



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

A report on
Ysgol Y Rhos

Date of inspection: December 2023

by

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

This report is also available in Welsh

About Ysgol Y Rhos

Name of provider	Ysgol Y Rhos
Proprietor	Unique Care Homes Ltd.
Local authority	Flintshire
Language of the provider	English
Type of school	Independent special
Residential provision?	Yes
Number of pupils on roll	11
Pupils of statutory school age	11
Date of previous Estyn inspection (if applicable)	
Start date of inspection	04/12/2023

Ysgol y Rhos is located in the grounds of two former holiday lodges in a rural area between Wrexham and Mold. The proprietor, Unique Care Homes Ltd., is a private limited company, which runs five children's homes in Wrexham and Denbighshire.

The school is registered for 16 pupils aged 8 to 16 years with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties. Many of the children have a history of placement breakdowns and exclusion from mainstream schools.

There are currently 11 pupils on the school roll. All pupils who attend the school are resident in the children's homes owned by the wider organisation. Around half of the children are placed by local authorities in Wales, including Ynys Môn, Caerdydd, Caerfyrddin and Gwynedd. Around half of the children are placed by local authorities in England.

The headteacher has been in post since September 2023 and is the fourth headteacher since the school opened in January 2019. They are supported by four full-time, permanent and qualified teachers. Two of these teachers started in September 2023. Staff from the company's children's home support the pupils in the school. In addition, the school works alongside two art psychotherapists.

Data reported is sourced from the latest available Pupil Level Annual School Census. These figures may be slightly different to those observed during the inspection.

Further information is available from the Welsh Government My Local School website: mylocalschool.gov.wales

a. The term 'additional learning needs' is being used to describe those pupils on the SEN/ALN register of the school.

Overview

Ysgol y Rhos is a caring and nurturing community where staff build positive relationships with pupils based on mutual respect. As a result, over their time at the school, many pupils make sound progress in their social skills and confidence. For these pupils, nearly all of whom have struggled with formal education in the past, this represents sound progress.

During their time at the school, a minority of pupils make suitable progress in their literacy and numeracy skills. However, overall, pupils' development of digital skills is limited due to the lack of opportunities for them to use these skills across the curriculum.

Nearly all pupils develop beneficial physical skills through the appropriate focus on sport and outdoor activities. Pupils enjoy these sessions and participate enthusiastically. This also positively supports the development of pupils' resilience and self-confidence.

Currently, there are very limited opportunities for pupils to contribute to decisions that affect the school. In addition, pupils do not develop their leadership skills well enough due to the lack of opportunities available to them.

The school generally provides a balanced curriculum, which meets the requirements of the Independent School Standards (Wales) Regulations 2003. However, in a few areas of the curriculum such as technology, personal and social education (PSE), relationships and sex education (RSE) and careers, the provision is limited.

Teachers plan experiences that broadly build on pupils' skills as they move through the school. However, planning does not link consistently well enough to the pupils' additional learning needs or evidence from the school's own assessments. As a result, in a minority of lessons, activities do not provide sufficient challenge or opportunity to build on pupils' previous experiences and learning. In addition, there are limited opportunities for pupils to achieve accreditation within the school.

Teachers plan targets that support learning in relevant areas linked to the objectives from pupils' individual development plans (IDPs) or equivalent. However, there are limited procedures in place to track and monitor progress against these targets and, as a result, there is not a clear picture of the progress pupils make over time. Overall, processes for tracking, monitoring and evaluating the impact of the school's work in relation to the progress pupils are making are in the very early stages of development.

Since the school opened in 2019, there have been regular and significant changes to leadership and staffing at the school. Processes and procedures at the school are not consistently embedded due to regular revisions. As a result, this limits the progress staff can make to improve the school and the progress of pupils.

The school is not fully compliant with the Independent School Standards (Wales) Regulations 2003 and the school has made limited progress against the recommendations left by inspectors on the last visit.

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 does not meet the regulatory requirements for this standard.

Although the school met most of 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 provides personal, social and health education which reflects the school's aims and ethos [1(2)(f)]
- Ensure teachers show a good understanding of the aptitudes, needs and prior attainments of the pupils, and that 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 information from such assessment is utilised to plan teaching so that pupils can make progress [1(3)(g)]
- Ensure the school has a framework in place by which pupil performance can be evaluated by reference to either the school's own aims, as provided to parents and/or by national norms [1(4)]

The spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils

The school does not meet the regulatory requirements for this standard.

