



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

A report on:

**Aran Hall School
Rhydymain
Dolgellau
Gwynedd
LL40 2AR**

Date of inspection: February 2017

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

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

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

The school currently has 11 pupils on roll, all of whom are boys who live in the children's home which shares the school's site. All pupils have statements of special educational needs and are looked after by local authorities in England and Wales.

Nearly all of the pupils are from English-speaking backgrounds.

The headteacher has been in post since 2003.

Summary

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

Current performance

Aran Hall's current performance is good because:

- Learning experiences are matched closely to the needs and interests of individual pupils
- Nearly all pupils engage well and improve their behaviour over time
- Nearly all pupils make strong progress in developing their skills
- Teaching is good
- Pupils receive excellent care, support and guidance

Prospects for improvement

Aran Hall's prospects for improvement are good because:

- The principal and proprietor provide strong strategic direction for the school
- Education, care and therapy staff work together well to provide a consistent approach to meeting pupils' educational, social and emotional needs
- Leaders have a good understanding of the school's strengths and areas for improvement
- The school has strong partnerships, which impact positively on the wellbeing and outcomes for pupils
- The school's self-evaluation and improvement planning processes are robust and link together well

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 pupils to develop work-related skills

R2 Improve the consistency and accuracy of teacher assessment

What happens next?

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 at the school

Main findings

Key Question 1: How good are outcomes?

Good

Standards: Good

Most of the pupils have had disrupted periods of education prior to starting at Aran Hall and arrive with underdeveloped knowledge and skills. Over time, nearly all pupils settle, engage well with their learning and make strong progress in relation to their abilities and individual needs. Most pupils are proud of their achievements and the progress that they make.

It is not appropriate to compare standards of achievement in the school with national averages or to analyse trends in overall performance over time because of the wide range of abilities and needs of the individual pupils.

Over the last three years, only a minority of school leavers have achieved one or more qualifications in accredited courses. Leaders have reviewed the curriculum and have introduced a unit award scheme and a small number of GCSEs. As a result, all pupils currently at key stage 4 and above have achieved two or more units of the scheme in subjects that match their interest and abilities well. A very few pupils have attained higher-level passes at GCSE in mathematics and mathematics: numeracy.

Nearly all pupils develop their communication skills well. In many lessons, they listen attentively, ask appropriate questions and answer confidently. A minority extend their answers to give reasons for their opinions. Many pupils use subject specific vocabulary accurately, for example when discussing the impact of physical exercise on the body and explaining the work of famous scientists.

Over time, many pupils develop their thinking skills and problem-solving skills well. They gain the skills that they need to improve their work. For example, they use dictionaries to find the meaning of words, edit their work to improve the range of adjectives used and make corrections to spelling and punctuation. Most pupils set themselves learning goals and targets to improve their performance in subjects across the curriculum.

Pupils whose handwriting is weak make effective use of ICT to produce writing that is neat and organised well into sentences. This helps them grow in confidence when responding to written tasks. A few pupils, who are more able, write for a wide range of purposes and audiences. They produce extended writing, present their ideas clearly and use punctuation and spelling accurately.

Many pupils improve their reading skills well and develop the confidence to read aloud in class and community meetings. They make effective use of these skills to read for pleasure, research information and analyse text. A few pupils, who are more able, skim and scan texts and present reasoned conclusions in their own words. Pupils who are less confident readers learn to recognise high frequency words and develop basic phonic skills. They are proud of their achievements.

Most pupils use their literacy skills well in subjects across the curriculum. For example, they follow menus when preparing meals in food technology and research venues and activities when planning reward trips.

Many pupils develop their numeracy skills well. A majority use numerical reasoning skills to identify appropriate strategies to complete tasks. Many pupils are generally secure with number skills. They can add and subtract whole numbers using tens and hundreds. Most use a range of measuring skills in line with their age and ability. A majority of pupils present and analyse data in charts and graphs accurately. A very few pupils are working at higher level GCSE mathematics and complete additional work in regular after school coaching sessions. Most pupils use their numeracy skills well in subjects across the curriculum, for example in managing their personal budgets and shopping for ingredients in food technology.

All pupils use information and communication technology (ICT) effectively to email their work to their teachers, present work neatly, research information in subjects across the curriculum and identify suitable reward activities.

Many pupils develop useful life skills that prepare them well for transition into adulthood. For example, they plan their off-site leisure activities and annual holidays. This includes identifying suitable locations, transport and appropriate clothing. A minority of pupils develop their independent living skills successfully through weekly attendance at a local college of further education.

A few pupils develop the skills they require to carry out work experience successfully in the wider community, for example at a local cafe. Through this work experience, they gain a good understanding of the world of work and develop the ability to relate to others appropriately. This prepares them well to move on to further learning.

