



*Rhagoriaeth i bawb – Excellence for all*

Arolygiaeth Ei Mawrhydi dros Addysg  
a Hyfforddiant yng Nghymru

Her Majesty's Inspectorate  
for Education and Training in Wales

**A report on**

**Bettws Lifehouse School**

**Date of inspection: May 2012**

**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:

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

Bettws Lifehouse School is an independent special school situated in the small, rural village of Bettws Cedewain, near Newtown in Powys. The school provides education for pupils with highly challenging social, emotional and behavioural difficulties from Welsh and English local authorities. Eleven pupils have a statement for special educational needs and all the pupils have additional learning needs. There are no pupils with 'looked-after child' (LAC) status.

At the time of the inspection the school educated 12 pupils, 7 boys and 5 girls. Of these, 2 pupils are in key stage 3, 7 in key stage 4 and three pupils are post-16. All the pupils are from homes where English is the predominant language and nine of the pupils are entitled to free school meals.

The school aims to provide a 'nurturing environment which supports young people to go forward into their lives, in the wider world, with confidence. In this environment pupils will be able to achieve realistic goals and leave with skills that are transferable to both work and home'.

The school creates an individual learning pathway for each pupil which reflects their individual, educational and personal needs.

The school opened in 2007 and has approval from the Welsh Government to admit up to 15 pupils from 11-to-19 years of age with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties and moderate learning difficulties. This is the first inspection of the school.

## Summary

<b>The school's current performance</b>	<b>Good</b>
<b>The school's prospects for improvement</b>	<b>Good</b>

### Current performance

Bettws Lifehouse is a good school because:

- leaders and managers have high expectations and ensure that the school functions effectively;
- pupils achieve good standards in their learning and develop very good social and communication skills;
- teaching is good;
- pupils behave very well;
- pupils have good care, support and guidance;
- managers monitor staff performance carefully; and
- the school has strong partnerships.

### Prospects for improvement

The prospects for improvement in Bettws Lifehouse are good because:

- managers and leaders have a clear vision for the school, which is shared by all staff;
- there is well-established culture of sharing good practice;
- staff work very effectively as a team and have high expectations of the pupils;
- managers and leaders use performance management and appraisal procedures effectively to identify whole school training and development needs; and
- the school manages its resources well and provides value for money.

## **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

In order to improve further, the school needs to:

- R1 make sure that self-evaluation processes fully inform planning for school development;
- R2 ensure that individual education plans (IEPs) clearly identify appropriate learning targets that are used and reviewed regularly;
- R3 improve the current system of tracking, analysing and recording the progress of all pupils; and
- R4 extend the opportunities for accreditation to meet the needs of all pupils.

### **What happens next?**

The school will draw up an action plan which shows how it is going to address the recommendations.

## Main findings

### Key Question 1: How good are outcomes?

Good

#### Standards: Good

Pupils attending the school have highly challenging social, emotional and behavioural needs and additional learning needs. Nearly all pupils come to the school because previous placements have been unable to meet their needs. Their attendance has usually been poor and as a result they have not made expected progress prior to starting at the school.

It is not possible to compare the school's performance with national averages, as there is no benchmark data available. Pupils' attainment and achievement has to be judged on an individual pupil basis.

Due to the very high quality of support and encouragement that they receive, pupils improve their behaviour, gain in confidence and engage well in learning. They make steady progress and achieve good standards with their learning.

Pupils who attend full-time gain a range of appropriate qualifications. These include entry level, GCSE and Essential Skills Wales level 1 and level 2. In 2010 all year 11 pupils achieved the Duke of Edinburgh bronze award.

Pupils gain valuable skills in practical areas such as carpentry, bicycle maintenance, cookery and gardening and achieve the school's incentive awards as recognition of their achievements. However, pupils do not gain accreditation in these areas. All pupils improve the skills that they need to look after themselves and, as a result, they become more independent. This includes preparing food, using public transport and ordering drinks in a café.

Pupils make very good progress in developing their social and communication skills. They have the confidence to communicate well with each other, with staff, with visitors to the school and with people in the community. This enables them to complete work placements with local employers.

All pupils have excellent listening and concentration skills. They follow instructions carefully, and respond to questions appropriately. They demonstrate good reading and writing skills.

