



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

A report on
Summergil House School

Date of inspection: March 2022

by

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

This report is also available in Welsh.

About Summergil House School

Name of provider	Summergil House School
Type of school	Independent special
Proprietor	Orbis Education and Care
Age range	5 - 19
Boarding/Residential provision?	Residential
Religious character	n/a
Number of pupils on roll	20
Pupils of statutory school age	14
Number in nursery classes	n/a
Number in sixth form	n/a
Percentage of pupils identified as having additional learning needs	100%
Date of headteacher appointment	July 2020
Date of previous Estyn inspection (if applicable)	n/a
Start date of inspection	14 March 2022
Additional information	<p>Summergil House School is an independent special school situated near the Powys and Herefordshire border in Presteigne. The school opened in March 2017 and is owned by Orbis Education and Care. It is part of the portfolio of August Equity, a private equity investment company.</p> <p>The school provides education for pupils aged 5 to 19 years who have a diagnosis of autistic spectrum condition. All pupils have a statement of special educational needs or an education, health, and care plan (EHCP).</p> <p>Currently, there are 20 pupils attending the school, many of whom are boys. Many pupils are placed by local authorities in England and the remainder from Wales. Many pupils have English as their first language. Around half the pupils are day pupils, and half reside at the registered on-site children's home.</p> <p>Since the last monitoring visit in May 2019, a new head of education was appointed in July 2020. The school</p>

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	<p>has five class teachers and ten learning support assistants. In addition, care workers from the residential setting support children in lessons and activities as required. A clinical team, including a speech and language therapist, behaviour specialist and occupational therapist, supports the education team.</p> <p>The school's aim is to 'provide a safe and secure school environment that encourages individuality, confidence and self-esteem'.</p> <p>This is the school's first core inspection since its registration.</p>
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Summary

Summergil House School is a happy and welcoming school. Its peaceful rural location has an extremely positive effect on pupils' well-being and provides many opportunities for pupils to take exercise, explore nature and self-regulate when they need to.

The school provides a suitably varied range of learning experiences that reflect the wide range of pupils' needs, abilities and interests. Teachers and learning support assistants know their pupils well and form positive working relationships with them. Over time, this caring support helps many pupils to settle in well and make worthwhile progress from their starting points.

Many pupils make beneficial progress in developing their physical skills and most become more independent during their time at the school. However, shortcomings in teachers' planning and the quality of learning support mean that pupils do not make the progress in developing their literacy, numeracy and digital skills that they are capable of.

Although the majority of pupils become more successful learners during their time at the school, a minority do not engage with classroom-based learning consistently enough. This is partly because the size and number of classrooms are not sufficient to accommodate the wide range of pupils' complex needs. In addition, the work of the clinical team in supporting teaching staff with behaviour management and communication strategies is not co-ordinated well enough.

Leaders promote a caring ethos across the school and have established strong working relationships with parents and carers and staff working in the residential setting. Their calm and purposeful leadership has helped the school navigate considerable challenges during the pandemic when the homes were forced to lockdown on successive occasions. Staff from the education and residential sides of the company worked together constructively to provide a caring and supportive community for pupils throughout this period. However, quality assurance and improvement planning processes are not self-critical enough and do not focus well enough on improving the skills of teachers and learning support staff.

The school does not comply fully with the Independent School Standards (Wales) Regulations 2003.

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

- Ensure that lessons are well planned, teaching methods effective, suitable activities used and class time managed effectively [1(3)c]
- Ensure teachers show a good understanding of the aptitudes, needs and prior attainments of the pupils, and that these are taken into account in the planning of lessons [1(3)d]
- Ensure classroom resources are of an adequate quantity, quality and range and are used effectively [1(3)f]
- Ensure teachers provide education which enables all pupils within a class to make progress including pupils with statements and those for whom Welsh or English is an additional language [1(5)]

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

- Prepare and implement written policies to promote and safeguard the welfare of children at the school which complies with Welsh Government guidance [3(2)b]
- Maintain an admission and attendance register in accordance with the Education (Pupil Registration) (Wales) Regulations 2010 [3(9)]

The suitability of proprietors and staff

The school meets the regulatory requirements for this standard.

