



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

A report on
Bryn Tirion Hall School

Date of inspection: March 2020

by

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

About Bryn Tirion Hall School

Bryn Tirion Hall School is located on two sites outside Wrexham. The school is owned by QEwC Ltd, which aims to provide 'quality education supported by a full range of residential and therapeutic care services'. The school provides day and 52-week residential provision for pupils with a range of needs, including social, emotional and behavioural difficulties and autistic spectrum disorder.

There are currently 49 pupils on roll. Pupils range in age from 7 to 16 years. Nearly all pupils have a statement of special educational needs or an education, health and care plan. Many pupils are placed by Welsh local authorities, a few are placed by English local authorities. A minority of pupils have looked-after child status and many of these pupils live in the company's children's homes. No pupils are from Welsh-speaking backgrounds.

It is not appropriate to compare the standards pupils achieve at the school with national averages or to analyse trends in performance over time because of the individual needs of the pupils.

The principal has been in post since 2011. Since the last inspection in September 2013, the number of pupils on roll has increased steadily from 13 to 49. In June 2019, the school made a material change to its registration to increase the number of pupils it can accept, and to open a new site at Bersham.

The school's last core inspection was in September 2013. The last annual monitoring visit was in December 2018.

Further information is available from the Welsh Government My Local School website at the link below.
<http://mylocalschool.wales.gov.uk/Schools/SchoolSearch?lang=en>

Summary

Staff at Bryn Tirion Hall School work together extremely effectively to promote an exceptionally caring and inclusive ethos that meets the needs of its pupils very successfully. Teaching staff have high expectations of pupils' behaviour and potential in learning. They plan a stimulating range of learning experiences that ignite pupils' curiosity and engagement in learning and provide valuable opportunities for pupils to develop a wide range of beneficial life skills.

Staff across the school share a strong commitment to improving the life chances of all pupils. They work closely with the school's therapy and psychology team to reflect carefully on their own practice and ensure that their knowledge of individual pupils' needs is informed by an up-to-date understanding of trauma-informed practice.

School leaders provide strong and effective leadership that ensure staff teams work together harmoniously to provide the best possible opportunities for pupils to succeed in a safe and happy environment. Rigorous arrangements for self-evaluation ensure they have a robust understanding of what the school does well and what it needs to improve.

As a result of the school's carefully co-ordinated approach to the curriculum and the high quality of care, support and guidance they receive, most pupils make strong progress in their learning, wellbeing and independence.

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

Compliance with the regulations for registration

Independent school inspections are governed by the Education Act 2002 and related regulations: the Independent School Standards (Wales) Regulations 2003. These regulations require an independent school to meet an appropriate standard in the following areas:

The quality of education provided by the school

The school meets the regulatory requirements for this standard.

The spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils

The school meets the regulatory requirements for this standard.

Welfare, health and safety of pupils

The school meets the regulatory requirements for this standard.

The suitability of proprietors and staff

The school meets the regulatory requirements for this standard.

Premises of and boarding accommodation at schools

The school meets the regulatory requirements for this standard.

The provision of information

The school meets the regulatory requirements for this standard.

The manner in which complaints are to be handled

The school meets the regulatory requirements for this standard.

Recommendations

R1 Strengthen the planning for and assessment of pupils' literacy, numeracy and ICT skills across the curriculum

What happens next

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.

Estyn will invite the school to prepare case studies on its work in relation to its arrangements for safeguarding, and how its programme for professional learning is supporting all staff to develop their understanding of trauma-informed practice, for dissemination on Estyn's website.

Main findings

Standards: Good

Nearly all pupils at Bryn Tirion Hall School have highly complex needs. Most have experienced significant periods of disruption to their education prior to joining the school. Despite these challenges, most pupils make strong progress over time because of the highly effective and well-co-ordinated support the school provides. Many pupils make secure progress against the targets in their personal plans and over time develop a range of important skills that help them to become more reflective and effective learners.

