner questionnaires

Ten pupils responded to the questionnaire, and overall are positive about the school. All pupils feel safe at school. Many pupils feel that the school deals well with any bullying, and feel that they have someone to talk to if they are worried. All pupils feel that the school teaches them how to keep healthy, and that there are plenty of opportunities for them at school to get regular exercise.

Many pupils say that they are doing well at school. All pupils say that the teachers help them to learn and make progress and that teachers help them when they have problems. A minority of pupils feel that their homework helps them to understand and improve their work in school. Most pupils say that they have enough books and equipment, including computers, to do their work.

Many pupils feel that they are encouraged to do things for themselves and to take on responsibility. Most pupils feel that the school helps them to be ready for their next school or college, or to start their working life.

Appendix 2

The inspection team

Caroline Rees	Reporting Inspector
Meinir Rees	Team Inspector
Alec Ian Clark	Peer Inspector
Paul Scudamore	Independent School Standards (Wales) Regulations 2003: 3 and 5
Claire Imber	School 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.