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a Hyfforddiant yng Nghymru

Her Majesty's Inspectorate
for Education and Training in Wales

A report on:

Woodlands Children's Development Centre

Date of inspection: July 2013

by

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



During each inspection, inspectors aim to answer three key questions:

Key Question 1: How good are the outcomes?

Key Question 2: How good is provision?

Key Question 3: How good are leadership and management?

Inspectors also provide an overall judgement on the school's current performance and on its prospects for improvement.

In these evaluations, inspectors use a four-point scale:

Judgement	What the judgement means
Excellent	Many strengths, including significant examples of sector-leading practice
Good	Many strengths and no important areas requiring significant improvement
Adequate	Strengths outweigh areas for improvement
Unsatisfactory	Important areas for improvement outweigh strengths

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

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Context

Woodlands Children's Development Centre provides highly specialised residential care, education and therapy for boys with significant and complex social, emotional and behavioural needs. The centre was established in 1998. The education provision was registered as an independent school in 2001. The school is situated in a town centre location in Wrexham.

The school currently has 11 pupils on roll, all of whom live in children's homes in the local area that are operated by the Woodlands organisation. The school is approved by the National Assembly for Wales for the admission of boys aged 11 to 18 years who have statements of special educational needs for social, emotional and behavioural difficulties. Six of the current pupils have statements of special educational needs.

Almost all pupils are placed by local authorities in Wales and England. Three pupils speak Welsh and the other pupils speak English as their first language.

The school was last inspected by Estyn in July 2006. Estyn also carried out a monitoring inspection in November 2011. The present headteacher was appointed in 2009.

Summary

The school's current performance	Adequate
The school's prospects for improvement	Unsatisfactory

Current performance

The school's current performance is adequate. Among the strengths are that:

- pupils enjoy school and behave well;
- pupils use information and communication technology well;
- pupils have opportunities to gain qualifications in a range of accredited courses;
- the off-site education activities provide pupils with valuable vocational experiences that help them re-engage in education;
- staff enjoy good working relationships with pupils and use praise and encouragement effectively to motivate them; and
- there are good links between care, therapy and education staff that benefit pupils.

However:

- pupils do not have enough formal opportunities to influence what and how they learn;
- schemes of work and lesson planning are under-developed;
- lessons do not always offer enough challenge;
- the quality of marking varies too much; and
- assessment is not used well enough in planning for pupils to make progress.

Prospects for improvement

The prospects for improvement in Woodlands Children's Development Centre are unsatisfactory because:

- the school does not comply with many of the Independent School Standards (Wales) Regulations 2003;
- the school has not taken appropriate action to address the recommendations of the last inspection and most recent monitoring visit;
- leaders do not take a rigorous approach to improving the school;
- there is no suitable self-evaluation process to enable the school to identify areas for improvement; and
- there is no effective school improvement plan.

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

- draw up and implement effectively a written policy on the curriculum supported by appropriate plans and schemes of work [1(2)];
- draw up and implement effectively plans to ensure that pupils acquire skills in speaking, listening, literacy and numeracy [1(2c)];
- involve well-planned lessons, effective teaching methods, suitable activities and wise management of class time [1(3c)];
- 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(3d)];
- demonstrate that a framework is in place to assess pupils' work regularly and use information from such assessments to plan teaching so that pupils can progress [1(3g)]; and
- have in place a framework for pupil performance to be evaluated, by either reference to the school's own aims as provided to parents or national norms, or both [1(4)].

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 does not meet the regulatory requirements for this standard.

Although the school meets about half of the regulatory requirements for this standard, in order to comply fully with the Independent School Standards (Wales) Regulations 2003 the school should draw up and implement effectively, written policies to:

- prevent bullying, which has regard to National Assembly Circular 23/03 'Respecting Others: Anti-bullying Guidance' [3(2b)];
- safeguard and promote the welfare of children who are pupils at the school which complies with Welsh Assembly Government Guidance 005/2008 'Safeguarding Children in Education' [3(2b)]; and

- safeguard and promote the health and safety of pupils on activities outside the school which has regard to 'Educational Visits – A safety guide for learning outside the classroom' 2008 [3(2c)].

In order to comply fully with the Independent School Standards (Wales) Regulations 2003 the school should also:

- have a satisfactory level of fire safety [3(5),(5a),(5b)];and
- maintain an admission register and an attendance register in accordance with the Education (Pupil Registration) Regulations 1995 [3(9)].

The suitability of proprietors and staff

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

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

- prior to confirmation of their appointment, carry out checks on members of staff including with the Disclosure and Barring Service [4c].