In lessons, many pupils recall prior learning and consolidate their understanding well in relation to learning objectives. They listen carefully to teaching staff and their peers, respond positively to instruction and apply themselves enthusiastically to tasks and activities.

Most pupils improve their communication skills successfully during their time at the school. Many respond confidently to teachers' questioning. They contribute positively to class discussion, take turns appropriately when listening to the views of others and justify their own opinions clearly, for example when discussing the impact of human activity on the weather. They apply their understanding of subject specific terminology accurately, for example in science lessons when describing the structure of the heart. Younger pupils reflect carefully on their use of adjectives to describe the characteristics of their friends or the properties of objects they find on a treasure hunt in the school grounds.

Many pupils make steady progress in developing their reading skills. Pupils on specific interventions make significant progress in improving their reading comprehension and word recognition skills. Most pupils locate information or identify key ideas successfully from short texts on topics such as the rainforest or global poverty. A few pupils use higher order reading skills such as inference or deduction confidently in order to reach insightful conclusions.

Many pupils improve their writing skills suitably. Over time, they improve the accuracy and presentation of their written work. They develop their understanding of punctuation and apply this with increasing accuracy in their work. They structure their ideas appropriately in sentences and short paragraphs to identify the advantages and disadvantages of wind power, for example. A minority of pupils develop their use of imaginative language well, for example when writing about the legacy of a famous person they admire, or an acrostic poem on the subject of firework night.

Many pupils develop effectively their understanding of key mathematical concepts as they move through the school. For example, younger pupils practise and consolidate their understanding of the four rules of number. They become more accurate using weighing and measuring skills and when telling the time using an analogue clock face. They learn to record and interpret information using bar or line graphs. Older pupils calculate percentage increases and decreases in stock market movements over time. They develop their understanding of financial literacy well, through the school bank, price comparison activities and budgeting.

Most pupils develop their independence skills significantly during their time at the school. Pupils who attend Shaz's Café learn valuable personal hygiene and housekeeping skills such as completing their laundry, sewing and cooking healthy snacks that support them well to lead a more independent life. Most pupils improve their fine and gross motor skills very effectively through a wide range of challenging activities that build their stamina, fitness and co-ordination such as gorge-walking, skiing and archery. The progress pupils make in these areas is a distinctive strength of the school.

Many pupils use information and communication technology (ICT) confidently to support their learning, for example, to research ideas, record data and make presentations. They improve their ability to use a range of skills such as coding, and making and editing videos very effectively.

Over the last three years, many pupils who leave the school at the end of their education achieve GCSE qualifications at level 1 in a range of subjects that include English, mathematics, art and science. These achievements, together with the progress pupils make in their learning overall, ensure that, over the last three years, all pupils who have left the school at the end of their education have progressed successfully to further education, specialist colleges or training providers.

Wellbeing and attitudes to learning: Excellent

Most pupils who join Bryn Tirion Hall School settle in quickly and thrive due to the school's highly nurturing environment and the consistent approaches of staff to managing pupils' behaviour. As a result of these successful approaches, most pupils make significant progress in learning how to recognise their own behaviours and developing the strategies and skills to regulate their own emotions more successfully. This awareness has an extremely powerful and positive impact on pupils' development and achievements.

In most lessons, most pupils are confident learners, willing to attempt different tasks and express their ideas and opinions in front of their peers. They show high levels of respect for each other's views and personal space, and support each other sensitively in their learning, asking for and offering each other help when required. These pupils engage well and work with interest and enjoyment. Many improve their ability to work independently, persevering with tasks and focusing on their work despite minor distractions.

Over the last three years, pupils' attendance has been a notable strength of the school. Most pupils attend regularly and those with a history of poor attendance at previous placements improve this while at the school. Most pupils enjoy being at school and appreciate the many opportunities they receive. Most pupils behave well at break times and lunchtimes and interact positively with other pupils, staff and visitors to the school. In relation to their previous experiences and the challenges they face, most pupils' behaviour in lessons and around the school is very good.