Wellbeing: Excellent

Nearly all pupils start at the school with little confidence, have difficulty controlling their behaviour and have a history of poor attendance and breakdowns of previous education placements.

Over time, nearly all pupils respond very well to the structure, consistent routines and high level of therapeutic support provided by the school. They feel safe in school and build trusting relationships with the staff. Nearly all pupils learn how to communicate their feelings appropriately and make effective use of opportunities to discuss their concerns with staff and independent advocates.

Many pupils develop the confidence to try new activities and increase their engagement in learning. As a result, attendance rates for all pupils show a marked improvement on their attendance prior to joining the school and attendance is exceptionally high compared to similar schools.

Over time, nearly all pupils make outstanding progress in developing the skills they need to manage their behaviour. Where a very few pupils have difficulty managing their behaviour, they respond appropriately to staff intervention and encouragement. There have been no permanent or fixed-term exclusions over the past two years.

All pupils take an active part in decision-making through expressing opinions in weekly community meetings. For example, they learn to negotiate with peers concerning access to extra-curricular activities. Pupils generally show respect and consideration to their peers, staff and visitors. In lessons and during lunch times, they show mature attitudes as they listen to the views of others and express their own ideas.

Many pupils have a very positive attitude to learning. They take pride in their achievements and work hard to improve. In lessons, nearly all pupils settle quickly and concentrate well.

Pupils develop an appropriate understanding of how to stay fit and healthy. They know what foods to eat to have a healthy diet. They do regular exercise in school and many enjoy keeping fit in their own time.

Pupils improve their social skills and learn to interact appropriately with members of the wider community through taking part in physical activities at a local sports centre and visiting the local library and other places of interest.

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

The school provides a broad and balanced range of learning experiences that are tailored closely to the needs of individual pupils. These experiences include valuable opportunities for pupils to develop important life skills and gain relevant qualifications.

Staff plan individual pupil timetables carefully to include a balance of therapeutic, academic and life skills activities. This balance enhances pupils' learning experiences, increases engagement and makes an important contribution to pupils' outcomes and wellbeing. The highly structured behaviour management programme provides a clear set of reward activities that promotes a wide range of skills such as turn-taking, numeracy and communication skills. This is a strength of the school.

The school promotes the development of literacy, numeracy and information communication technology skills well in subjects across the curriculum. Lesson plans identify useful opportunities for the development of these skills. All pupils have suitably challenging targets in these areas.

Teaching staff work well with the care team to provide a wide range of extra-curricular activities that supports pupils learning effectively. This includes coaching for a few more able pupils taking GCSEs in mathematics and English and sporting activities at a local park and sports centre.

The school offers appropriate work experience opportunities for a few pupils. These are matched well to pupils' interests and needs. These experiences support pupils effectively in developing their personal and social skills and prepare them well for the next stage of learning. However, for those pupils who are not ready to access external work placements, the school does not provide enough opportunities for them to develop work-related skills within the school.

Teaching: Good

Teachers and teaching assistants have strong working relationships with, and comprehensive knowledge of, the pupils they teach. They share high expectations of pupils' work and behaviour.

Staff have a sound knowledge of autism and behaviour management. They create clear routines for pupils and manage pupil behaviour well. They apply the school's behaviour management system consistently and use praise and positive reinforcement to encourage and motivate pupils. As a result, nearly all pupils remain on task in lessons and make strong progress with their learning.

Teachers plan lessons with clear objectives and suitably challenging tasks for pupils. The pace of lessons is generally successful in maintaining pupils' interest. In nearly all lessons, teachers employ a wide range of strategies that are well matched to the needs and abilities of the pupils. These include well-planned activities to support pupils with weak literacy skills and extend learning for pupils who are more able.

Teachers share their planning with teaching assistants and deploy them effectively to provide support for individual pupils. Teaching assistants are very competent and confident in supporting and facilitating learning.

The school has a clear marking policy, which teachers apply consistently. Teachers provide regular feedback to pupils to recognise progress and help pupils to understand what they need to do to improve their work. Most pupils respond well to the advice provided by staff. There are suitable arrangements for pupils to reflect on their own performance and set targets for improvement.

The school has recently introduced new assessment and tracking procedures to improve the monitoring of pupil progress over time. However, there are inconsistencies across the team in the use of these procedures and it is too early to evaluate the impact of these new arrangements on the quality of teaching and pupil progress.

Teachers produce informative reports for parents and carers. These provide useful information on attendance, behaviour, pupil progress and attainment. They also set appropriate targets for improvement.

Care, support and guidance: Excellent

The school provides exceptionally high levels of care, support and guidance for its pupils.

