



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

**A report on**

**Priority Childcare**

**Date of inspection: March 2023**

**by**

**Estyn, His Majesty's Inspectorate for Education**

**and Training in Wales**

## About Priority Childcare

Priority Childcare is an independent school providing education for up to 22 children aged 8 to 18 years who have social, emotional and behavioural difficulties and who are not able to access mainstream education. The school opened in 2015 and initially operated in classrooms at four of the company's seven children's homes. Priority Childcare was taken over by Orbis Education and Care in April 2021. Orbis Group owns four other independent special schools in Wales and is part of the portfolio of August Equity, a private equity investment company.

The school now provides education for nearly all of the pupils currently on roll at the dedicated at the Ty Trafle site, which is education only. A very few pupils are educated in dedicated classrooms annexed to their residential home.

Many pupils are looked after by their local authorities and resident in the company's children's homes, although a few pupils attend on a day basis. Most pupils have statements of special educational needs individual development plan (IDP) or education, health and care plan (EHCP) for social, emotional and behavioural difficulties.

The substantive head of education has been in post since December 2021 and oversees the education across the four sites. Currently, there is an acting head and deputy head of education who have been in post since January 2023. They are supported by a team of four teachers, 22 learning support assistants and a school administrator. The delivery of the school curriculum is undertaken by the teachers and supported by teaching assistants and a clinical team.

The school was last inspected in February 2020, prior to the acquisition by Orbis.

## Main findings

### Strengths

Priority Childcare provides a calm learning environment where leaders place a high value on the well-being of all pupils. All staff know their pupils and their interests well. They establish and maintain trusting relationships with pupils, which supports them well to engage in their learning.

The classrooms are well-maintained with colourful displays that provide a stimulating learning environment. The use of outside areas is developing suitably. For example, the school has recently added an outside gym space, which encourages pupils to exercise and regulate their behaviours.

There are beneficial arrangements for pupils to attend work experience placements, for example in a local restaurant and at a farm. In addition, a few pupils have the opportunity to take part in volunteering opportunities such as working in a local animal rescue centre.

The school has made recent changes to the pupils' learning pathways and the thematic curriculum. However, it is too early to evaluate the impact of these for pupils.

### Areas for development

The school does not meet the Independent Schools Standards (Wales) Regulations 2003.

Leaders and teaching staff do not always have a secure understanding of pupils' individual starting points. In addition, processes for tracking the progress of pupils are very recent and inconsistently applied. As a result, teaching does not always accurately meet the individual needs of the pupil.

The new curriculum on offer to pupils is beginning to meet their needs more appropriately. However, plans for the delivery of several aspects of this curriculum are at very early stages of development. For example, it is unclear how the current personal and social education (PSE) policy and scheme of work will be delivered.

Leaders do not always have a clear enough understanding of the specific actions required to bring about improvement. For example, they do not regularly review the impact of professional learning on the quality of teaching.

## **Recommendations**

### **The school should:**

R1. Ensure that the school complies fully with the Independent School Standards [Wales] Regulations 2003

R2. Ensure that tracking systems provide a clear picture of the progress pupils make over time

R3. Ensure that teaching consistently challenges and meets the needs of all pupils

R4. Evaluate the impact of professional learning on teaching and learning

## **Progress in addressing recommendations from previous visit or inspection report**

### **R1. Ensure that the school complies fully with the Independent School Standards [Wales] Regulations 2003**

The school has made variable progress against this recommendation. At the time of the last monitoring visit, the school was not compliant with Standard 1: the quality of education at the school, and Standard 3: the welfare, health and safety of the pupils.

Since this visit, the school has taken suitable actions to meet Regulation 3(2) of the Independent Schools Standards (Wales) Regulations. It has ensured that it has prepared and implemented written policies to safeguard and promote the welfare of children who are pupils at the school in compliance with Welsh Government Guidance 283/2022 Keeping Learners Safe. It has also ensured that it maintains an admission and an attendance register accordance with The Education [Pupil Registration] [Wales] Regulations 2010.

In addition, the school has taken several steps to address the shortcomings in Standard 1. For example, it has reviewed its curriculum policy and its arrangements for leadership of teaching and learning across the school. In addition, teachers have implemented new schemes of work in many areas of learning. However, many of these changes remain at an early stage of implementation and the school has not yet evaluated their impact. Further, there remains too much variability in lesson planning and teaching. As a result, the school remains non-compliant with aspects of Standard 1.

### **R2. Formalise links with schools and other organisations to strengthen improvement planning processes**

Since the last visit, the school has been acquired by Orbis Education and Care which has four other independent special school in Wales. This has enabled leaders to make helpful formal links with these schools. Leaders and staff benefit from these links, for example when planning new schemes of work with colleagues across the organisation.

