



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

A report on

Eastward House School

Date of inspection: January 2024

by

Estyn, His Majesty's Inspectorate for Education

and Training in Wales

About Eastward House School

Name of provider	Eastward House School
Proprietor	Harriet Harrison
Local authority	Cardiff local authority
Language of the provider	English
Type of school	Independent special
Residential provision?	No
Number of pupils on roll	29
Pupils of statutory school age	29
Date of previous Estyn inspection (if applicable)	
Start date of inspection	22/01/2024

Eastward House is an independent special school located in Cardiff, established in September 2021. The school has a second site in Bridgend, which is used as a base for outdoor education. The proprietor currently owns three independent schools in Wales.

The school provides education for pupils between the ages of seven to eighteen years who have specific learning difficulties including dyslexia, dyspraxia, dysgraphia, dyscalculia, as well as learning difficulties associated with autistic spectrum condition (ASC) and attention deficit disorder (ADD). In addition, the school provides education for pupils who have no specific learning need but whose parents wish to enrol their child as an alternative to local state schools.

There are currently 29 pupils on roll. Nearly all pupils have statements of special educational needs or an individual development plan. Nearly all pupils are placed by a local authority. Currently, the school is registered to admit 35 pupils.

Data reported is sourced from the latest available Pupil Level Annual School Census. These figures may be slightly different to those observed during the inspection.

Further information is available from the Welsh Government My Local School website: mylocalschool.gov.wales

a. The term 'additional learning needs' is being used to describe those pupils on the SEN/ALN register of the school.

Overview

Eastward House provides an inclusive, nurturing environment that successfully promotes the development of pupils' confidence and self-esteem. Teachers and support staff have developed strong relationships with pupils and know their pupils well. As a result, pupils are happy to attend and develop a sense of pride and belonging during their time at the school. They feel safe and secure and know who to go to if they are worried or concerned.

Over time many pupils settle appropriately to their learning at the school following periods of disruption to their schooling. They make suitable progress in developing their knowledge, understanding and skills from their initial starting points within teaching activities. However overall pupils' progress in their literacy and numeracy is underdeveloped.

Curriculum planning at the school is weak and underdeveloped. As a result, levels of challenge provided by activities and lessons across the school are variable and pupils' skills across the curriculum are not developed progressively. In addition, the school has no structured plans to develop and assess pupils' skills progressively.

The school has recently experienced a period of significant disruption to the management and strategic leadership of the school. This includes a period when a senior member of staff moved to a sister school, due to staff absence, to provide leadership. This hiatus has limited the leaders' ability to establish effective mechanisms to support the operation, management and performance of the school.

Leaders do not gather and analyse first hand evidence to evaluate the quality and effectiveness of teaching. Due to the limited amount of quality assurance work undertaken, leaders do not have a robust understanding of the strengths and areas for development within the provision, which limits their ability to plan strategically for improvement.

The school has procedures in place to make appropriate and timely referrals to other agencies when it has a safeguarding concern. However, leaders' record keeping of these referrals and other safeguarding matters is not sufficiently robust.

The school is not fully compliant 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:

- have a curriculum policy set out in writing and supported by appropriate plans and schemes of work and implement it effectively
- ensure that the curriculum policy enables pupils to acquire skills in speaking, listening, literacy and numeracy
- when pupils have a statement, fulfil its educational requirements
- ensure that the curriculum provides the opportunity for all pupils to learn and make progress
- ensure that lessons are well planned, teaching methods effective and suitable activities used. The school should ensure that class time is managed wisely
- ensure that teachers demonstrate appropriate knowledge and understanding of the subject matter being taught
- ensure that there a framework in place to assess pupils' work regularly and thoroughly and utilise information from such assessment to plan teaching so that pupils can make progress

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 safeguard and promote the welfare of children who are pupils at the school which complies with Welsh Government Guidance 272 / 2021 Keeping Learners Safe

The suitability of proprietors and staff

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:

