



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

A report on

**Ruthin School
Mold Road
Ruthin
Denbighshire
LL15 1EE**

Date of inspection: February 2019

by

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

About Ruthin School

Ruthin School is a co-educational boarding and day school catering for pupils from the age of 10 to 20 years. The school is situated on the outskirts of Ruthin, a small market town in the Vale of Clwyd, Denbighshire.

The school was founded in 1284 as part of a castle and garrison built by Edward I. It was re-formed in 1574 by a former pupil, Gabriel Goodman, Dean of Westminster and granted a Royal Charter by Elizabeth I as a centre of academic excellence in north Wales. The school is a charitable trust whose governing body is the Council of Management.

There are currently 360 pupils in the school, of whom 192 are sixth-form pupils. There are similar numbers of boys and girls. Day pupils come from a wide catchment area that includes Denbighshire, Flintshire and Cheshire. There are currently 226 boarders at the school, nearly all of whom are from overseas.

Around 61% of the school's pupils are from a minority ethnic background. There are 162 pupils, including 125 in the sixth form, who speak English as an additional language. A very few pupils speak Welsh as a first language or to an equivalent standard. The school does not aim to make pupils bilingual in English and Welsh.

There are no pupils with a statement of special educational needs. The school identifies 19 pupils who have specific learning difficulties such as dyslexia. The school selects pupils into the lower school based on ability and academic attainment, with prospective day pupils sitting an entrance examination in January of each year. This tests English, mathematics and non-verbal reasoning. The school requires overseas pupils to have a good level of English before starting any examination course. The sixth form is highly selective. Pupils are expected to have achieved high grades at GCSE to embark on AS courses. Pupils only continue onto A level courses if they achieve the higher grades in their AS examinations.

The school was last inspected in March 2014. Since the last core inspection, the school has undertaken a building programme including the addition of new boarding accommodation and a new dining hall, and the school roll has increased by around 150 pupils. In addition, both the senior leadership team and the middle management have been restructured.

The school describes itself as 'an international community committed to high academic standards, dedication and mutual respect'.

Summary

Pupils at Ruthin School achieve outstanding outcomes in public examinations at the end of key stage 4 and in the sixth form. Across the school, pupils display extremely positive attitudes to their learning and high levels of wellbeing.

Across the school, teaching and assessment have a positive impact on outcomes for pupils. Where teaching is most effective, teachers have high expectations of pupils and challenge them adeptly to achieve their best. They use a wide range of teaching methods and activities flexibly to capture pupils' interests and to motivate them.

The school is a cohesive community that provides beneficial support and guidance for its pupils. Teachers offer valuable help within and beyond the classroom to meet pupils' individual needs effectively.

The principal provides astute and assured leadership. Together with the council of management, he sets a clear strategic vision and mission, provides firm direction and promotes high expectations for all areas of the school's work.

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

Inspection area	Judgement
Standards	Excellent
Wellbeing and attitudes to learning	Excellent
Teaching and learning experiences	Good
Care, support and guidance	Good
Leadership and management	Good

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 Strengthen tracking and monitoring arrangements
- R2 Improve consistency in teaching and assessment to match best practice
- R3 Strengthen quality assurance arrangements and use outcomes to support staff professional development

What happens next

Estyn advises the council of management 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

Standards: Excellent

The standards achieved by pupils at Ruthin School are extremely high. During their time at the school, most pupils develop a particularly secure understanding of subject knowledge and make at least strong progress in developing their skills.

Nearly all pupils, including a high proportion of pupils with English as an additional language, develop their literacy skills well over time. Many pupils develop their oracy skills to a high standard and almost all pupils are considerate listeners. Pupils are attentive to teachers and their peers and the majority respond thoughtfully to the points that are raised. Nearly all pupils make effective use of appropriate technical vocabulary. For example, in geography, pupils demonstrate their understanding of complex processes as part of a discussion on climate change. A few pupils lack confidence to speak at length to develop their points. However, when given time to prepare or with careful prompting and coaching by teachers, they express their ideas clearly.

Most pupils make particularly strong progress in developing their reading. Many pupils read confidently with fluency and lively expression. Many read effectively to extract information or to understand instructions, such as the procedures for creating a computer programme. Older pupils read and respond confidently to an increasingly complex range of texts. For example, in the sixth form, pupils analyse critically research about the immunisation of babies before reaching their own informed opinion.