Although the school met most of the regulatory requirements for this standard, in order to comply fully with the Independent School Standards (Wales) Regulations 2003 the school should:

- Provide pupils with a broad general knowledge of public institutions and services [2(d)]
- Assist pupils to acquire an appreciation of and respect for their own and other cultures, in a way that promotes tolerance and harmony between different cultural traditions [2(e)]

Welfare, health and safety of pupils

The school does not meet the regulatory requirements for this standard.

Although the school met most of 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 prepared and implemented a written policy relating to the health and safety of pupils on activities outside the school [3(2)(b)]

- Keep written records of sanctions imposed upon pupils for serious disciplinary offences [3(8)]
- Maintain an admissions and attendance register in accordance with the Education (Pupil Registration)(Wales) Regulations 2010 [3(9)]

The suitability of proprietors and staff

The school meets the regulatory requirements for this standard.

Premises of and boarding accommodation at schools

The school meets the regulatory requirements for this standard.

The provision of information

The school meets the regulatory requirements for this standard.

The manner in which complaints are to be handled

The school meets the regulatory requirements for this standard.

Recommendations

- R1 Comply fully with the Independent School Standards (Wales) Regulations 2003
- R2 Ensure that assessment, behaviour and attendance information is used systematically to provide a clear picture of the progress pupils make over time
- R3 Improve procedures for quality assurance and improvement planning to focus on pupil progress and the standards they achieve
- R4 Strengthen the provision for personal and social education, relationships and sex education and careers

What happens next

Since the school does not meet the standards required for registration, the Welsh Government will require the proprietor to submit an action plan within a specified period of time. This plan will set out the steps that the school will take to meet the standards, and the timescale within which it will complete each step.

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/carers at the school.

Main findings

Learning

Nearly all pupils join the school following periods of disruption to their education. They frequently struggle with formal learning and the classroom environment.

Overall, a majority of pupils attending the school are confident in communicating with staff and visitors. A minority of pupils make appropriate contributions to class discussion and explain their ideas with suitable clarity. For example, pupils describe characters from the book 'Kensuke's Kingdom' clearly or translate phrases from English into Welsh with confidence. These pupils listen carefully to both their peers and staff. A minority of pupils are reluctant to participate in discussion work or give only brief and underdeveloped responses. These pupils' limited vocabulary often prevents them from articulating their ideas clearly.

A minority of pupils use subject specific vocabulary appropriate to their needs. For example, in science lessons, pupils use the terms circuit, cell and bulb accurately.

A very few pupils have the opportunity to improve their reading skills and develop simple comprehension skills. In addition, there are limited opportunities for pupils to develop higher order reading skills, such as identifying the purpose or considering differing viewpoints.

In many cases, pupils' writing is suitably clear. However, the quality of presentation of written work is variable. Only a very few pupils write extended pieces of work. This limits their opportunities to write in a range of styles and for different audiences or edit their work to improve their vocabulary choices.

A minority of pupils develop their numeracy skills suitably. In mathematics lessons, pupils use the concept of fractions and work on developing numeracy skills in preparation for GCSE maths.

A minority of pupils develop a few important skills that will support their independence after they leave school. For example, they gain skills in valuable areas such as preparing their own food or caring for animals such as Eddie, the school guinea pig.

Many pupils have suitable basic digital skills, such as word processing and using the internet to research information. However, opportunities for pupils to develop their digital skills progressively over time and across the curriculum are underdeveloped.

Nearly all pupils develop their physical skills appropriately through regular timetabled outdoor education where they participate in a range of exciting activities such as paddleboarding, canoeing and gorge walking. Additionally, pupils participate in an annual sports day event and weekly sports sessions. For example, they develop their skills in football and rounders with peers and the wider staff team.

A majority of pupils develop worthwhile creative skills. For example, they produce imaginative lino paintings and replicate colourful images in the style of artist Frida Kahlo.

A very few pupils demonstrate independent learning skills. For example, they proactively select the correct equipment in art to ensure that they are prepared for the lesson. However, a majority of pupils are over-reliant on staff support to direct their learning and do not develop age-appropriate independent learning skills.

It is not appropriate to compare the standards that pupils achieve at the school with national averages or to analyse the performance trends of groups over time because of the nature of the pupils' behavioural, social and emotional needs.

Well-being and attitudes to learning

During their time at the school, many pupils develop strong working relationships with school staff. They speak respectfully towards staff and each other. Many pupils are confident to share worries, concerns or ideas with teaching staff.