Pupils develop good thinking skills and have the confidence and ability to discuss issues and express opinions. Most pupils learn to co-operate with others, solve problems and take responsibility, for example, during outdoor group sessions. This leads to increased confidence, perseverance and motivation.

All pupils develop good numeracy skills and apply these well to practical situations. This includes weighing ingredients in the kitchen and measuring materials in the workshop. They access information and communication technology (ICT) at a level appropriate to their needs. They use this to research and present information, to support literacy and numeracy skills and to develop higher level ICT skills, such as designing their own web page.

In lessons, all pupils understand their learning objectives. They discuss the progress they are making, and understand what they need to do to improve.

The school has a very positive impact on the longer-term outcomes for pupils. Over the past two years, 5 out of 6 school leavers have moved on to further education or training. This year, all school leavers have been offered college places.

**Wellbeing: Good**

All pupils feel safe and well supported in school and value being part of the Bettws Lifehouse community. They enjoy school and attend regularly unless their individual needs impact on their ability to do so.

Pupils are polite, respectful and courteous. They learn to consider each other's feelings and relate well to each other, to staff and to visitors to the school. All pupils behave very well. They clearly understand the school rules and behaviour policy and respond well to rewards and sanctions. All pupils know what to do if they are bullied.

All pupils have a very good understanding of healthy eating and grow a range of vegetable and herbs in the school's garden. They use these in daily food preparation sessions. They recognise the importance of regular exercise and engage in regular physical education sessions and outdoor activities including the Duke of Edinburgh bronze award.

Most pupils feel confident to participate in activities in the local community. These include creating displays for the local fete, painting the footbridge and mending the bench in the village. They enjoy exercising in the local play park, the community sports hall and alongside peers in other local schools.

Pupils enjoy and gain valuable skills from work experience such as on a local farm, in shops, and in the village garage. Pupils work well on a project with the local police. They are given unclaimed bicycles by the police which they strip down and rebuild in the school's workshop. Pupils then pass on the bicycles to children and young people's charities.

Pupils express their views well and make valued choices. They participate fully in developing their own 'Lifehouse Learning Pathway' plan which sets out long term objectives for future achievement. All pupils regularly review and amend this plan in consultation with their parents and their school mentor.

<b>Key Question 2: How good is provision?</b>	<b>Good</b>
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**Learning experiences: Good**

The broad and balanced curriculum meets the needs of the pupils very well and builds effectively on their previous knowledge and skills. The school provides a wide range of subjects, including some non-accredited vocational courses. Each pupil has an individualised learning pathway which is well matched to their needs and interests.



Pupils participate in a wide range of outdoor learning, including using the school's own woodland and gardening areas. Pupils have good opportunities to care for small animals and to ride and work with horses. In the workshop sessions, pupils learn carpentry, tiling and bicycle maintenance. Pupils are also given opportunities to learn daily living skills, such as cookery, handling money and, where appropriate, independent travel.

Pupils have very good opportunities to develop their social and communication skills throughout the school day during lessons, assemblies and break times. There are clear targets for each pupil, which staff reinforce consistently.

All pupils have very good opportunities to develop their literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology (ICT) skills although this is not always reflected well-enough in teachers' planning.

All key stage 4 pupils benefit from work experience. The school has developed very good links with the local community. This has resulted in a wide range of appropriate options for work placements, for example engineering, hairdressing and catering.

Pupils learn about Welsh culture and history, with regular visits to historical sites. They learn to take care of the environment through recycling and making compost for the garden. They learn about global issues through links with a community in Nepal, and sponsorship of children in Armenia and India.

### **Teaching: Good**

The teaching at Bettws Lifehouse is good. All staff have a very good understanding of the pupils' individual needs and foster exceptional working relationships with them that are based on trust and respect. They use praise and positive language very effectively to promote and strengthen their motivation, learning and behaviour.

Teachers, tutors and learning support assistants demonstrate good subject knowledge. They work exceptionally well as a team and have high expectations for pupils' learning and behaviour in class and around the school. The management of the pupils' behaviour is exemplary.

Staff use a range of appropriate resources to meet the individual learning needs of all the pupils. Lessons are well organised and demonstrate good pace and challenge for all the pupils.