Premises of and boarding accommodation at schools

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

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

- ensure that the premises meet the requirements of the Equality Act 2010 by providing an access statement and access plan [5v].

The provision of information

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

Although the school meets many of the regulatory requirements for this standard, in order to comply fully with the Independent School Standards (Wales) Regulations 2003 the school should make the following information available, and make it clear that parents/carers may request it:

- particulars of the curriculum offered by the school [6(2g)]; and
- particulars of policies relating to bullying, child protection, the promotion of good behaviour and sanctions in the event of pupils misbehaving [6(2h)].

In order to comply fully with the Independent School Standards Regulations 2003 the school should also make the following information available:

- access to an attendance register that meets the requirements of Regulation 3(9) [6(6b)];

- information on pupils with statements to the responsible local education authority for the purpose of the annual review of the statement [6(8)]; and
- a copy of the risk assessment referred to in 3(5) relating to fire safety [6(9)].

The manner in which complaints are to be handled

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

In order to comply fully with the Independent School Standards (Wales) Regulations 2003 the school should:

- provide a written complaints policy tailored specifically for provision at the school that meets all the requirements of the regulations [7a-k].

Recommendations

- R1 Comply fully with the regulations for registration
- R2 Ensure that the school's policies and procedures for staff recruitment and safeguarding pupils are robust and comply fully with Welsh Government and Local Safeguarding Children's Board guidance
- R3 Improve the quality of the curriculum by developing suitable schemes of work and consistency in planning at every stage
- R4 Ensure that leaders take a more rigorous approach to strategic planning and monitor the school's work more effectively
- R5 Ensure that self-evaluation processes are comprehensive, systematic and consistent across the school and that they identify appropriate improvement priorities

What happens next?

Since the inspection report notes that the school does not meet one or more of the standards required for registration, the National Assembly for Wales will require the proprietor to submit an action plan within a specified period of time. This plan must set out the steps that the school will take to meet the standards, and the timescale within which it will complete each step.

Main findings

Key Question 1: How good are outcomes?

Adequate

Standards: Adequate

Overall, pupils achieve adequate standards. The number of pupils in each year group is small and it is not appropriate to compare the standards that pupils achieve with national averages or to analyse trends in their performance over time because of the very specific nature of the school.

By the time they leave the school, most pupils attain at least one GCSE or entry level qualification. Almost all pupils in key stage 4 enter for GCSE art and design courses and their work displays are of good quality. Pupils also attain level 1 and level 2 qualifications in the AQA 'Preparing for Working Life' course. The majority of pupils move on to appropriate further education courses or training after leaving school.

In the lessons observed where standards are good, pupils build well on their previous learning. In these lessons, pupils listen well, are enthusiastic and have good rapport with the teacher. They settle quickly to the task and make good progress in developing their knowledge and understanding. Pupils know how to use resources correctly and safely, for example when learning to use tools for woodwork.

Almost all pupils have reading skills that are below their chronological ages. Nevertheless, they have functional reading skills that enable them to access the curriculum and make sound progress. About half of pupils lack confidence in contributing to class discussion and need encouragement from their teachers. Despite this, most pupils use appropriate and occasionally sophisticated vocabulary to express their opinions.

However, pupils' writing skills are under-developed. They are reluctant writers and rarely write at length despite most having satisfactory spelling skills. Except for a very few examples in English, their written work is generally of poor quality. Overall, the content is limited. Pupils' handwriting is almost always immature.

Almost all pupils use information technology well and enjoy their success in using this means of communication effectively to present good-quality work that demonstrates a range of skills. Overall, pupils have poor numeracy skills. They find it difficult to use these skills to solve simple problems without staff support.

The few pupils who speak Welsh as their home language enjoy the opportunity to use their skills and gain confidence in speaking. Those pupils learning Welsh as a second language make adequate progress in lessons.

Wellbeing: Adequate

All pupils enjoy school and feel safe there. They think that the school deals well with any incidents of bullying and that they can approach staff if they are worried. Pupils trust staff to help and support them when they need it.

All pupils are polite and welcoming to visitors. Overall, their behaviour is good and they show respect for staff and each other. In lessons, most pupils listen to instructions appropriately and generally apply themselves well to specific tasks with minimal fuss.

Pupils appreciate and value the praise and various certificates and rewards they receive. Through these opportunities to celebrate success, pupils gain considerable self-esteem within their peer group.