Most pupils feel safe in school and build trusting relationships with the staff and with their peers. They feel staff listen to them carefully and know who to turn to if they have any concerns. Their growing trust in staff and sense of personal safety enable them to become more confident in themselves and in their relationships with others, engage better in their learning and respond effectively to new tasks and learning experiences.

Most pupils develop very successfully their understanding of their role as responsible citizens through the school's well-co-ordinated programme of personal and social education and clearly articulated commitment to inclusion. This helps them acquire a strong understanding of diversity, racism, and the harmful effects of bullying. Over time, many pupils develop a mature understanding of their responsibilities as well as their rights, and an appreciation of the relationship between them. For example, pupils in Year 11 can explain clearly how they have the right to be respected and an equal responsibility to respect others.

Many pupils take part enthusiastically in regular opportunities for physical exercise as part of their weekly timetable, for example, ice-skating, badminton and building dens. They engage well with teaching and residential staff playing football, rugby and basketball at lunch and break times. These pupils understand the benefits of regular exercise and a healthy diet. They take good advantage of the healthy daily menu and fruit available throughout the day.

A few pupils embrace valuable leadership roles through the school's pupil leadership programme, in areas such as equality, children's rights and anti-bullying. With support, these pupils organise highly worthwhile events to inform other pupils on topics such as the issues that face members of the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) community. As a result, they build their confidence, empathy and decision-making skills as they interact with new people and take on new challenges.

Teaching and learning experiences: Good

The school provides a curriculum that is broad and balanced and meets the Independent School Standards (Wales) Regulations 2003.

The school's curriculum provides a wide range of stimulating learning experiences that support the individual needs of pupils, ignite their curiosity and develop their wellbeing successfully. This includes beneficial cultural, recreational and outdoor learning opportunities that enhance and extend pupils' classroom-based learning. For example, pupils take part in exciting pursuits such as the annual ski trip to France and camping trips, as well as regular opportunities for paddleboarding and climbing. These activities promote very effectively pupils' engagement in learning and their sense of belonging to the school community.

Teachers and leaders plan strategically to develop pupils' confidence and build wider skills that support them to become more successful learners as they move through the school. For example, the provision for younger pupils ensures that they experience a calm, nurturing environment that enables them to establish secure routines and build positive relationships with staff. Older pupils take part in challenging enterprise activities that develop their product design and marketing skills as well as their understanding of profit and loss. Pupils of all ages benefit from the school's external leadership programme and enrichment activities that develop valuable resilience, team-working and leadership skills.

Across the school, teaching staff create stimulating learning environments that promote these imaginative and diverse experiences. For example, Shaz's Café provides pupils with a realistic independent living skills hub. Here pupils learn a

range of valuable life skills such as balancing income and outgoings, using kitchen appliances and arranging transportation to work or school. Teachers work beneficially with other schools and organisations to extend their own knowledge and provide purposeful opportunities for pupils. For example, they support pupils to participate in a sports leadership programme, which develops pupils' self-confidence and social skills.

The school has a strong focus on developing a range of skills through targets on their individual education plans, including a suitable focus on pupils' literacy and numeracy skills. The school has an established programme of targeted interventions that helps support the progress of those pupils with weaker reading and spelling skills. Overall, however, teachers do not plan well enough consistent opportunities for pupils to develop their literacy, numeracy and ICT skills progressively across the curriculum.

All staff have high expectations of pupils' behaviour and their potential for learning. They develop exceptionally caring working relationships with pupils. They understand pupils' social and emotional needs extremely well and ensure that most pupils remain engaged in activities and persevere with tasks. Teachers and support staff have a very good understanding of how to manage the challenging behaviour of pupils and ensure that this is not a barrier to learning. They adopt a calm, respectful and reflective approach and work collaboratively to benefit the pupils. Pupils appreciate this consistent approach, which supports effectively their ability to reflect, self-regulate and learn. As a result, the behaviour and engagement of most pupils in lessons is good and enables them to make effective progress.