During the inspection, a minority of pupils did not attend. School attendance is generally poor. A minority of pupils are not punctual to lessons. This hinders their learning and disrupts that of others.

During lessons, the majority pupils are over reliant on staff support to direct their learning. As a result, these pupils do not always have the resilience to cope when they find something difficult or get something wrong in their work. This restricts pupils' opportunities to make progress or transition to other educational provisions.

Most pupils engaged well with visitors to the school. They communicate respectfully and appropriately, showing appropriate social skills and confidence. The majority of pupils show respect for each other and listen to teaching staff and peers, taking turns appropriately. However, a minority of pupils do not show sufficient interest in their work and a minority do not remain in class for the duration of the lesson. This behaviour has a significant negative impact on their own learning.

Most pupils value the rewards that are available for their achievements and understand the behaviour policy. However, a few pupils do not feel safe at the school due to the behaviours of others, which impacts negatively on their well-being. A few pupils do not behave well enough during lessons and most pupils do not behave well enough during unstructured times, such as breaks and lunchtime. However, it is not possible to comment on the trends in behaviour over time.

Many pupils develop a suitable understanding of how to stay safe online and are confident discussing this with staff and visitors.

Many pupils feel that they are listened to and have an informal input into school life. For example, they are given a choice in their physical learning activities and rewards programme. Pupils enjoy making decisions about where they wish to go on trips and activities offsite. However, their participation in formal pupil voice activities is at a very early stage in development. This limits pupils' abilities to develop reasoning and leadership skills by engaging in discussions involving the school community.

Nearly all pupils attend outdoor education where they enjoy engaging in a range of outdoor activities where they develop self-esteem, team building skills and self-confidence. A very few pupils enjoy playing football games with staff and peers during breaks.

The majority of pupils attending the school regularly make simple meals for themselves at breakfast and lunch. However, a few pupils do not understand the importance of a healthy diet and do not make healthy food choices during the school day.

A few pupils at the school use their creative skills appropriately as part of fundraising and enterprise activities. For example, they make cupcakes and jewellery to raise funds for charity as part of a Christmas fete. This positively supports them to understand the importance of their role as part of the community.

The majority of pupils enjoy celebrating successes together with the whole staff team. Over time, they learn to recognise the achievements of their peers through the week and understand the importance of accepting disappointment. In addition, pupils understand the benefits of reflecting on their own emotions during the valuable weekly assemblies.

Teaching and learning experiences

Overall, the school generally provides a suitably broad and balanced curriculum, which meets the requirements of the Independent School Standards (Wales) Regulation 2003. However, opportunities to develop pupils' digital and technological skills are underdeveloped.

The curriculum is organised appropriately into areas of learning, which generally meet the interests of most pupils. However, the school has not developed suitably progressive learning experiences for pupils to develop and apply their skills across the curriculum. In addition, there are limited opportunities for pupils to achieve accreditation across a range of subjects at appropriate levels.

The school is beginning to develop the curriculum for pupils' personal, social and health education (PSE). For example, pupils develop their understanding of healthy lifestyles and money management. The school has had support from the community police officer on the delivery on topics such as radicalisation, extremism and understanding hate crimes. However, there is not a cohesive approach to the teaching of important issues to support pupils to successfully develop an understanding of their own well-being and identity. For example, provision relating to sex and relationship education or to develop pupils' knowledge of public services and appreciation of different cultures is underdeveloped.

Teaching staff at the school know pupils' interests well. However, they do not have a robust understanding of pupils' additional learning needs (ALN). Teaching staff are beginning to collect a suitable range of baseline assessment information, which focuses appropriately on pupils' literacy and numeracy skills. However, this is not well established, and teaching staff do not use these assessments consistently or effectively enough to track and monitor pupil progress. Assessment data does not

inform future planning well enough to deliver appropriate interventions to meet the needs of individual pupils.

In many lessons, teachers provide clear instructions and helpful explanations to pupils. These teachers are clear with their expectations and effectively model what success may look like. They use questioning appropriately to check pupils' recall of prior learning and provide positive verbal feedback. In addition, many teachers are flexible to the emerging emotional needs of the pupils and skilfully adapt lessons as necessary.

In a few lessons where teaching is less effective, teachers' expectations are too low. They do not plan activities that are suitably demanding or challenge pupils' lack of engagement sufficiently. As a result, pupils do not make satisfactory progress or develop enough independence and resilience in learning.