Nearly all pupils make good progress in developing their writing skills. Many pupils write well, with a high degree of accuracy in spelling, punctuation and grammar. Many pupils have a strong understanding of literary conventions. For example, pupils in English write successful critical analyses of Mary Shelley's use of language to convey fear and dread in *Frankenstein*. Many older pupils provide strong written responses. They write well-structured persuasive accounts and use a wide range of sophisticated and technical vocabulary to present well-developed arguments. However, a few pupils make careless errors, including when spelling subject specific terminology and do not take enough care in the presentation of their work.

The standard of pupils' numeracy is a particular strength of the school. Most pupils are fluent in number and competent in using measuring and data handling skills in different contexts and subjects across the curriculum. As they progress through the school, most pupils become extremely secure in recognising and making use of appropriate units in calculations. They analyse a range of data and apply the techniques that they have learnt in their mathematics lessons effectively to different problem-solving activities. For example, in astronomy, pupils use the radius of the earth correctly to calculate its circumference and surface area, and they plot co-ordinates for the celestial sphere accurately.

Most pupils use their thinking skills well in a range of contexts. For example, Year 10 pupils apply their reasoning skills astutely when explaining why we use unmanned rather than manned space probes. In different contexts, more able pupils are particularly adept at using their mathematical and scientific knowledge systematically to explore and critically analyse unfamiliar concepts.

In astronomy, pupils develop their creative skills successfully when they design and construct small models to replicate the specific functions of different types of space probe.

Performance at the end of key stage 4 is strong and shows a steady trend of improvement over the last three years. In two of the last three years, most pupils achieved the level 2 threshold (equivalent to five GCSEs at grades A* to C) and the level 2 threshold including English and mathematics. In 2018, nearly all pupils achieved these measures. Over the last three years, the proportion of A*/A grades for all GCSE entries has increased from around half to two-thirds. The proportion of pupils gaining five or more grades A*/A (or equivalent) at GCSE has also increased and in 2018, is extremely high at 71%. These outcomes are well above the national average and in line with the highest performing schools in Wales. Performance in the core subjects greatly exceeds national averages in each of the last three years.

For the last three years, no pupil has left the school without a recognised qualification. At the end of Year 11, nearly all pupils remain in full-time education.

In the sixth form, pupils' performance at A level over the last three years is exceptional. During this time, around 73% of all A level grades were A*/A, and around 90% of entries were at grades A*-B. In each of the last three years, around half of pupils achieved three A level passes at grades A* or A. These outcomes are well above national averages. At the end of Year 13, almost all pupils progress to higher education.

Wellbeing and attitudes to learning: Excellent

Across the school, pupils have extremely positive attitudes to their learning and high levels of wellbeing. Nearly all pupils are exceptionally eager to succeed and develop key attitudes and behaviours that will help them to learn throughout their lives.

During lessons, most pupils work diligently. They show an interest in the topics that they study and a determination to master the understanding and skills related to them. Most pupils have a secure understanding of their ability in each subject, including their strengths and the areas that they need to improve. In the sixth form, most pupils are highly ambitious and motivated. They show considerable resilience in meeting the demands of the school's robust testing schedule and work exceptionally hard to address misconceptions and improve upon past results.

Nearly all pupils exhibit exemplary behaviour within lessons and as they move about the school. They are punctual to lessons and most show high levels of concentration and engagement throughout. Most pupils are considerate and respectful in the way that they relate to each other and adults. They develop highly effective working relationships with their teachers and liaise confidently with them both when discussing their work and when seeking pastoral support.

Almost all pupils feel safe and secure. They feel confident that the school responds well to any allegations of bullying and they know who to go to if they have a problem. Pupils show great respect for the school as an international community, where tolerance and fairness are embedded. They are keen to share their own cultural heritage with their peers and enjoy celebrating festivals as a school, for example,

Chinese New Year. They also seek to contribute to communities outside of the school through their house fundraising efforts such as a charity car wash for a national cancer charity.

Almost all pupils contribute enthusiastically to the house system, enhancing the life of the whole-school community. For example, the annual 'Country Games' in September provides an opportunity for current pupils to welcome new pupils to the school and help them to integrate. Older pupils also support younger pupils effectively in their house based vertical tutor groups.

Participation in activities and extra-curricular clubs such as art and craft, yoga, computer programming and badminton is particularly high amongst younger pupils. Many older pupils attend additional tutorials and clubs, which support their learning well. They also engage in valuable extra-curricular opportunities. For example, two teams have recently entered a national competition to design a Formula 1 car. This valuable experience provides pupils with an informed view about careers in engineering, Formula 1, science, marketing and technology.