Teachers' planning is based appropriately on meeting the needs of individual pupils. Lesson plans are detailed and identify clear, subject-specific objectives which are shared and understood by the pupils. Staff use a range of good teaching and learning strategies which engage the pupils well.

The school collects information and assessment data on the progress of individual pupils but this data does not always inform planning well-enough. Pupils' work is marked regularly and marking is used effectively by many staff to inform pupils' progress and to identify areas for improvement.

Staff work well with pupils in lessons and during daily mentoring sessions to evaluate the progress they are making with their learning and their behaviour. As a result pupils understand what they need to do to improve.

Parents are kept well informed of the progress their children are making. This is done informally by email, text messages and phone calls and formally through detailed and comprehensive termly and annual reports.

### **Care, support and guidance: Good**

The school provides a high level of care. Provision for personal and social education is good. The school has appropriate policies for sex education and understanding relationships and teaches pupils about internet security. This includes the safe use of social networking sites.

The school has established an inclusive learning community which promotes pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development effectively. The schools' provision for supporting pupils with challenging behaviour is exemplary. This includes all staff consistently applying the agreed behavioural strategies throughout the school day and the valuable one-to-one mentoring sessions which engage pupils well in evaluating their progress in all aspects of their learning and behaviour.

The school supports pupils with home-tutoring including therapeutic interventions that keep the pupils engaged in education. They work consistently well with a wide range of outside agencies and specialist services to support the health and wellbeing of all pupils.

Staff use their expertise to offer pupils interesting and enjoyable activities which promote healthy living. This includes regular opportunities to exercise during the school day. Pupils are given extensive opportunities to take part in food technology sessions, preparing meals and snacks for both staff and pupils. They are encouraged to reflect on what they learn during these sessions.

The annual review process for pupils with statements of special educational needs satisfies statutory requirements and parents and pupils contribute effectively to this process. Individual educational plans identify clear targets for supporting pupils' social, emotional and behavioural difficulties. However, they do not always identify appropriate targets to support their learning which can be used and reviewed effectively by staff and pupils across the school.

The school makes good use of comprehensive risk assessments that are regularly updated.

The school has an appropriate policy and has procedures for safeguarding.

### **Learning environment: Good**

Managers and leaders have created a very inclusive and supportive school ethos in which pupils can thrive. All pupils have access to a curriculum that is appropriate to their individual learning and personal needs.

The school provides a positive, caring and welcoming environment which is well-resourced to meet the learning needs of the pupils. The organisation of the classrooms creates a safe environment which allows pupils to be taught individually, in pairs or in groups. The calm atmosphere of the school impacts positively on pupils' wellbeing, and helps them to engage well with their learning.

The school building is utilised well to provide a good range of learning experiences. This includes use of the kitchen and the workshop. The school makes very good use of outdoor areas, such as the garden, as well as local facilities such as the community hall, sports centre, local park and football pitch.

<b>Key Question 3: How good are leadership and management?</b>	<b>Good</b>
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### **Leadership: Good**

The three directors of the company are fully committed to improving the quality of education for all pupils. They have a clear vision for the school which is shared by all staff. They work very well as a team and have established a strong sense of purpose and values within the school.

Two of the directors, the school's manager and the headteacher, play a crucial role in the day-to-day running of the school. They have established a very inclusive and supportive school environment in which pupils with emotional, social and behavioural difficulties make good progress. Staff work well together to improve outcomes for pupils.

Communication throughout the school is a strong feature. Staff are well informed about the school's comprehensive plans and policies which focus well on meeting the wide range of pupils' individual needs. The new management structure includes three middle leaders and the school has established a comprehensive structure to enable staff to meet regularly.

Managers and leaders monitor and evaluate staff performance very effectively through regular observation and performance management. To do this, they have established an inclusive and secure performance management and appraisal system. They set helpful written targets for improvement and staff have good opportunities for peer observation and sharing good practice.

Managers use the performance management and appraisal procedures effectively to identify whole school training and development needs. As a result the school is increasingly able to meet the individual, specific and changing needs of the pupils.

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

### **Improving quality: Adequate**

The process and culture of self-evaluation is at an early stage of development. The views of pupils, staff, parents and carers gathered during the day-to-day work of the school are valued and used to inform planning. However, the self-evaluation report is mainly descriptive and not evaluative enough and it does not clearly identify areas for improvement.