Teaching staff at the school provide pupils with regular and valuable verbal praise to engage and motivate them in their learning. However, overall, the use of feedback to help pupils to understand how well they are doing and what they need to do to improve is underdeveloped.

The school provides a limited range of enrichment opportunities that supplement pupils' wider experiences appropriately. Teachers plan events and trips to enhance pupils' experiences. For example, they arrange interesting trips to Chester Zoo and Wrexham Museum to expand pupils' understanding of the local area. In addition, the school periodically organises interesting 'activities weeks'. For example, pupils work with a street art artist to produce colourful murals on the school walls.

Support staff from the linked residential homes who support pupils in school are not consistently aware of their roles in the classroom. In addition, teaching staff do not clearly share learning objectives with these staff to enable them to support learning effectively.

Annual reports to parents provide a useful account of general progress in each subject area. However, reports to parents are generally descriptive and do not include references to important areas linked to pupils' progress in areas such as attendance, punctuality or behaviour. Further, they do not clearly state the expected progress of pupils against their known starting points.

Care, support and guidance

Ysgol y Rhos provides pupils with a supportive and caring environment so that they can explore their social, emotional and learning strengths. Staff know the pupils' interests well and are empathetic to their individual needs.

Teaching staff in the school generally have a sound understanding of pupils' emotional and social needs on admission to the school. However, the school does not always receive information on pupils' ALN in a timely manner. In addition, the school does not have clear systems in place for identifying the ALN of individual pupils when they start at the school. Further, robust procedures to ensure the appropriate annual review of statutory documentation are not in place. This hinders

the school's ability to ensure they are meeting the ALN of its pupils and limits the progress they are able to make.

The school is in the very early stages of developing a school council. As a result, the opportunities for pupils to have a voice in the day-to-day running of the school or hold leadership opportunities are limited.

The school's processes to record, monitor and track pupils' progress and well-being, including attendance and behaviour, are significantly underdeveloped. Consequently, the school is not able to clearly identify relevant issues and respond appropriately to the outcomes of monitoring and tracking, for example through the provision of appropriate support and challenge or the use of intervention strategies. Further, this limits the school's ability to show the impact of their work or recognise any patterns and trends that may affect the progress pupils are making.

The school provides useful personal learning pathway plans for all pupils, which include relevant targets. However, staff do not monitor and track pupils' progress against their personal targets well enough. The school also provides detailed positive behaviour support plans for a minority of pupils. These outline suitable strategies to support pupils to self-regulate, and useful information to help staff recognise triggers and provide a well-considered, graduated response as appropriate. However, these plans are not routinely used to inform classroom practice.

The school benefits from the support of a therapeutic team comprising of two art psychotherapists. This support provides the school with beneficial opportunities to share information from a range of helpful assessments of pupils' wider needs. In addition, the team offers valuable support and training to staff in an appropriate range of areas linked to the social, emotional and mental health needs of the pupils. However, the impact that therapy has on pupils' well-being and attitudes to learning is not evaluated well enough.

The school benefits from valuable partnership working with agencies such as the community police officer, the looked-after child nurse and the wider organisation team. This helps to support pupils to develop knowledge and skills to keep themselves safe. However, work to deepen pupil understanding of these important areas of personal development within the curriculum is insufficient. The school's provision to help pupils develop the skills, knowledge and understanding to make healthy lifestyle choices, for example in relation to substance misuse, sex and relationships, is underdeveloped. In addition, the provision to support pupils to gain an appreciation of other cultures and religions, and to understand their place in the world, is very limited.

There are appropriate safeguarding arrangements in place with relevant staff identified as the designated safeguarding leads for the school. The school's evaluations of its safeguarding arrangements are accurate and have supported leaders to make improvements to safeguarding at the school. The school's procedures for the safer recruitment of staff are sound.

Leadership and management

Since opening in 2019, Ysgol y Rhos has experienced significant instability in both leadership and the teaching team. Over time, different leaders have had different priorities for the school and different expectations of staff. This has resulted in a lack of clarity for staff, who have started initiatives with one leader that have then been changed by another. These changes have not supported a coherent or progressive approach to developing teaching and learning.

In a short space of time, the new headteacher has established and communicated a clear vision for the school. They set high expectations for the whole staff team and have a high level of commitment to making everyone's time in school beneficial and enjoyable. The headteacher strives to 'find the joy' in every pupil attending the school and develop a culture of trust. In this, the headteacher leads by example.

