



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

**A report on
Priority Childcare**

Date of inspection: November 2018

by

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

About Priority Childcare

Priority Childcare is an independent school providing in-house education for children aged 8 to 18 years who have social, emotional and behavioural difficulties and who are not able to access mainstream education. The school opened in 2015 and operates in classrooms at four of the company's seven children's homes across four counties in south Wales.

There are currently nine pupils on roll at the school. All pupils are looked after by their local authorities. Nearly all pupils are resident in the company's children's homes. Around a half of pupils have statements of special educational needs.

The headteacher has been in post since September 2016 and oversees the education across the four sites.

This is the school's first core inspection.

Summary

The headteacher communicates a clear vision for the school, based on providing a safe and nurturing environment where pupils can build positive relationships and experience success. Leaders have developed highly effective partnerships with a wide range of specialist services that provide valuable support for this vision.

The school provides a high level of support for pupils' social, emotional and wellbeing needs. This helps most pupils to improve their behaviour, engage well in lessons and make strong progress in developing their social skills. The high quality personal and social education programme provides pupils with valuable age-appropriate information about a wide range of important issues. This programme helps older pupils in particular, to develop important independent living skills well.

Staff tailor learning experiences closely to the identified needs of individual pupils. These include valuable opportunities for pupils to practise skills in the community. However, the quality of teaching varies too widely across the school. Systems to assess, track, and monitor pupil progress across the curriculum are not robust enough.

Leaders have put in place a suitable process of self-evaluation, drawing on the views of staff, pupils, placing officers and a limited range of first-hand evidence. However, school development planning lacks a clear focus on the standards pupils achieve and the quality of teaching.

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

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

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 Ensure that self-evaluation processes focus more clearly on the standards pupils achieve and the quality of teaching
- R2 Ensure that staff assess pupils' standards in subjects across the curriculum and use the information to plan for progression
- R3 Improve pupils' writing skills
- R4 Improve pupils' use of information and communication technology (ICT) to research and present work

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 a case study on its work in relation to the strong provision for personal social education, for dissemination on Estyn's website.

Main findings

Standards: Adequate and needs improvement

Pupils attending Priority Childcare have a range of social, emotional and behavioural difficulties. Nearly all pupils have been out of education for a considerable time before joining the school. They have experienced severe barriers to learning and have a history of poor school attendance.

During their time at school, pupils learn to trust staff and develop positive attitudes towards learning. As a result, most pupils make sound progress from their individual starting points in line with their needs and ability. They concentrate well in lessons and achieve their learning objectives.

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.

Most pupils make strong progress in developing their social and communication skills. They learn to work effectively with others through building strong relationships with staff, taking part in work experience placements and by helping out with local charities. Older pupils make strong progress in developing a wide range of important personal and social skills through taking part in the school's moving forward programme. As part of this programme, they learn how to manage personal finances, apply for jobs and access housing support.

Around half of pupils develop their thinking and problem-solving skills well. For example, when making furniture in forest schools, cooking meals for their peers and when planning fundraising activities. A majority of pupils use creative skills well when completing topic work. For example, they design and make toy animals, decorations and memory jars.

Nearly all pupils make strong progress in developing their oracy skills. They engage well in discussions and listen attentively to staff and fellow pupils. They initiate discussion with visitors and explain clearly what they are doing, and older pupils explain confidently what their hopes are for the future.

Many pupils develop their reading skills appropriately in line with their needs and abilities. They are able to extract information from texts and answer questions correctly about what they have read. A majority of pupils write neatly and take pride in the presentation of their work. However, pupils generally provide short written answers, especially when completing worksheets. Generally, across the school, pupils do not produce enough creative writing and do not write for a range of purposes and audiences.

Most pupils make strong progress in developing their number skills. They carry out calculations using the four rules of number accurately and use these skills in contexts such as managing money. A very few pupils use measuring skills accurately when weighing ingredients in food technology.

A minority of pupils make appropriate use of ICT to research and present work. However, across the school, pupils' use of ICT to support learning is under developed.

Over the last two years, all pupils have left the school with at least one recognised qualification and have moved on to suitable care or education placements.

Wellbeing and attitudes to learning: Good

Over time, nearly all pupils respond well to the structure, consistent routines and high level of support provided by the school.

All pupils feel safe in school. They behave well, are polite and demonstrate respect for staff and visitors. Pupils form trusting relationships with staff and this contributes positively to the progress many make, particularly in developing their self-confidence and resilience. Many pupils particularly enjoy opportunities to work in the community to improve the local environment. A majority take part enthusiastically in events to support a local charity that provides care for abandoned dogs.

Nearly all pupils attend well and those with a history of poor attendance at previous placements have improved their attendance whilst at the school.

Many pupils have a very positive attitude to learning. They take pride in their achievements and work hard to improve. In lessons, nearly all pupils settle quickly and concentrate well. Pupils express their views about the school and what they learn through weekly feedback sheets and through choosing which topics they want to study.

Older pupils develop valuable life skills and awareness of important aspects of wellbeing such as personal safety, nutrition and healthy relationships through taking part in the school's moving forward programme. Through taking part in this innovative programme, pupils develop the skills they need to build positive relationships and develop greater independence.

Generally, pupils have positive attitudes towards healthy eating and cook healthy well-balanced meals. Nearly all pupils take part enthusiastically in daily physical activities such as cycling, walking and skating at a local park.

Teaching and learning experiences: Adequate and needs improvement

The school provides a broad curriculum that meets the requirements of the Independent School Standards (Wales) Regulations 2003. The curriculum focuses strongly on developing pupils' attitudes to learning, raising their self-esteem and improving their social skills. It provides pupils with learning pathways that reflect their needs and interests well. These pathways include an effective balance of experiences, such as the development of pupils' literacy and numeracy skills, topic work which integrates a wide range of subjects and important opportunities for pupils to develop valuable social skills.