In most lessons, teachers use their knowledge and understanding of pupils to plan lessons and activities that engage pupils' interests successfully. Most teachers and support staff provide valuable verbal feedback that stimulates, motivates and encourages pupils to know what they are doing well and where they need to improve. However, teachers do not always set clear learning objectives at the beginning of activities so that pupils may evaluate their own progress and improvement. In addition, arrangements for the assessment of pupils' progress in skills and across the curriculum are not precise enough. They focus well on what the pupil has done but do not identify well enough what pupils need to do to improve.

Most teachers encourage and respond well to pupils' curiosity. They value pupil questions and views during lessons and make sure that they create sufficient time to respond to these in order to strengthen and reinforce learning. This helps pupils to feel valued and ensures that they have an active voice in their own learning.

Care, support and guidance: Excellent

Bryn Tirion Hall School provides an exceptionally caring and inclusive ethos that reflects clearly its motto of empowering pupils to 'change by choice'. Staff teams across the school work together extremely harmoniously and share a strong commitment to improve the learning and life chances of every pupil. The high quality of care, support and guidance at the school supports pupils very effectively and is a notable feature of the school's work.

The school has comprehensive and well-established processes to assess pupils' individual starting points to ensure that staff have a clear understanding of pupils'

individual abilities and needs when they join the school. As pupils move through the school, there are robust measures to track and monitor their progress in learning. Leaders and teaching staff use this information thoughtfully to plan beneficial interventions to help pupils improve their standards of reading and spelling or to adjust pupils' learning appropriately to meet their changing needs.

School leaders evaluate a wide range of information relating to important aspects of pupils' wellbeing, including attendance, behaviour and attitudes to learning. Daily meetings of the education team ensure that there are regular and timely opportunities for staff to discuss concerns, reflect on their practice and implement strategies relating to individual pupils. Where these processes identify that pupils face particular challenges, the school considers carefully how it can best support pupils to address these. In these instances, leaders, teaching and therapeutic staff work exceptionally well with parents and carers and external agencies to co-ordinate a united response to support the pupil.

The closely integrated work of the therapeutic and psychology team with teaching staff is a particularly strong aspect of the school's work. This team works very effectively with pastoral staff to inform approaches to support pupils' wellbeing, for example by contributing to pupils' initial assessments and the development of pupils' personal support plans. In addition, the therapeutic team leads valuable training in relevant areas such as mental health, adverse childhood experiences, and speech, language and communication. This innovative programme of staff development and the close collaboration between the therapy and education teams is having a powerful impact on developing the skills and empathy of all staff as reflective, trauma-informed practitioners.

Pupil leadership roles enable pupils to have a positive impact on school policy and contribute to school improvements. For example, they have helped shape the new homework policy and the school's new reward system. These roles allow pupils to explore and evaluate practice, generate ideas and share information with other pupils on a variety of topics such as food waste, anti-bullying, racism and children's rights.

The school's curriculum for personal and social education helps pupils very effectively to develop the skills they need to support their future well-being. This programme includes a wide range of topical and relevant issues such as extremism, e-safety and racism. The school collaborates constructively with external agencies to deliver appropriate topics such as county lines, domestic violence and substance misuse.

The school encourages pupils to think about the world they live in and the people they share it with. Pupils learn about their responsibilities, helping them to become more ethically informed citizens. For example, pupils have taken part in a charity shoe-box event for Romania and made links with a school in Mexico, sharing ideas about other cultures and values.

The school has a comprehensive careers and work-related curriculum, which supports pupils strongly to develop their skills for the world of work. There is a clear focus on pupils' destinations and career aspirations. For example, pupils in key stage 3 participate in a beneficial variety of taster sessions and engagement projects, which gives them insight into many areas of interest, such as music and horticulture. Older pupils participate in valuable work experience opportunities, including catering and hospitality and computer maintenance.

The school has highly effective arrangements to communicate with parents and carers through termly reports and the regular use of an online app. This programme ensures that parents and carers remain up-to-date with their child's learning and enables them to celebrate their achievements with them on a daily basis.