The proprietors are committed to long term improvements for the school and have made a significant investment in ensuring that the school is staffed with well-qualified, teachers and experienced leaders. In addition, the proprietors are committed to provide the 'active offer' for Welsh language provision and recent appointments have been made with appropriate consideration of this.

The school is in the early stages of developing a culture of self-evaluation and improvement planning. However, the range of quality assurance processes currently in place at the school is limited. For example, the school does not robustly analyse individual pupil and school level data on behaviour, attendance or progress in lessons.

Since their appointment, the headteacher has planned an appropriate system for the performance management of teachers, which includes the use of lesson observations to help evaluate the quality of teaching. However, these processes have not yet been fully implemented. As a result, leaders do not have enough robust first hand evidence to come to a view on the quality of provision and standards at the school. In addition, they do not evaluate the impact of new or refined processes and systems effectively enough.

All staff have additional whole-school responsibilities as part of the revised distributed leadership model within the school. However, roles and responsibilities are not yet confirmed within the team and, as a result, there is a lack of clarity around these new roles. Coupled with their teaching duties, teachers do not have sufficient dedicated time to undertake all aspects of their roles.

Whilst leaders have a clear vision, the implementation of this is hindered by a lack of guidance for staff. The induction process for new staff joining the school is not robust and does not focus on education well enough. For example, the staff handbook focuses predominantly on the care model and does not include information on processes and guidance for education staff. As a result, new staff are not confident in their roles and their place in the wider organisation.

Leaders and staff have a comprehensive programme of meetings to share information and discuss aspects of the school's work with the wider team within the organisation. Whilst these meetings consider the needs of pupils, they do not focus

on learning and teaching and the progress pupils are making well enough. In addition, leadership meetings focus on operational matters too much and lack strategic oversight.

The school is situated in an attractive rural setting that provides beneficial opportunities for outdoor learning and enrichment activities. It provides a stimulating and well-resourced learning environment, which is used creatively within the school to meet the challenging social and emotional needs of pupils.

Although the school does not have a fully delegated budget, directors ensure that the headteacher has an appropriate budget to use for the day-to-day running of the school. However, a lack of clarity around the structure of the school finances means that the headteacher is not confident in being able to plan sufficiently for long-term improvement or implement key priorities in the school development plan.

The school does not have a clear strategic approach to professional learning and ensuring that this learning has the intended outcome on pupil progress. Teachers work with support staff to develop joint understanding of issues that impact on pupils. For example, all staff are trained on early childhood trauma and attachment disorders.

The wider organisation provides online training in relevant areas such as safeguarding, child protection and the Prevent duty. In a few areas, however, these courses are not sufficiently relevant to teachers' roles in education or the relevant statutory guidance for schools in Wales. Opportunities for teaching staff to meet regularly to discuss issues associated with teaching and learning, or to observe best practice in other schools, are in the early stages of development. In addition, leaders have not focused well enough on professional learning that will support residential staff to understand their role in supporting pupils in the classroom.

As a result of significant disruption to the school leadership over recent years, the school has not responded promptly enough to recommendations from previous Estyn inspections. For the third consecutive year, the school does not fully comply with the Independent School Standards (Wales) Regulations 2003.

Evidence base of the report

Before an inspection, inspectors:

- analyse the outcomes from parent/carer and pupil questionnaires and consider the views of teachers and support staff through their questionnaire responses

During an inspection, inspectors normally:

- hold a meeting with parents/carers to hear their views on the school and its effectiveness
- meet the headteacher, governors/proprietor(s), leaders and individual teachers to evaluate the impact of the school's work
- meet pupils to discuss their work and to gain their views about various aspects of their school
- meet groups of pupils in leadership roles, such as representatives from the school council and eco-committee
- visit lessons and undertake a variety of learning walks to observe pupils learning
- look closely at the school's self-evaluation processes
- consider the school's improvement plan and look at evidence to show how well the school had taken forward planned improvements
- scrutinise a range of school documents, including information on pupil assessment and progress, records of meetings of staff and the governing body (where appropriate), information on pupils' well-being, including the safeguarding of pupils, and records of staff training and professional development

After the on-site inspection and before the publication of the report, Estyn:

- review the findings of the inspection alongside the supporting evidence from the inspection team in order to validate, moderate and ensure the quality of the inspection

Copies of the report

Copies of this report are available from the school and from the Estyn website ([Estyn Website](#))

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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