Premises of and boarding accommodation at schools

The school 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:

- Provide classrooms appropriate in size to allow effective teaching [5(j)]

The provision of information

The school meets the regulatory requirements for this standard.

The manner in which complaints are to be handled

The school meets the regulatory requirements for this standard.

Recommendations

R1 Comply fully with the Independent School Standards (Wales) Regulations 2003, including making a material change to the registration of the school to cover the temporary use of additional teaching space

R2 Strengthen the planning for and teaching of pupils' literacy, numeracy and digital skills

R3 Ensure the size and number of classrooms meet the needs of pupils

R4 Ensure arrangements for quality assurance and governance focus on school improvement and improving the quality of teaching

What happens next

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

Estyn advises the proprietor to amend its current development plan to show what actions the school intends to take in response to the recommendations. It is also advisable to circulate this plan, or a summary of it, to all parents/carers at the school.

Main findings

Learning

Many pupils join the school following periods of disruption to their education. The complexity of their needs means they frequently struggle with formal learning and the classroom environment and need time to make a successful transition to the school. Over time, many pupils who join the school settle in well, build constructive relationships with their staff and peers, and the majority make worthwhile progress in their learning. This supports them well to acquire skills they will need to be more independent in their future lives.

During their time at the school, many pupils make suitable progress in developing their literacy skills. Many pupils develop their writing skills appropriately in line with their ability. For example, they practise letter formation, independently or with over hand support, and complete short sentences, filling in the gaps using visual prompts as a stimulus. More able pupils improve the presentation and punctuation of their work at a level appropriate to their age and ability.

In lessons, a few pupils read competently from the board, or from the interactive whiteboard. Younger pupils follow sequenced instructions from task sheets, or practise reading short sentences from their reading book.

Many pupils improve their numeracy skills in contexts that support them appropriately to lead more independent lives. For example, they learn to tell the time, practise coin recognition, and measure and record the size of common objects around the site. Older, more able, pupils use calculators confidently. They make suitable progress in calculating theoretical probabilities and understand how these compare to observed probabilities when conducting experiments.

A few pupils apply their digital skills appropriately when given opportunities to do so. For example, they use word processing programmes confidently. Younger pupils use the interactive whiteboard to click and drag pictures in matching activities.

Overall, however, opportunities for pupils to develop their literacy, numeracy and digital skills progressively across their areas of learning are underdeveloped. The lack of co-ordinated planning for the development of these skills restricts the progress pupils make in these areas.

Across the school, the majority of pupils develop their communication skills suitably during their time at the school. They communicate respectfully with their staff and in line with their abilities, respond politely in conversation with visitors to the school. Pupils who require support to communicate use symbols to choose snacks and refreshments for lunch and break times. In lessons, the majority listen well to staff instructions and respond appropriately to their guidance.

However, variability in teaching staff's use of questioning and of signing and symbols to support pupils' communication needs means that pupils do not consistently develop their communication skills in areas specific to their learning as well as they could. In addition, there are limited opportunities in lessons for pupils to develop their

communication skills in interactions with each other or to practise listening to each other.

Many pupils develop their physical skills effectively through valuable planned opportunities to access activities such as yoga, swimming and horse-riding as part of their timetable. They have regular access to the grounds of the school to complete sensory circuits, muddy obstacle courses or membership of the local gym. They improve their fine motor skills suitably through activities such as whittling green wood to make wands and beneficial opportunities to practise their letter and number formation.

Most pupils improve their independence skills purposefully during their time at the school. For example, they improve their personal care skills and learn to prepare simple meals. More able pupils complete classroom activities working independently or with minimal support, for example in woodwork sessions. Older pupils access valuable work experience opportunities at a garage, as part of the school's maintenance team, or at a local stable.

As pupils move through the school, they achieve a range of units of accreditation in areas that generally reflect their needs, abilities and interests well. This includes areas such as woodland craft, literacy and numeracy, animal care, healthy relationships, employability and photography.