The school's provision for safeguarding pupils is a notable strength of its work. This includes well-developed procedures for staff to record and report safeguarding instances. This highly effective system allows staff to identify and support successfully vulnerable pupils and those at risk of harm. The school provides very beneficial activities for pupils on important issues such as e-safety and the dangers of sharing personal information on social media sites.

Leadership and management: Excellent

The principal provides strong strategic vision that gives the school clear and robust direction. He has high expectations of staff and pupils that focus successfully on raising standards through improving pupils' attitudes towards learning, their perseverance, tolerance and resilience.

Supported by highly capable vice-principals who share the same ambitious principles, the principal provides very strong and cohesive leadership and ensures that all staff work together to establish an extremely caring ethos. Together with members of the wider senior leadership team, this dedicated and strategic group share a common commitment to ensure that the school is well organised and managed effectively. They understand and respond to pupils' complex needs very well and succeed in raising the aspirations of vulnerable pupils and their parents or carers. This collaborative leadership model is a well-established strength of the school, which has a significant effect on most pupils' progress and standards of wellbeing.

The school has developed a strong vision for developing leadership skills at all levels, including those of the pupils. For example, the pupils' external leadership programme encompasses a wide range of outdoor pursuit activities, making good use of the school grounds and local environment to develop personal responsibility, positive peer to peer relationships, and social and leadership skills successfully.

The principal and senior management team have established an honest, analytical, and robust structure for self-evaluation. These well-developed systems include regular contributions from all members of staff. Leaders use a wide range of evidence to monitor and evaluate performance and gather the opinions of pupils, parents and other stakeholders effectively. Senior leaders analyse self-evaluation outcomes collectively when planning for improvement. Rigorous evaluation of pupil progress, lesson observations and discussions with pupils ensure that leaders have an exceptional understanding of what the school is doing well, and what needs to improve. For example, the school has responded positively to the outcomes of their evaluation of pupils' behaviours by developing worthwhile strategies that encourage pupils to make their own choices and remove themselves from potentially volatile situations that may escalate and result in unacceptable behaviour.

Leaders have specific responsibilities for improvement. Members of the leadership team co-ordinate and share the work of addressing priorities for improvement

equally. This provides them with valuable leadership experiences for the future as they take advantage of worthwhile opportunities to manage staff and lead whole-school initiatives skilfully. All staff are aware of their responsibilities and are held accountable for achieving the targets for improvement.

Staff across the school benefit from a comprehensive programme of training opportunities that supports their professional development well. This programme links clearly with the school's priorities and enhances very effectively the school's capacity for making improvements. Rigorous performance management arrangements ensure that there is a sensible and realistic approach to target setting. These procedures encourage teachers and teaching assistants to challenge their own performance and to take an active part in planning for their personal professional development. The school has begun to work with a cluster of maintained schools by leading on aspects of moderating and assessing pupils' standards in ICT. Leaders provide regular opportunities for staff and pupils to give their views on the life and work of the school. This contributes well to their understanding on the effectiveness of teaching and learning.

The school has robust and rigorous financial management systems that are administrated skilfully by the school's business manager. The board of directors has a detailed understanding of the school's budget requirements and ensure that the school is well staffed and resourced. They ensure that the needs of the pupils come first and foremost before financial decisions are made. The finance committee meet termly and have a strong understanding of their roles and responsibilities. They provide robust challenge to scrutinise the school's expenditure when monitoring progress to achieve specific improvement targets. This has resulted in increased funding to develop highly effective procedures for safeguarding pupils.

Evidence base of the report

Before an inspection, inspectors:

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

During an inspection, inspectors normally:

- meet proprietors, school leaders and individual members of teaching and support staff 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
- visit lessons and undertake a variety of learning walks to observe pupils learning and to see staff teaching in a range of settings
- 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, information on pupils' wellbeing, 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 (www.estyn.gov.wales)

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

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

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

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

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

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