- prior to the appointment of any member of staff to work at the school, where the prospective member of staff is an individual in respect of whom the Secretary of State must issue a disclosure and barring certificate under section 113A of the Police Act 1997, the proprietor ensures that:

the individual has applied for an appropriate disclosure and barring certificate; and the individual makes the certificate available to the proprietor

- prior to the confirmation of the appointment of all staff, carry out appropriate checks to confirm their identity, medical fitness, previous employment history, character references and where appropriate qualifications and professional references and take into account information in determining whether their appointment will be confirmed

The suitability of the premises and accommodation

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 management of safeguarding and address the shortcomings identified during the inspection
- R2 Comply with the Independent School Standards (Wales) Regulations 2003
- R3 Formalise governance and leadership arrangements to strengthen strategic oversight so that leaders understand and fulfil their roles effectively
- R4 Establish rigorous procedures for quality assurance and improvement planning, focusing clearly on pupil progress and outcomes, to support leaders' management and improvement of the school
- R5 Strengthen curriculum planning to ensure that all programmes of study are supported by appropriate schemes of work and assessment to develop pupils' literacy, numeracy and digital skills progressively

What happens next

Since the school does not meet the standards required for registration, the Welsh Government 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.

Main findings

Learning

Over time many pupils settle well to their education at Eastward House following periods of disruption to their schooling. They make suitable progress in developing their knowledge, understanding and skills from their initial starting points within teaching activities. This is due to the beneficial support and encouragement they receive from teaching staff. Many pupils develop important social and life skills during their time at the school. These skills prepare pupils well for the next stage in their lives.

Across the school, many pupils develop their social and communication skills suitably. Many pupils listen attentively to their teachers and peers. Overall they follow instructions promptly and are keen to respond to teachers' questions and to contribute appropriately towards class discussions. Many pupils speak clearly using a suitable range of vocabulary including subject specific vocabulary to express their views and explain their thinking. For example a few pupils debate the benefits and disadvantages of various social media platforms confidently. A few pupils offer only brief responses to teachers' questions.

Many pupils work appropriately in pairs or small groups. They take turns and co-operate with teaching staff and their peers successfully.

The majority of pupils develop appropriate reading skills in line with their ability. For example, they successfully re-arrange the instructions within a recipe to make savoury scones. The majority of pupils read with fluency and demonstrate a secure understanding of a range of texts. They skim and scan texts and can locate information effectively to inform their spoken and written responses. More able pupils develop sound inference and deduction skills to draw conclusions. For example, they read current news articles and consider the motives of the Russian government during the recent war with Ukraine. A few pupils enjoy reading a range of genres such as factually based materials and horror stories such as 'Night of the Living Dummy' by R.L.Stine.

Overall, the standard of writing across the school is variable. The majority of pupils produce writing that is structured appropriately and is technically secure. They use a suitable range of vocabulary and share their opinions and ideas successfully. These pupils write for a variety of different purposes and audiences suitably. For example, they write formal letters and extended pieces of creative writing about being deserted on an island. However, a minority of pupils make basic errors in their spelling, punctuation and grammar.

Many pupils develop their numeracy skills suitably within a range of meaningful contexts. Generally, they have a secure grasp of number concepts and explain their methods and their reasoning. For example they calculate the total weekly spend on food, housing, and energy. Pupils have a secure grasp of shapes and measures. For example they identify shapes of objects and angles while out in the community. In addition, they apply co-ordinates to find hidden treasure on a map.

A majority of pupils make appropriate use of information and communication technology (ICT) to facilitate their learning. For example, younger pupils use word processing packages to compose letters of support to charities of their choice. A few older pupils use online platforms to engage with science lessons and to submit and receive feedback on their work. However, generally, pupils across the school do not apply and develop their ICT skills sufficiently across the curriculum.

Many pupils develop appropriate creative skills through a range of activities. These include designing prints to decorate canvas bags and water bottles and creating attractive models of sea turtles. Pupils enjoy planting flowers and vegetables at the school's allotment as well as designing a frightening scarecrow to deter the birds. In addition, a few pupils enjoy the guitar lessons offered at the school.