Over the last three years, when they leave the school, most pupils have progressed to supported living placements, day services or have returned home to live with their families. A few pupils have returned to mainstream schools as a result of the progress they make during their time at the school.

Well-being and attitudes to learning

The school's rural location and peaceful environment has a positive effect on pupils' well-being. Many pupils use the space effectively to regulate their behaviour and feelings and to prepare themselves to re-engage with learning. They recognise when they need to take a short break from learning which helps them to manage their emotions. As a result, many pupils improve their behaviour during their time at the school.

Over time, many pupils become more settled and develop a sense of belonging due to the caring support they receive from the school. As a result, they maintain their placements at the school successfully despite periods of disrupted education prior to joining the school. Many pupils are happy and feel safe in the generally calm atmosphere of the school.

Overall, pupils are respectful and polite, and the majority interact confidently with adults and visitors. Many develop positive working relationships with staff. However, pupils have fewer structured opportunities to collaborate with each other, and as a result, relationships between peers are less well developed.

A few pupils, relative to their needs and abilities, show well-developed emotional awareness and have the confidence to approach adults to express their views and their concerns for other pupils. For example, they let staff know when they think

another pupil is feeling sad. Pupils feel listened to and appreciate the availability of staff to make time for them.

Nearly all pupils have regular opportunities to make choices and decisions for themselves, for example choosing which activities to participate in during sports day or deciding on green initiatives such as planting trees to make a maze. Older pupils choose which meals they wish to learn to cook, purchase ingredients, and then prepare their own meals. However, pupils do not have opportunities to take on formal leadership roles in the school.

Many pupils participate enthusiastically in a valuable range of activities on and off site. For example, they participate in yoga, trampolining, or go swimming. Pupils enjoy these activities, which help them to develop their understanding of how to lead a healthy life.

Many pupils have participated in charitable activities, for example sponsored walks to the summit of Pen-y-Fan. Recently, they have supported a virtual walk from Kiev to Warsaw to help understand the route refugees are taking and to raise money for them as a result of the war in Ukraine. This helps pupils to develop their sense of citizenship and place in the world.

Over time, the majority of pupils acquire attitudes and behaviours which help them to become more successful learners. The majority increase their tolerance of the classroom and show increasing levels of engagement with activities and tasks, and learn to celebrate their achievements. More able pupils in particular become increasingly independent in their work, demonstrate resilience in their problem solving, and take pride in their achievements.

However, a minority of pupils find it difficult to remain in the classroom and do not always engage with their learning for extended periods. In addition, a few learners do not attend timetabled lessons consistently. As a result, these learners do not make the same rate of progress in their learning as their peers.

Owing to the coronavirus pandemic, inspectors will not report pupils' rates of attendance during the academic years 2020-2021 and 2021-2022. Inspectors will, however, consider the school's provision for monitoring and improving attendance as part of inspection area 4 (care, support and guidance).

Teaching and learning experiences

The school provides a broad range of learning experiences, which reflects suitably the aspirations and principles outlined in its curriculum policy. The curriculum is organised appropriately into four pathways that reflect the wide range of pupils' ages, needs and abilities who attend the school. This varied range of learning experiences focuses on developing the relevant skills to support and prepare pupils appropriately for their transition to a variety of possible destinations after leaving school.

In order to enhance and promote learners' independence skills, the school has developed effective partnerships with local businesses and community leisure facilities. These links provide pupils with valuable opportunities to apply and practise skills away from the classroom. For example, younger pupils attend local attractions run by charitable trusts to participate in maintenance projects. In addition, a

partnership with a local stable offers older pupils work-related placements which support the development of their independence and work skills. A range of meaningful on-site work-related experiences, such as a placement with the site maintenance team, further enhances the development of these skills.

The school has an effective personal and social education (PSE) programme, supported by digital resources which have been appropriately adapted for the needs of all pupils. As a result, many pupils develop a beneficial understanding of the importance of active lifestyles, healthy choices and positive relationships. For example, pupils are encouraged to enrol in a local gym, and many enjoy taking regular exercise and developing an understanding of the positive effect of exercise on their health and well-being.