The school has highly successful policies and strategies for supporting pupils' behaviour and emotional wellbeing. The consistent application by staff of the behaviour management system has a very positive impact on pupils' outcomes and wellbeing. Nearly all pupils respond well to the clear expectations and boundaries that are part of the approach.

The school has highly effective procedures to support pupils' medical and therapy needs. A wide range of health professionals provide detailed assessment information on pupils' medical and emotional needs that are revisited and updated regularly. They provide staff with high quality training and guidance on important topics such as sex and relationships education, managing risk and behaviour management. Pupils benefit highly from weekly sex and relationships education lessons delivered by a specialist agency in addition to weekly sessions with a school-based therapist.

The school's personal and social education programme provides pupils with valuable information about citizenship, substance misuse, and e-safety. The programme helps pupils develop their self-esteem, self-awareness and positive attitudes towards their own and other cultures. There are many opportunities for pupils to discuss and reflect on their beliefs and behaviours in personal and social education lessons and in therapy and tutorial sessions.

The school promotes the benefits of healthy living effectively through a wide range of activities that link well to pupils' interests and targets for personal development. For example, there are appropriate arrangements for learning about healthy eating in food technology lessons and shared mealtimes, and many opportunities for pupils to exercise.

The school has introduced new arrangements for identifying the additional learning needs (ALN) of pupils. All pupils have an individual education plan that contains relevant targets and strategies to address their identified needs. Teachers share these plans well with the residential care team. As a result, the residential care workers provide valuable support for pupils in class and in their homes.

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

Learning environment: Good

The school provides a warm, welcoming and safe learning environment. There is a shared ethos of treating each other with dignity and respect and celebrating diversity. Pupils of all backgrounds and needs are included fully in all aspects of the school.

There are specialist rooms for art, music, horticulture and design technology as well as well-equipped spacious classrooms. Classroom displays are stimulating, support learning and celebrate pupils' success well. There are appropriate resources and equipment to support learning including tablet computers for all pupils.

Outdoor areas provide useful opportunities for pupils to develop horticulture skills. The school makes good use of local leisure facilities to support the physical education curriculum and extra-curricular activities.

The buildings and grounds are maintained and managed to a high standard.

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

Leadership: Good

The principal, with the support of the proprietor, provides strong strategic leadership for the school. Together, they communicate a clear vision for the school that focuses on providing a nurturing and stable environment where pupils benefit from a broad and balanced curriculum, tailored effectively to meet their individual needs. This includes an equal emphasis on meeting pupils' academic, social and emotional needs. The principal shares this vision effectively with all stakeholders.

Leadership meetings are organised appropriately and result in clear actions that link well to school improvement targets. Responsibility for leading on the delivery of identified actions is shared appropriately within the wider staff team including teaching assistants and members of the care team.

Generally, there are comprehensive plans and policies in place, which focus well on meeting pupils' needs and raising standards of achievement.

Senior leaders use performance management processes effectively to identify appropriate targets for individual staff and whole school improvement.

The proprietor knows the strengths and areas for improvement of the school well and holds the school to account through weekly monitoring activities.

Leaders have established valuable links with other schools in the company as well as outside educational establishments which provide useful training opportunities for staff to improve the curriculum.

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

Improving quality: Good

Senior leaders have established a cycle of quality assurance activities to monitor and review all aspects of the school's work. They use the outcomes of self-evaluation activities appropriately to identify targets for school improvement.

The process of self-evaluation draws appropriately on a wide range of information including the views of staff, pupils, parents and carers. Pupils value highly the opportunities that they have to contribute to self-evaluation and improvement planning through weekly community meetings.

Leaders use data effectively to identify, track and monitor trends in pupil behaviour. This provides staff with an accurate picture of pupils' attitudes and progress in meeting the targets set in the behaviour management system.

The self-evaluation report provides an accurate account of the school's current performance.

Senior leaders make effective use of lesson observations and the scrutiny of pupils' work to set clear targets for staff and pupil performance.

The school improvement plan links appropriately to the areas of improvement identified in the self-evaluation report. The school improvement plan identifies clear priorities, and includes detailed actions with realistic timescales and clear responsibilities. As a result, senior leaders are able to monitor progress against actions effectively.

The school has made strong progress in addressing the recommendation of the last annual monitoring visit.

Partnership working: Excellent

The school has established highly effective strategic partnerships with a wide range of external agencies that have an important impact on pupils' standards, wellbeing, and the breadth of pupils' learning experiences. For example, partners support the delivery of valuable opportunities in horse-riding, music, art and horticulture and therapeutic interventions that match well pupils identified needs. Most pupils benefit from using local shops and cafés with increasing confidence to practise their skills in real-life situations.