Many pupils improve their physical skills well. Pupils access a range of exciting activities, which help them understand the benefits of being fit and healthy. They develop their self-confidence, resilience and self-esteem. For example, pupils enjoy navigating an obstacle course with their eyes closed, following the verbal instructions of a trusted partner. The obstacle course includes twisting paths, balance beams, small jumps, and changes in height.

Most older pupils achieve a narrow range of qualifications at a level appropriate to their abilities. This includes subjects such as English language, mathematics, sociology, history and computer science.

Over the last two years, all pupils leaving Key Stage 4 progressed into education, training or employment.

Well-being and attitudes to learning

Pupils at Eastward House are happy to attend and develop a sense of pride and belonging during their time at the school. They feel safe and secure and know who to go to if they are worried or concerned. Most pupils say that they are treated fairly and are free from bullying and harassment.

Most pupils believe that the school encourages them to treat others with respect. They are polite, courteous and respectful to their peers, staff and visitors. Most pupils behave well in lessons and around the school. With support, many pupils are developing the confidence to share their views and opinions.

Most pupils understand how to develop healthy lifestyles. They know the importance of a balanced diet, for example eating a 'rainbow' of fruit and vegetables a day. Most take part in regular exercise, including, for example mixed martial arts, boxing and swimming.

Most pupils enjoy the range of regular opportunities offered by the school to develop their well-being, for example pond dipping, visiting a local allotment, beach studies, yoga and mindfulness. These opportunities have a positive impact on the health and well-being of pupils and helps build their confidence and strengthen their engagement.

Many pupils attend school regularly. The minority of pupils who do not attend regularly are supported by useful transition plans and generally improve their

attendance over time. Many of these pupils positively improve their attendance compared to their previous placements. For these pupils, this represents significant progress.

A few pupils benefit from opportunities to develop their leadership skills. For example, they enjoy their roles as library and IT monitors. However, many pupils do not have the opportunity to develop their leadership skills well enough due to the limited opportunities.

During their time at the school, most pupils develop successful relationships with their peers and teachers. With support and encouragement, they readily engage in and complete their tasks. They generally sustain concentration well. A minority of pupils show resilience when working independently. These pupils are confident, capable learners, who are ready to learn.

Teaching and learning experiences

Staff at Eastward House build positive, trusting working relationships with their pupils. Nearly all teachers and teaching assistants have effective, in-depth knowledge of pupils' contexts and of their social and emotional needs. As a result, staff react and adapt to pupils in a timely fashion, allowing pupils to settle quickly, self-regulate, and engage with their learning with confidence. Staff provide effective behavioural role-models, and their lead is followed by the pupils, which fosters a calm learning environment and mutual respect between all members of the school.

The school's curriculum policy focuses on delivering the six areas of learning and experience from Curriculum for Wales. Responsibility for planning of curriculum, teaching and assessment is delegated to teachers which takes the form of short- to medium-term activity timetables under half-termly themes. For example, younger pupils learn through the theme of "Help". However, there are no long-term plans or schemes of work and assessment in place. This limits leaders' ability to ensure that the intended curriculum is consistently delivered so that pupils' skills and understanding are developed systematically.

For older pupils, the school's accreditation offer is too narrow, and does not always provide a wide enough range of courses and qualifications to allow productive matching of programmes of study to pupils' potential future plans and pathways.

Where teaching is most effective, teachers provide good opportunities for pupils to recall prior learning and build upon their knowledge and understanding. They frame learning by providing pupils with clear learning objectives for activities, lessons and short sequences of lessons. In a few cases, this practice is enhanced by the use of co-constructed success criteria, for example when pupils agree with their teacher that they will aim to use imperative verbs and rhetorical questioning in their written responses. These practices enable pupils to engage with their learning with a sense of purpose and clarity, in turn instilling confidence and pride in their achievements.

Curriculum planning at the school is weak and underdeveloped. As a result, levels of challenge provided by activities and lessons across the school are variable and pupils' skills across the curriculum are not developed progressively.

In many lessons, staff use verbal feedback to good effect to encourage and motivate pupils, and to validate their achievements. In these lessons, pupils demonstrate a willingness to experiment and persevere with their learning. However, throughout the school, written feedback does not tell the pupils what they need to do to improve their work.