Sixth form pupils' participation in voluntary work makes a significant contribution to them developing important life skills such as reliability and empathy. For example, about half of Year 12 pupils regularly volunteer within the school or local community. These activities include helping out in a care home, primary schools, charity shops and providing valuable support to younger pupils with their Chinese studies. They also help with the running of after-school clubs.

Pupils across the school develop valuable skills by taking on leadership roles and responsibilities. Members of the school council feel that their opinions are listened to and that they make a positive contribution to improving the day-to-day life of the school.

Teaching and learning experiences: Good

The school provides a curriculum that is broad and balanced and meets the Independent School Standards (Wales) Regulations 2003. The school offers pupils a broad range of subject choices including Latin, Chinese and astronomy. The curriculum offer is tailored to the needs of individual pupils well and supports the school's stated aim to provide academic pathways and progression to higher education.

Most subjects across the curriculum provide suitable opportunities for the progressive development of pupils' literacy, particularly their reading and writing. In many subjects across the curriculum, pupils are well prepared for the written aspects of examinations.

In a few subjects the development of oracy is a strength. For example, in English, pupils are taught to deliver and assess effective speeches, which they do using sophisticated language and rhetorical techniques. However, pupils' oracy is not developed consistently across the curriculum. As a result, a few pupils lack confidence, particularly in formal settings.

In appropriate subjects across the curriculum pupils have valuable opportunities to develop and apply their numeracy skills.

There are useful opportunities for pupils to extend their learning experiences through participation in a wide range of extra-curricular activities, including yoga, and photography as well as educational trips. Through extra-curricular activities, such as involvement in design challenges and house competitions, the school provides pupils with suitable opportunities to demonstrate their imagination and creativity.

Nearly all teachers have very strong subject knowledge that they use well to enthuse pupils and develop their learning. For example, they use their knowledge skilfully to model and coach pupils preparing speeches on complex moral issues. Nearly all teachers have positive working relationships with pupils. They manage behaviour well and develop positive attitudes to learning in their pupils.

Many teachers have high expectations of pupils and challenge them adeptly to achieve their best. They use a wide range of teaching methods and activities flexibly to capture pupils' interests and to motivate them. Many teachers probe pupils' understanding effectively in whole-class discussion and when giving individual support to ensure that pupils have a secure understanding and to address any misconceptions. They emphasise the importance of pupils offering accurate explanations for the techniques or structures that they use. For example, pupils are taught that they must be able to explain processes as well as apply them.

In a few lessons teachers overuse workbooks that are not matched well enough to the full range of pupils' needs or plan low-level activities that lack challenge. These lessons do not meet the needs of all learners sufficiently and have a limiting effect on learning.

Many teachers monitor progress in lessons carefully and provide prompt and useful verbal feedback that helps pupils to improve their work. These teachers also provide helpful written feedback on the work pupils complete. They comment on the good features of the work, ask purposeful additional questions and identify where there are gaps. However, in a few cases the impact of this feedback is limited because the teacher does not follow up to ensure that additional questions are answered and work improved and completed. Further, outcomes from regular tests for Year 9 upwards are not used consistently to inform teachers' lesson planning.

Care, support and guidance: Good

The school is a cohesive community that provides beneficial support and guidance for its pupils. Staff know their pupils very well. They offer valuable help, within and beyond the classroom through the subject tutorial and pastoral systems, to meet pupils' individual needs effectively. This provision makes a positive contribution to the high outcomes pupils achieve.

The whole-school system for tracking assessment information ensures that key data is easily accessible electronically by pupils, staff and parents. This accessibility builds an effective line of communication with parents to help them to support their child and to raise any issues that might affect their learning in a timely manner. Leaders and teachers monitor the outcomes of regular assessments closely by topic, concept and question type. They then take prompt action to support pupils if they encounter difficulties, for example arranging subject concept or skills tutorials. The school also collects wellbeing data including attendance and behaviour, as well as baseline standardised assessments. However, at all levels, this information is not used well enough alongside pupils' performance and progress data for support and monitoring purposes.

Overall, pupils who have English as an additional language and those with the greatest difficulty with literacy access valuable support arrangements. For example, older pupils who have English as an additional language are provided with a bespoke curriculum to enhance these language skills, as well as to meet their other subject needs. Most of these pupils achieve strong outcomes in English language proficiency tests for higher education and gain their preferred university placement. However, the support for a very few younger pupils is not always comprehensive.

Across the school, the personal, social, health and economic wellbeing programme supports the development of pupils' social and emotional skills effectively. The programme enables pupils to explore important life issues such as prejudice or the denial of human rights. It also helps them to make informed decisions about their own lives and demonstrate the ability to take responsibility for these decisions. For example, younger pupils act as critical consumers when they evaluate value for money aspects of mobile phone contracts, and sixth-form pupils consider their responsibilities for driving safely.