Teachers plan a diverse range of experiences and class-based learning opportunities to support the development of pupils' literacy, numeracy, and communication skills. The school makes appropriate use of the extensive outdoor areas to help pupils self-regulate, and to enhance learning opportunities offered in the classrooms. However, teachers do not plan consistently to make best use of this resource to extend learning, particularly for those pupils who struggle to tolerate the classroom.

Overall, teachers' planning is not sufficiently detailed and does not identify opportunities for the progressive development of skills across the areas of learning. In addition, teachers do not make sufficient use of the outcomes of individual pupil assessments in their planning of activities. As a result, many activities do not provide sufficient challenge or opportunity to build on pupils' previous experiences and learning.

Most teachers and learning support staff have a good understanding of the needs and interests of the pupils they support. They develop positive working relationships with pupils, provide reassurance and encouraging verbal feedback, and celebrate pupils' achievements in ways that are meaningful to each individual. This empathetic approach helps pupils with their emotional regulation and, in the majority of cases, supports them to engage purposefully in learning.

However, in around half of lessons, shortcomings in the quality of learning support and the physical constraints of the classrooms have a negative impact on the quality of teaching and support for learners. For example, teachers and support staff do not consistently provide opportunities for pupils to use the communication systems in their personal plans. As a result, these pupils find it difficult to contribute to lessons, make independent decisions, or express preferences. In addition, the number and size of classrooms is not sufficient to meet the needs of pupils at the school.

A strength of the school is the quality of the reporting to parents, carers and stakeholders on their children's progress. These reports provide interesting and informative updates on curricular experiences, and importantly include pupils' views and opinions on their own progress and aspirations where possible.

Care, support and guidance

Summergil House School is a happy and welcoming school. Teachers and learning support assistants know the pupils well and develop trusting and effective working relationships with them.

The school provides effective support and guidance for pupils to prepare them for their next steps in life. For example, it plans and delivers a successful PSE programme alongside the wider assembly programme. These sessions provide pupils with a comprehensive range of beneficial age and needs appropriate information, including important areas such as radicalisation, sex and healthy relationships and on-line safety.

The school uses a range of external agencies to offer worthwhile support to pupils in areas of education such as relationships and sex education. These agencies, which include local police and health professionals, alongside the on-site clinical team, provide valuable tools to enable pupils to communicate about the more sensitive aspects of their education, including masturbation and periods.

The school creates suitable opportunities for pupils to develop their cultural awareness within the PSE and assembly programme. As a result, pupils develop an awareness of the world around them and an understanding of people less fortunate than themselves. In lessons and around the site, pupils show respect for their peers, staff and visitors, regardless of gender, race or additional needs.

Summergil House provides useful, up-to-date personal plans for all pupils which are shared with relevant staff and parents. The education, care and clinical teams work collaboratively to produce these plans which include valuable contributions from parents and carers and the pupils themselves. These plans contain a range of worthwhile strategies, which focus appropriately on areas such as effective communication methods and life skills. As part of these plans, there are also detailed positive behaviour plans that outline suitable strategies to support pupils to self-regulate. However, the application of identified behaviour management and communication strategies across the school is inconsistent. Overall, the support from the clinical team in terms of training and raising awareness of these strategies is not co-ordinated well enough. The school has recently appointed a new autism practitioner to develop its practice in this area. However, this work is at an early stage of development, and it is too soon to assess its impact.

The school develops and maintains supportive relationships with parents and carers. It keeps in touch with parents and carers of day pupils using a home school diary, and all parents, carers and stakeholders are emailed weekly with details of what has happened within education during the week. These emails provide a valuable opportunity for the school to celebrate pupils' successes and achievements.

The school records attendance consistently. However, recorded attendance at the time of the inspection does not match the numbers of pupils observed in lessons. In addition, there is no analysis of attendance at a whole school level and monitoring engagement in learning within lessons is underdeveloped.