The school is in the early stages of developing its use of assessment and data. Staff collect a range of largely summative assessment information, including indicative use of Curriculum for Wales progression steps, and standardised baseline testing of numeracy and literacy. In a few areas, this information is used to inform short- and medium-term classroom provision effectively, but its use across the school to enable leaders to track and monitor pupil progress is underdeveloped.

Many individual lessons and intervention sessions have an appropriate focus on development of pupils' literacy, numeracy and digital skills, for example effective handwriting intervention sessions, or when younger pupils compose fictional castaway narratives. However, the school's policy and planning for use of skills across the curriculum is weak. The school has no structured plans to develop and assess pupils' skills progressively.

Many teachers and teaching assistants have appropriate levels of experience and expertise. However, around half of GCSE courses are not delivered by subject specialist teachers. These courses are reliant on pupils' self-directed, independent study, using online platforms as the main means of support. As a result, teachers' ability to assess and evaluate pupils' learning is limited.

The school enriches its curriculum with a range of appropriate and worthwhile external visits through which pupils develop valuable life skills, social confidence, and awareness of the outside world, for example pond-building, birdwatching, and nature walks on local beaches.

The school has enriched provision in several areas by establishing partnerships with, or using services provided by, external organisations. For example, the school uses Careers Wales to provide advice to pupils about the world of work and has worked with Cardiff Metropolitan University to allow pupils to take part in a week-long digital skills course.

Annual reports to parents are extensive and detailed, and provide clear, valuable information on attitudes to learning and progress being made by pupils in a social and emotional context. However, reports are not sufficiently clear regarding academic progress made by pupils, including progress made towards their child's individual targets.

Care, support and guidance

Eastward House provides an inclusive, nurturing environment that promotes the development of pupils' confidence and self-esteem successfully.

Teachers and support staff have developed strong relationships with pupils and know their pupils well. They foster a calm and caring environment. A few provide good

quality specialised support, for example in phonics and providing support for pupils with dyslexia and dyscalculia.

Support for pupils with additional learning needs (ALN) is developing appropriately and broadly meets their needs. The school has introduced person centred practice successfully to focus the teaching on the individual needs, interests and aspirations of each pupil. Annual reviews are carried out in accordance with Welsh Government guidance and pupils are encouraged to contribute and take an active part in these meetings. Nearly all individual development plans (IDPs) outline suitable additional learning provision for pupils with additional learning needs. All pupils have useful one-page profiles that outline their aspirations and what is important to them. These profiles help staff to support their learning and well-being. However, there are generally limited resources to support individual pupils' needs. This includes access to specialist teaching. As a result, important aspects of provision outlined in statements of educational needs and IDPs are currently not being delivered. Across the school, the impact of ALN provision on the progress pupils are making is not evaluated well enough.

Staff at the school liaise effectively with parents and carers on a regular basis. This supports the parents well and enables them to raise any issues that may affect their child's well-being.

Leaders have begun to develop a useful tracking system to monitor pupils' behaviour and have recently introduced a scheme to support pupils' emotional health and well-being. However, in general, systems to track the progress of pupils against their individual targets are underdeveloped.

The school provides a wide range of opportunities for pupils to take part in regular physical activities, including PE, athletics, boxing and mixed martial arts. Opportunities for pupils to develop their creative skills are developing well. Many pupils develop appropriate creative skills through a range of activities. These include designing bunting, creating large scale works of art on the beach and learning about the 'artist of the week'.

Throughout the school, staff provide an appropriate emphasis on the development of life skills such as weekly cookery sessions, housekeeping and personal care. In addition, the school uses valuable off-site trips and activities to engage pupils in their learning. They have established close links with the local community. For example, there are good opportunities for pupils to visit the local fire station, an engineering company, shops and cafes, Dŵr Cymru and a global computer store in the city centre. This fosters a sense of belonging in the local community. Further, it helps support and prepare pupils in developing their confidence in social situations and prepares them for life beyond school.