Pupils have worthwhile opportunities to work as a whole group, for example to debate a topic where they gain confidence in sharing ideas. However, pupils have few opportunities to take responsibility. There are no formal arrangements, such as though a school council, for pupils to discuss matters regarding themselves and the school, and to influence aspects of the school's work. They make little contribution to what and how they learn.

It is not possible to judge levels of attendance and punctuality accurately because the recording of absences and lateness in the register is very unclear.

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

The curriculum is specifically tailored to meet pupils' individual learning needs and appeal to the interests of pupils who were reluctant to engage with education in their previous schools. For example, there is a focus on practical subjects including art and design, and information and communication technology.

The curriculum offers pupils full-time education and, overall, appropriate experience in the seven areas of learning to meet the requirements of the Independent School Standards (Wales) Regulations 2003. The school offers pupils good-quality off-site vocational learning opportunities that prepare them well for further education or employment. For example, all pupils participate in environmental work locally in conjunction with the National Trust, where they learn practical skills.

Despite these good features, there are significant weaknesses in the school's approach to planning. The curriculum policy gives staff very little direction about what is expected and is unsatisfactory. Pupils do not have access to a weekly timetable to know which lessons to expect.

At key stage 4, the school bases its work on published external examination programmes for those pupils following courses to gain accredited qualifications. However, these programmes are not developed into personalised schemes of work that give teachers clear guidance in planning for progression in their subjects or lessons. In key stage 3, there is no programme of study or scheme of work in each subject that provides a framework for subject or lesson planning. There is no focus on planning to develop pupils' literacy and numeracy skills across the curriculum. As a result, teachers often rely too much on published worksheets and booklets that do not challenge pupils enough. Information from pupils' individual education plans is not used well to inform planning. There is not enough focus on developing pupils' awareness of healthy living, including eating and exercise.

Specialist therapists provide pupils with a suitable programme of personal, social and health education that meets pupils' specific individual needs and supports their wellbeing.

The school has an appropriate programme to develop pupils' knowledge of the history and culture of Wales and has recently introduced Welsh language lessons for all pupils.

Teaching: Adequate

Teachers manage pupils' behaviour well. They enjoy very good working relationships with pupils, know them well and use praise and encouragement effectively to motivate pupils.

In lessons where teaching is good, teachers introduce suitable tasks that hold pupils' interest well. These teachers have good specialist subject knowledge and deliver lessons with appropriate pace and challenge. They work hard to develop pupils' confidence and ensure that each pupil's contribution to the discussion is heard and valued.

Where teaching has shortcomings, lessons are not planned well enough to ensure that pupils make enough progress. There is too little focus on building on pupils' previous learning. In these lessons, teachers do not always expect enough of pupils or use a wide range of strategies to maintain pupils' interest. In a few subjects, there is an over-reliance on the use of worksheets that are not appropriate to pupils' ages or to the specific task.

The school carries out suitable baseline assessments of pupils' reading and writing skills when they join the school. However, while this information is useful in determining an appropriate starting point, there is too little follow-up to measure pupils' progress over time.

Overall, teachers give good oral feedback to pupils. However, the quality of teachers' marking varies too much. There are a few examples of effective marking that helps pupils know what they need to do to improve but there is too much work that is unmarked.

The school provides appropriate reports on pupils' education and progress for the relevant authorities.

Care, support and guidance: Unsatisfactory

The school works closely with care staff and the therapy team to provide appropriate individual holistic support for each pupil. All pupils have appropriate access to an in-house therapeutic programme. The focus of this work is to identify areas where pupils need individual support to improve their wellbeing and behaviour.

Overall, there are good induction procedures that help pupils settle into the school. The therapy team carry out appropriate initial assessments of pupils when they first arrive. A member of the care team accompanies each pupil for the first few weeks to provide a useful link between home and school. The school also provides good support for older pupils to attend suitable courses at local colleges.

The school promotes pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development effectively and encourages them to respect the differences between each other.

The school does not have robust systems for managing the statutory annual reviews of pupils' statements of special educational needs. As a result, not all statements are up-to-date. The school does not use the information in pupils' statements effectively to develop their individual education plans and personal education plans. As a result, too often pupils do not make enough progress.

The school's arrangements for safeguarding pupils do not meet requirements and give serious cause for concern.

Learning environment: Adequate

The school has established a nurturing and supportive ethos where pupils feel safe. The calm atmosphere of the school has a positive impact on pupils' sense of wellbeing and enables them to engage well in education. The school encourages pupils to be tolerant and understanding of each other's needs. Pupils are encouraged informally to give their opinions on a variety of topics whilst being respectful of the views of others. All pupils have equal access to the curriculum.