The school places a strong emphasis on ensuring that pupils are safe. For example, it provides staff and pupils with relevant, appropriate information on how to keep themselves safe in all situations, including online safety. Its arrangements for the safe recruitment of staff are robust. Leaders encourage all staff to understand their responsibility to provide a safe environment for pupils with a wide range of varied and complex needs.

However, although policies contain clear guidance for staff on the use of personal mobile phones whilst on site, this is not monitored closely enough. In addition, the security of the school perimeter and traffic management arrangements do not ensure the safety of pupils, staff and visitors to the school. Therefore, the school's arrangements for safeguarding pupils are not robust enough.

Leadership and management

The school promotes a caring ethos that supports the needs of many pupils with a wide range of complex needs and abilities successfully. In recent months, the school has faced many difficulties, including the considerable challenges presented at different stages of the pandemic, when the residential side of the school was forced to lockdown on successive occasions following advice from Public Health Wales. Despite these challenges, staff from both education and residential sides of the company have worked together constructively to provide a caring and supportive community for pupils throughout this period.

The head of education and deputy head of education have effective arrangements to ensure the smooth running of the school. They are visible around the school on a day-to-day basis, know and understand the needs of their pupils well, and provide valuable support for teaching staff. They have established strong and productive relationships with parents and placing authorities. They communicate regularly with parents, providing weekly updates on their children's progress, and listen and respond appropriately to their views.

The director of education provides beneficial advice, support and challenge for the school. She knows the school well and has a clear understanding of the school's strengths and its priorities for improvement. The director of education plays an important role in setting the school's long-term strategic priorities and in reporting back to the proprietors on the progress of the school. There are regular opportunities for the director of education to meet with leaders from the school to discuss the school's performance and to plan actions to address priorities for improvement. However, in a few areas, reporting mechanisms, such as the structure of governance reports, mean that these discussions do not consider well enough the school's own short- and medium-term development priorities.

The school has an established cycle of quality assurance activities to help it evaluate its work. These activities include regular governance reports to the school's director of education, lesson observations, work scrutiny, and learning walks. Overall, these activities provide leaders with a worthwhile overview of the school's work and help to identify priorities for improvement in the school's improvement plan. However, in many cases, the approach taken by the school is based on demonstrating compliance, rather than providing an in-depth evaluation of what works well and what

needs to improve. This means that leaders' assessment of the school's work is too generous and does not focus well enough on identifying areas for improvement.

Similarly, actions to achieve priorities in the school's development plan are not detailed enough and do not specify well enough the resource implications and timescales required to achieve them. In addition, the school's monitoring of progress against its improvement priorities is not critical enough. It does not take into account changes in the teaching team, or ensure that areas for improvement are revisited to ensure that all staff have the skills and expertise they need to support pupils' learning.

The school employs a small teaching team who are supported by a larger team of learning support assistants and support staff drawn from the residential provision. In recent months, the school has faced changes to this team, and crucially, challenges in recruiting and retaining suitably qualified and experienced teaching support staff.

Staff value the professional learning programme provided by the school. This focuses well on ensuring staff receive the mandatory training they need to support their roles working in a specialist residential setting. However, overall, there is not enough emphasis on ensuring this programme focuses on developing teachers' understanding of the core skills of teaching pupils with a broad range of complex needs across the curriculum, or of learning assistants' role in supporting teachers.

The school's setting provides pupils with many beneficial opportunities for pupils to take exercise, explore nature and self-regulate as appropriate. However, the size and number of classrooms can no longer accommodate the wide range of needs of the increased number of pupils attending the school, according to their age and ability. In addition, a few areas of the external environment do not provide inviting or well-resourced areas for learning.

The school does not comply fully with the Independent School Standards (Wales) Regulations 2003. In addition, the school is currently using part of its site for which it does not have permission from the Welsh Government.

Evidence base of the report

Before an inspection, inspectors:

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

During an inspection, inspectors normally:

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

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

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

Copies of the report

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

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

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

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