The school is beginning to help pupils to understand their Welsh identity, heritage and culture. For example, older pupils study Welsh winter customs, such as learning about the Mari Lwyd and calennig. Younger pupils celebrate Dydd Santes Dwynwen. Pupils learn about the history of life in Wales, for example through visits to St Fagans, National Museum of History. However, opportunities for pupils to understand issues relating to equality and diversity are less well developed.

Access to the school is controlled effectively and there are secure measures in place to monitor pupils' arrival and departure from the school premises. Furthermore, there are suitable arrangements to record and follow up on pupil absence and attendance. As a result, the school premises are secure, and this contributes positively towards pupils feeling safe at the school.

All staff have undertaken statutory safeguarding and Prevent training and understand how to report any safeguarding concerns should they arise. The school has procedures in place to make appropriate and timely referrals to other agencies when it has a safeguarding concern. However, leaders' record keeping of these referrals and other safeguarding matters is not sufficiently robust.

Leadership and management

In the relatively short period since the school's launch in November 2021, leaders have successfully fostered a nurturing culture and developed a close family community to which pupils and parents are pleased to belong. The shared vision of 'a school for every child' is well embedded and understood well by staff, pupils, parents and carers. This overarching vision serves as the foundation of the school's work.

The school has recently experienced a period of significant disruption to the management and strategic leadership of the school. This includes a period when a senior member of staff moved to a sister school, due to staff absence, to provide leadership. This hiatus has limited the leaders' ability to establish effective mechanisms to support the operation, management and performance of the school.

The school has experienced significant challenges in recruiting and retaining suitably qualified staff. At the time of inspection, the school does not have a full complement of specialists and teaching staff in position. This hinders leaders' ability to focus on improvement priorities and negatively impacts on the consistency and quality of teaching that the school provides, particularly additional learning provision.

Leaders do not gather and analyse first hand evidence to evaluate the quality and effectiveness of teaching. Performance management processes do not currently evaluate the effectiveness of teaching and the additional learning needs provision of the school. Due to the limited amount of quality assurance work undertaken, leaders do not have a robust understanding of the strengths and areas for development within the provision, which limits their ability to plan strategically for improvement.

The proprietor, driven by a passion for building a school community that supports the growth of individuals, maintains strong links with the school and engages regularly with leaders to make decisions to support the smooth running of the school. However, whilst they are highly engaged, formal arrangements for the proprietor to challenge leaders regarding the quality of teaching and learning, to manage leaders' performance and the robust evaluation and review of school policies are underdeveloped. As a result, this limits the ability of the proprietor to offer clear strategic oversight and to act as a critical friend.

In response to recommendations from the last inspection, leaders have improved aspects of the learning environment. For example, areas of the school have been recarpeted and new equipment added to the sensory room. However, insufficient

progress has been made towards clarifying roles and responsibilities and newly written job descriptions do not collectively provide sufficient clarity concerning oversight of the curriculum, teaching and learning, and line management structures for staff. As a result, leaders' responsibilities are not defined clearly enough and over time leaders have not demonstrated an ability to implement and sustain improvements.

Regular updates provided to parents and carers about their children's activities at school are valued and, through a variety of effective communication methods, parents feel involved in their child's education. Supportive trusting relationships between all members of the community are a strength of the school.

The school benefits from its links with the other schools within the group. This includes the sharing of specialist teaching staff, access to online sessions delivered by teachers at another school and sharing of good practice. A member of staff has been appointed to oversee teaching and learning across the three schools. However, this appointment is too recent to gauge its impact.

Across the school staff engage positively with a suitable programme of meetings. For example, teaching staff meet regularly to discuss pupils' progress, teaching and assessment. Effective records of these meetings demonstrate teachers' genuine desire to identify strengths in the school's provision and to identify ways in which it could improve.

Leaders provide staff with appropriate opportunities to access online professional development courses. However, new systems to offer and track the impact of this training are at a very early stage of implementation.

The school is not fully compliant with the Independent School Standards (Wales) Regulations 2003.

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 publication. Any enquiries or comments regarding this document/publication should be addressed to:

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