The school's accommodation is adequate although the classrooms are small. However, staff make best use of the space available. There are good-quality displays of the pupils' own recent work that enhance the learning environment. Although the school does not have its own outdoor space it is situated next door to a local park where pupils benefit from access to a few sports facilities including a soccer pitch and tennis courts.

Resources are satisfactory but do not always support pupils' learning well enough. For example, there are limited resources to carry out experiments in science.

The proprietor is currently negotiating to acquire new premises, and consequently actions to improve resources in the current premises have been deferred.

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

The senior management team, which includes the headteacher, proprietors, children's home managers and a representative from the therapy team, has worked together well to create an inclusive school ethos. As part of this ethos, good behaviour and positive values are promoted effectively and staff and pupils feel valued.

However, the strategic management of education is not strong enough. Managers do not focus well enough in their meetings and their work in general on improving the quality of the educational provision. They do not communicate a clear vision for moving the school forward that is shared by all. As a result, staff do not have a comprehensive overview of the priorities for school improvement.

The proprietors are fully supportive of the school and are involved constructively in the running of the school on a day-to-day basis. However, they do not know enough about how well the school performs, and do not challenge and hold the school to account appropriately for the quality of provision and the standards pupils achieve.

Staff work together well as a team and communication is a strong feature. A few procedures and systems, for example for improving behaviour, are implemented effectively by staff. However, too many key policies and procedures do not meet regulatory requirements. Plans and policies lack detail and do not provide clear direction. They are not implemented and monitored well enough to provide suitable evidence of their impact.

Performance management arrangements for staff are weak. They do not identify areas of strength or professional development requirements clearly. Individual staff targets do not focus enough on measurable outcomes. The headteacher line manages the education staff and makes formal observations of teaching. However, reviews and lesson observations are not carried out rigorously or often enough.

Managers do not have a clear understanding of what support and training is needed in order to improve and develop staff skills. There are too few opportunities for staff to attend relevant training on specific educational topics to ensure that they meet the changing individual needs of the pupils.

The school fails to comply with many of the Independent School Standard (Wales) Regulations 2003.

Improving quality: Unsatisfactory

The process and culture of self-evaluation are weak. As a result managers cannot clearly identify the school's strengths and the areas for improvement.

The school does not carry out any formal survey to seek the views of parents or carers and an appropriate range of stakeholders. The views of pupils are taken seriously during the day-to-day work of the school. However, the school does not have an established school council or other formal process to encourage pupils to share their views and raise concerns.

The views of staff are sought informally and valued by members of the senior management team. However, there are very few opportunities for teachers to discuss and share good practice formally with other staff in the school or with other similar schools. They do not observe each other teaching.

Education, care and therapy staff share information to address the social, emotional and behavioural needs of the pupils effectively. Staff have morning briefings and end-of-day meetings to share information about individual pupils and to plan timetables. The main focus in these meetings is on pupils' behaviour. Staff have too few opportunities to reflect on learning outcomes.

The school does not track pupils' progress with enough depth to enable leaders to evaluate how well pupils are doing. This means that staff and leaders do not know if pupils are making progress on a day-to-day basis.

The school has made unsatisfactory progress in addressing the recommendations from the last inspection and the most recent annual monitoring visit.

Partnership working: Good

The school works well with a range of key partners including placing authorities, the children's homes and therapy staff. This helps pupils to settle well in the school and has a positive impact on pupils' wellbeing.

Staff have established valuable links with the National Trust and local businesses. These provide useful opportunities for pupils to learn about woodland management, car mechanics, animal care and hairdressing at a barber's shop. These links give individual pupils good work experience opportunities and prepare them well for the world of work.

The school also arranges for individual tutors to support pupils' personal learning programmes well. Pupils learn new skills that include circus, music, dance and drama skills.

The school has established good partnership arrangements with local colleges. These provide valuable opportunities for individual pupils to gain access to a range of accredited courses and to work alongside peers from mainstream schools.

Woodlands engages the services of a team of therapists to ensure that the organisation meets the individual and specific social and emotional needs of all pupils.

Resource management: Adequate

The school has an appropriate range of experienced, specialist teachers and other staff who are deployed effectively to meet the individual needs of the pupils. Pupils benefit from the individual attention they receive in small teaching groups.

Staff do not have enough planning, preparation and assessment time. They do not access an appropriate range of professional development opportunities to ensure that their skills are updated on a regular and planned basis.

The shortcomings in the self-evaluation process and in strategic planning mean that the procedures to ensure that resources are allocated to key priorities are not suitably robust. As a result, the school does not use its budget effectively, for example to improve resources and support relevant staff professional development. The school has a significant underspend.