The school collects a range of performance data but this is not yet used consistently to inform self-evaluation and strategic planning. The school accurately identifies individual pupils' progress over time although coherent systems for tracking pupils' progress are not sufficiently well-developed.

Staff have access to appropriate professional development and training which is clearly identified through the inclusive performance management and appraisal systems.

Networks of professional practice exist within the school. Teachers, tutors and learning support assistants share good practice in teaching, learning and behaviour management across the school. They are in the early stages of sharing training and good practice with local secondary schools and a special school. However, the impact of networking with local schools on pupils' attainment and achievement is not clear.

Recent annual monitoring notes of visits have been positive and the school has fully met half of the recommendations from the previous year's visit.

### **Partnership working: Good**

The school has well established links with the community and a range of key partners including placing authorities and parents or carers. This helps pupils to settle well in the school and has a positive impact on outcomes for pupils.

There are very good examples of working with local businesses to enable pupils to experience the world of work and access a wide range of appropriate work experience placements. This makes a valuable contribution to pupils' wellbeing and development of their social and life skills.

The very good partnership arrangements with local colleges of further education provides further opportunities for individual pupils to gain appropriate accreditation in line with their ability and individual needs.

The school is developing good links with local schools. This includes shared sporting activities for pupils and staff sharing good practice. Links with the community in Nepal and sponsoring a child in Armenia and a child in India help to broaden pupils' horizons.

The school communicates well to share valuable information with parents and carers. This makes sure that there is a consistent approach to managing pupils' behaviour and meeting their individual needs. Parents and carers value this partnership and feel well supported. There are very good transition arrangements in place when pupils join the school and when they move on to the next stage in their education.

### **Resource management: Good**

The school has an appropriate range of staff which includes teachers, tutors and learning support assistants with a wide range of relevant knowledge and experience. Staff are deployed well within the school and support pupil's learning and personal

needs very effectively. This includes an outreach service for pupils who are unable to attend school because of their individual needs.

Professional development opportunities and planning, preparation and assessment time are used well to ensure that staff skills are updated on a regular basis.

The company manages resources well to support and improve the learning environment, for example by investment in the fabric of the buildings and equipment and resources. Resources are of good quality and are well matched to the interests and abilities of the pupils.

The school's financial management is robust and as a result the school provides value for money.

## Appendix 1

### Stakeholder satisfaction report

#### Responses to parent questionnaires

Eleven parents responded to the questionnaire. All responses were very positive. All agree strongly that their child was helped to settle well when they started at the school and that they are kept well informed about their child's progress. Almost all agree strongly that they are satisfied with the school and that their child likes, and feels safe in, the school. All parents agree that they are comfortable about approaching the school and nearly all understand the school's procedures for dealing with complaints. All agree that teaching is good and that staff treat pupils with respect. They also agree that their child receives good support and is encouraged to be healthy and take regular exercise, to be more mature and to take on more responsibility. All parents agree that their child is well prepared for moving onto the next school, college or work. Most parents agree that pupils behave well in the school.

#### Responses to learner questionnaires

Twelve pupils responded to the questionnaire. Their responses were positive and agree with the majority of the statements above. A few pupils disagree with the statement that they feel safe in school and that the school stops bullying. Around half of the pupils agree that they exercise regularly and that other children behave well in class.

## Appendix 2

### The inspection team

Meinir Rees	Reporting Inspector
Caroline Rees	Team Inspector
Christine Dooley	Peer Inspector
Paul Scudamore	Independent School Standards (Wales) Regulations 2003: 3 and 5
Kay Jones	School Nominee

## Copies of the report

Copies of this report are available from the school and from the Estyn website ([www.estyn.gov.uk](http://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 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 LEAs.

The term 'Reception' (FPR) refers to the year group of pupils in a primary school who reach the age of five during the academic year. FYear 1 refers to the year group of pupils who reach the age of six during the academic year and so on. Year 13 is the year group of students who reach the age of 18 during the academic year.

Primary phase:

Year	FPR	FPY1	FPY2	Y3	Y4	Y5	Y6
Ages	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 four key stages cover the following year groups:

Foundation Phase	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.