The school organises worthwhile visits to places of interest to support the curriculum, such as the theatre, botanical gardens and local castles. These visits have a clear focus on developing pupils' social skills, enrich pupils' learning experiences, and have a positive impact on their wellbeing.

Education staff work effectively with the care team to ensure that pupils practise skills learnt in class during after school activities. These include an after school club where pupils work together on projects and a wide range of leisure and sport activities.

Generally, staff know the social and emotional needs of their pupils well and provide a high level of support for pupils' mental health and wellbeing. They manage pupils' behaviour sensitively and provide pupils with high levels of support and encouragement. The positive working relationship between staff and pupils and the consistent approach to managing behaviour impacts positively on pupils' attendance, motivation and wellbeing. Education staff ensure that many classrooms are welcoming and nurturing environments, personalised to the needs and interests of the pupils.

Staff who deliver practical and outdoor activities, know their subjects well and model skills effectively. This helps pupils to develop a wide range of skills independently. In a majority of classroom-based lessons, staff deliver interesting activities and tasks that engage pupils well. In these lessons, staff move pupils' learning forward at an appropriate pace and use questioning effectively to assess and challenge pupils' understanding. However, in a minority of lessons, there is an over-reliance on the completion of commercial worksheets and a lack of pace to pupils learning.

Generally, the approach to assessment is ineffective. Staff provide useful feedback to pupils to reward them and encourage their motivation and engagement in learning. However, baseline information is unreliable and does not provide an accurate measure of pupils' abilities on entry. Staff have started to map pupils' literacy and numeracy levels using indicators taken from the literacy and numeracy framework. However, this is newly in place and staff do not routinely assess and record pupil progress in other areas of the curriculum. As a result, they do not plan effectively for pupils to develop their skills systematically.

Care, support and guidance: Good

The provision for the care support and guidance of pupils is a strength of the school. Staff track important aspects of pupils' wellbeing such as behaviour, engagement and attendance regularly, and include targets for these indicators in individual education plans. As a result, staff have a good understanding of the health and wellbeing needs of pupils and work together effectively to ensure these needs are met. However, the tracking and monitoring of pupils' progress in developing academic skills is less effective.

The school has developed highly effective partnerships with a wide range of specialist services that provide valuable support for pupils' wellbeing needs. These include support for pupils to understand the impact of their behaviour on others and to learn about healthy relationships and personal safety. Therapists provide staff with important training to help them support pupils' emotional development.

The school and local social services department have co-produced an innovative course to develop the social and emotional skills of older pupils. This course, which is accredited by Agored Cymru, makes a strong contribution to developing pupils' knowledge and understanding of a wide range of important and relevant personal and social issues. This is an outstanding feature of the provision.

Staff liaise well with parents and carers on a daily basis. This helps the school, parents and carers work together effectively to provide consistent approaches to support, rewards and the consolidation of skills.

The school promotes positive attitudes towards healthy eating well. Staff encourage pupils to prepare healthy meals and have provided each pupil with their own fitness tracker. This encourages pupils to exercise regularly.

The school has effective policies and procedures for managing pupils' behaviour. Staff manage the few incidents of challenging behaviour skilfully and successfully re-engage pupils in their learning.

The school has suitable arrangements to involve pupils in decision-making about their education. For example, pupils choose which topics they want to study, select work experience placements and provide feedback to staff through weekly summaries of their likes, dislikes and achievements.

The school's arrangements for safeguarding pupils meet requirements and give no cause for concern.

Leadership and management: Adequate and needs improvement

The headteacher communicates a clear vision for the school, based on providing a safe and nurturing environment where pupils can develop the skills they need to be successful, confident learners who are positive about their future. This vision, which is shared effectively by all staff, helps pupils to develop the skills they need to participate in society and develop important independent learning skills.

The headteacher implements valuable training for staff that supports this vision well. For example, staff benefit from training to develop their understanding of the needs of pupils who have experienced adverse childhood experiences and trauma. This includes meeting the needs of children who have experienced multiple changes to school and care provision. Staff benefit from an induction process that includes learning about the vision and ethos of the company and important aspects of pupil wellbeing. However, training on approaches to teaching and learning is limited.

A clear set of policies associated with aspects of pupils' wellbeing provide strong guidance for staff. These policies are shared across the school, which helps staff to implement procedures consistently. As a result, pupils make strong progress in developing their self-esteem, confidence and behaviour.

The school forms valuable partnerships with local work experience providers and local charities. These beneficial partnerships help pupils to develop important social skills and extend their learning experiences.

The headteacher has put in place a suitable process of self-evaluation, drawing on the views of staff, pupils, placing officers and a limited range of first-hand evidence, including lesson observations, behaviour, attendance and wellbeing indicators. However, the self-evaluation process does not capture well enough important information such as the results of teacher assessments from across all of the sites. As a result, self-evaluation and school improvement planning does not focus well enough on the standards pupils achieve.

A majority of the classrooms are well maintained and support the delivery of the curriculum well. The outdoor learning environment enables pupils to learn new skills and enhances their physical and mental wellbeing. Staff are deployed effectively to ensure that pupils' social and emotional needs are supported well. Leaders meet with education staff regularly to develop planning and schemes of work. However, the performance management and supervision of education staff is under developed.

The proprietor visits the school regularly and knows the school's strengths and areas for development well. He has arranged for the headteacher to have support from external consultants who provide valuable advice and quality assurance of the school's work.

The school meets all of the Independent Schools Standards (Wales) regulations 2003.

Copies of the report

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

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.

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

Excellent	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:

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