The pastoral support provided in tutor and house groups reinforces successfully the whole-school approach to positive behaviour. This support, together with the personal, social, health and economic wellbeing programme, helps pupils to develop a strong sense of community, celebrate diversity and foster values such as appreciation, tolerance and respect.

The school provides beneficial opportunities for pupils to develop their understanding of the importance of healthy lifestyles. For example, the extremely nutritious menu in the new dining hall promotes pupils' awareness of healthy eating. Most pupils participate in the wide range of sports or physical activities offered within the curriculum or through the extra-curricular programme.

Pupils have beneficial opportunities to learn how to become active citizens. For example, older pupils complete community service in school such as acting as buddies to mentor younger pupils in skills development, while others support vulnerable members of the local community. Pupils also have useful opportunities to develop leadership skills, for example, as members of the school council, as prefects and when organising house activities. These opportunities help pupils to understand the importance of making a contribution, and how to make a difference.

The school works successfully with a range of specialist staff and agencies to support pupils' wellbeing and enhance their learning experiences. This provision includes, for example, the school's nursing team, specialist external careers advisors, and outside guest speakers to support individual subject areas.

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

Leadership and management: Good

Leadership at all levels contributes substantially to the strong learning community, academic rigour, high levels of wellbeing, and the very high standards at Ruthin School.

The principal provides astute and assured leadership. Together with the council of management, he sets a clear strategic vision and mission, provides firm direction and promotes high expectations for all areas of the school's work. Over time this approach has transformed the school. In particular, it has contributed to considerably

increased pupil numbers and robust financial management that underpin significant improvements in the premises, resources and quality of provision.

The school has recently refined and strengthened its leadership structure to increase capacity. These changes reflect a clear rationale to ensure consistency of approach between the lower school and sixth form, and the school's ambitions to provide a greater focus on the quality of teaching and to prepare pupils effectively for life beyond Ruthin. The roles and responsibilities of the senior leadership team, faculty heads and pastoral leaders are defined clearly and balanced suitably.

Responsibilities focus appropriately on improving standards and provision, tracking pupils' progress closely and ensuring a high quality of care, support and guidance for all pupils. These senior and middle leaders are helping to provide appropriate direction and suitable levels of accountability for all aspects of the school's work.

Through a range of policies, briefings and team meetings leaders share information and communicate expectations well, and ensure the school operates efficiently on a day-to-day basis.

The principal and senior leaders have a secure understanding of the school's strengths and areas for improvement. There are clear and well-understood priorities to raise standards, improve the quality of teaching and support pupils' wellbeing.

Leaders at all levels undertake appropriate reviews of the school's work. For example, faculty heads undertake useful analyses of standards and provision in their areas. They reflect carefully on course content and outcomes in external examinations, and identify particular strengths and potential barriers to improvement. Team plans identify relevant actions to improve outcomes in their areas. However, the quality and rigour of these reviews and team plans varies too much. Lesson observations and scrutiny of pupils' work do not identify sharply enough the particular strengths and areas for improvement in the quality of learning and teaching.

The school has a suitable number of well-qualified and experienced staff. They deliver the curriculum effectively and make a substantial contribution to the school's extra-curricular programme. Many staff have benefited from relevant professional development opportunities that are relate well to improving pupils' performance. Where staff underperformance is identified, this is dealt with in a constructive manner. The school is currently developing its performance management arrangements, but this is at an early stage.

Members of the council of management have a wide range of relevant professional skills and experience. They receive detailed reports from the principal and senior leaders and are well informed about all areas of the school's performance. They help determine the school's strategic direction and provide extensive support and a suitable level of challenge to leaders. Together with the principal, the council of management oversees and monitors the school's finances robustly. Through successful marketing and recruitment, the school has been able to allocate significant funds to major improvements of the premises and resources. For example, the school has appointed additional staff to enhance leadership capacity and to strengthen the quality of teaching and pastoral support for pupils.

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

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.

Estyn evaluates a provider's effectiveness using a four-point judgement scale:

Excellent	Strong, sustained performance and practice
Good	Strong features, although minor aspects may require improvement
Adequate and needs improvement	Strengths outweigh weaknesses, but important aspects require improvement
Unsatisfactory and needs urgent improvement	Important weaknesses 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:

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

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

© Crown Copyright 2019: This report may be re-used free of charge in any format or medium provided that it is re-used accurately and not used in a misleading context. The material must be acknowledged as Crown copyright and the title of the report specified.

Publication date: 15/04/2019