In view of the adequate standards achieved by the pupils and their overall positive sense of wellbeing, the school provides value for money.

Appendix 1

Stakeholder satisfaction report

Responses to parent questionnaires

Pupils' questionnaire responses

Seven pupils responded to the questionnaire but only four pupils answered every question. The responses were all positive. Half of the questions were not answered by everyone.

Of those pupils who responded to the questionnaire, all agree that:

- they feel safe in school, the school deals well with any bullying and they know whom to talk to if they are worried;
- they have good opportunities for exercise and teachers help them to be healthy;
- teachers help them to learn and make progress, and help them when they have problems;
- they are doing well at school and other pupils behave well so they can get their work done; and
- they have enough books and equipment, including computers.

Around half of pupils responded to these questions and agree that:

- staff listen to their views and treat them fairly and with respect;
- staff help them to widen their views and learn respect for other cultures;
- they are prepared well for the future; and
- they are encouraged to do things for themselves.

A few pupils agree that homework helps them to build on their learning but others did not respond.

Parents' questionnaire responses

Five parents responded to the questionnaire. All these parents agree that:

- they are satisfied with the school and that their child likes it there;
- their child was helped to settle in and is expected to do his best;
- staff treat pupils fairly and with respect;
- their child is safe and receives appropriate support in relation to their particular needs; and
- their child is encouraged to be healthy.

Many of these parents agree that:

- their child is making good progress at school and that they are kept well informed;
- they understand the school's procedure for dealing with complaints; and
- their child is well prepared for moving on to school or college or employment.

Five placing authorities provided reports about the school's work. These reports were mainly positive.

Appendix 2

The inspection team

Rosemary Lait	Reporting Inspector
Meinir Rees	Team Inspector
Lynne Ninnis	Peer Inspector
Paul Scudamore	Independent School Standards (Wales) Regulations 2003: 3 and 5
Vivien Deveraux	School Nominee

Copies of the report

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

Under the Independent School Standards (Wales) Regulations 2003, the school must provide copies of the report to all parents of the school. Where a pupil is subject to placement by a local authority, a copy of the report should be sent by the school to each relevant authority.

Year groups, the Foundation Phase and key stages

Schools use a common system of numbering year groups from the start of compulsory schooling to 18 years of age. This system emphasises the importance of continuity and eases communication among schools, governing bodies, parents and local authorities.

The following table sets out the age ranges relevant to each year group. For example, Year 1 refers to the group of pupils who reach the age of six and Year 13 is the year group who reach the age of 18 during the academic year.

Primary phase:

Year	N	R	Y1	Y2	Y3	Y4	Y5	Y6
Ages	3-4	4-5	5-6	6-7	7-8	8-9	9-10	10-11

Secondary phase:

Year	Y7	Y8	Y9	Y10	Y11	Y12	Y13
Ages	11-12	12-13	13-14	14-15	15-16	16-17	17-18

The Foundation Phase and key stages cover the following year groups:

Foundation Phase	Nursery, Reception, Year 1 and Year 2
Key stage 2	Year 3 to Year 6
Key stage 3	Year 7 to Year 9
Key stage 4	Year 10 and Year 11

Glossary of terms

Core subject indicator (CSI)	This relates to the expected performance in English or Welsh, mathematics and science, the core subjects of the National Curriculum.
Level 1	This represents the equivalent of a GCSE at grade D to G.
Level 1 threshold	This represents a volume of learning equivalent to five GCSEs at grade D to G.
Level 2	This represents the equivalent of a GCSE at grade A* to C.
Level 2 threshold including English or Welsh first language and mathematics	This represents a volume of learning equivalent to five GCSEs at grade A* to C including English or Welsh first language and mathematics
Level 2 threshold	This represents a volume of learning equivalent to five GCSEs at grade A* to C.
Level 3	This represents the equivalent of an A level at grade A*-E.
Level 3 threshold	This represents a volume of learning equivalent to two A levels at grade A* to E.
Average wider points score	This includes all qualifications approved for use in Wales at the relevant age, for example at aged 16 or at aged 18.
Capped wider points score	This includes the best eight results from all qualifications approved for use in Wales at aged 16.
Proprietor	The term 'proprietor', as defined in the Education Act 1996, means the person or people responsible for managing an independent school and can include a sole proprietor, governing bodies, trustees or directors. The ways that independent schools are governed and owned varies a great deal. A proprietor or trust may own a school or the school may have a governing body that appoints a headteacher. Some schools have a combination of these.