Leaders have strengthened improvement planning processes through the introduction of a calendar of relevant quality assurance activities. These include a cycle of useful focused learning walks. In addition, the school has broadened the range of first-hand data used to inform improvement planning, for example asking staff and pupils for their views. As a result, the quality of school improvement planning has been strengthened.

### **R3. Increase the pace of activity to meet the recommendations of the core inspection in 2018**

Since the monitoring visit in February 2020, the pace of activity to meet recommendations from the core inspection in November 2018 has been significantly increased. This is in part due to changes in leadership as a result of Priority Childcare being acquired by Orbis Education. These changes included formation of a

new senior leadership team, support from the director of education and wider organisation and the appointment of additional qualified teachers and teaching assistants. The school has also benefited from the use of new dedicated premises and an appropriate investment in the school grounds and resources. In addition, there has been a suitable investment from the organisation to introduce a new therapeutic model and subsequent professional development and coaching relating to this.

Whilst there have been positive improvements in many areas of school as a result of this more focused activity, the quality of teaching and learning still requires improvement.

#### **R4. Review the roles and responsibilities of all staff**

Since the last monitoring visit, leaders have reviewed the school's staffing structure. This revised structure is clear and well understood by all stakeholders. Staff roles and responsibilities are focused and concise. As a result, staff have a sound understanding of what is expected of them and what they can expect from leaders.

#### **R5. Formalise professional learning opportunities for all staff**

Since the last visit, the school has allocated a specific budget for professional learning and training. Leaders have identified the core training that all staff must complete and new staff are supported by a comprehensive induction programme. This provision has a strong focus on statutory training and supporting pupils' well-being.

The school has ensured that relevant staff have completed training in important areas such as leading safeguarding, developing a therapeutic approach to responding to challenging behaviours and training relating to changes to the requirements for individual development plans (IDPs). In addition, there is a detailed calendar outlining training provided by the school and how this links to the school improvement priorities.

However, overall professional learning opportunities to develop staff understanding and knowledge relating to teaching are having limited impact.

## **Compliance with the standards for registration**

### **Standard 1: The quality of education provided by the school**

The school does not fully meet the regulatory requirements for this standard. In order to comply fully with the Independent School Standards (Wales) Regulations 2003, the school should:

- Ensure the school has a curriculum policy set out in writing and supported by appropriate plans and schemes of work, and implement it effectively [1 (2)]
- Ensure that lessons are well planned, teaching methods effective and suitable activities used and class time is managed wisely [1(3)(c)]
- Ensure that teachers show a good understanding of the aptitudes, needs and prior attainments of the pupils, and ensure these are taken into account in the planning of lessons [1(3)(d)]
- Ensure there is a framework in place to assess pupils' work regularly and thoroughly and that information from such assessment utilised to plan teaching so that pupils can make progress [1(3)(g)]

### **Standard 2: The spiritual, moral, and cultural development of pupils**

On the basis of this visit, there is no evidence to indicate that the school does not meet the regulatory requirements for this standard.

### **Standard 3: Welfare, health and safety of pupils**

On the basis of this visit, there is no evidence to indicate that the school does not meet the regulatory requirements for this standard.

### **Standard 4: The suitability of proprietors and staff**

On this visit, Estyn did not inspect Standard 4.

### **Standard 5: Premises of and boarding accommodation at schools**

On this visit, Estyn did not inspect Standard 5.

### **Standard 6: The provision of information**

On the basis of this visit, there is no evidence to indicate that the school does not meet the regulatory requirements for this standard.

### **Standard 7: The manner in which complaints are to be handled**

On the basis of this visit, there is no evidence to indicate that the school does not meet the regulatory requirements for this standard.

## **Recommendation regarding continued registration**

When considering this school's registration the Welsh Government may wish to have regard to the following recommendation:

The school does not currently meet the requirements of the Independent School Standards (Wales) Regulations 2003. To comply fully with these requirements, the school should address the issues identified above for each standard.

Inspectors' judgements on this limited inspection should not prejudice the findings of a future full Section 163 inspection.



## Copies of the report

Copies of this report are available from the school and from the Estyn website (<http://www.estyn.gov.wales>)

The report was produced in accordance with section 163 of the Education Act 2002. The main purpose of inspection under this section is to report on compliance with the Independent Schools Standards Regulations 2003. In schools that provide non-maintained nursery education, this report also satisfies the requirements of Schedule 26 of the School Standards and Framework Act 1998.

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

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**This document has been translated by Trosol (English to Welsh).**