The school builds strong partnerships with parents. The school arranges regular meetings with families and representatives of local authorities to review and report on pupil progress. The school provides parents with an end-of-week summary of their child's achievements and informative monthly reports. The school consults well with parents over the provision to meet their child's needs and acts well on advice provided by parents. For example, the school has acted quickly in response to a parental request to increase the range of qualifications available and to liaise with a local further education college to help prepare pupils for transition.

There are highly effective links with higher education institutions that support staff training and the development of the school's innovative behaviour management programme. The school has shared this behavioural management programme with other special schools and pupil referral units. Valuable partnerships with other schools help the school to improve important aspects of its own provision. For example, through working with others the school has improved the use of ICT to support pupils' literacy skills, target-setting in individual education plans and their baseline testing arrangements.

Effective partnership working between staff from the school and a local college of further education ensures that pupils have access to appropriate vocational courses and has strengthened the school's assessment procedures.

Resource management: Good

The school develops and deploys teachers and support staff well to provide effective support for the educational and emotional needs of all pupils. Staff from across the education, care and therapy teams work together well to provide pupils with consistent routines and high expectations of their work and behaviour. This

consistent approach makes a valuable contribution to the pupils' learning outcomes and the quality of the support and guidance they receive.

Staff have appropriate planning, preparation and assessment time. This enables them to plan lessons that are carefully tailored to the needs and interest of individual pupils.

The school's spending priorities link closely to the targets in the school improvement plan. All teachers have a budget and this is used to good effect in purchasing resources of a high quality that match well with pupils' individual needs and interests.

In view of the good standards and provision, the school provides value for money.

Appendix 1

Stakeholder satisfaction report

Responses to learner questionnaires

Denotes the benchmark - this is a total of all responses since September 2010.

	Number of responses Nifer o ymatebion	Agree Cytuno	Disagree Anghytuno	Don't know Ddim yn gwybod	
I feel safe in my school.	11	10 91%	1 9%	0 0%	Rwy'n teimlo'n ddiogel yn fy ysgol.
		94%	2%	4%	
The school deals well with any bullying.	11	10 91%	0 0%	1 9%	Mae'r ysgol yn delio'n dda ag unrhyw fwlio.
		75%	10%	15%	
I know who to talk to if I am worried or upset.	11	11 100%	0 0%	0 0%	Rwy'n gwybod pwy i siarad ag ef/â hi os ydw I'n poeni neu'n gofidio.
		95%	2%	4%	
The school teaches me how to keep healthy	11	10 91%	0 0%	1 9%	Mae'r ysgol yn fy nysgu i sut i aros yn iach.
		87%	7%	6%	
There are lots of chances at school for me to get regular exercise.	11	8 73%	3 27%	0 0%	Mae llawer o gyfleoedd yn yr ysgol i mi gael ymarfer corff yn rheolaidd.
		79%	16%	5%	
I am doing well at school	11	9 82%	1 9%	1 9%	Rwy'n gwneud yn dda yn yr ysgol.
		91%	5%	4%	
The teachers and other adults in the school help me to learn and make progress.	11	11 100%	0 0%	0 0%	Mae'r athrawon a'r oedolion eraill yn yr ysgol yn fy helpu i ddysgu a gwneud cynnydd.
		98%	0%	2%	
I know what to do and who to ask if I find my work hard.	11	11 100%	0 0%	0 0%	Rwy'n gwybod beth I'w wneud a gyda phwy i siarad os ydw I'n gweld fy ngwaith yn anodd.
		100%	0%	0%	
My homework helps me to understand and improve my work in school.	11	4 36%	5 45%	2 18%	Mae fy ngwaith cartref yn helpu i mi ddeall a gwella fy ngwaith yn yr ysgol.
		57%	23%	19%	
I have enough books, equipment, and computers to do my work.	11	10 91%	1 9%	0 0%	Mae gen i ddigon o lyfrau, offer a chyfrifiaduron i wneud fy ngwaith.
		91%	4%	5%	
Other children behave well and I can get my work done.	11	7 64%	3 27%	1 9%	Mae plant eraill yn ymddwyn yn dda ac rwy'n gallu gwneud fy ngwaith.
		65%	20%	15%	
Nearly all children behave well at playtime and lunch time	11	9 82%	0 0%	2 18%	Mae bron pob un o'r plant yn ymddwyn yn dda amser chwarae ac amser cinio.
		75%	9%	16%	

Responses to parent questionnaires

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

Appendix 2

The inspection team

Anthony Mulcahy	Reporting Inspector
Ms Elizabeth Ann Dackevych	Team Inspector
Ms Ange Anderson	Peer Inspector
Mr Paul Scudamore	Independent School Standards Inspector
Dr Duncan Pritchard	Nominee

Copies of the report

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

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.