



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

A report on

ACT Schools

Date of inspection: May 2022

by

Estyn, Her Majesty's Inspectorate for Education

and Training in Wales

About ACT Schools

ACT Schools is an independent special day school with campuses in Cardiff and Caerphilly. It provides education for pupils aged 11 to 16 years who have special educational needs, specifically social, emotional and behavioural difficulties, and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder. The school is administered by ACT (Holdings) Ltd, a subsidiary of Cardiff and The Vale College.

There are currently 72 pupils at the school. A minority of the pupils has a statement of special educational needs. A very few pupils are looked after by local authorities in Wales.

The head of education has been in post for four years.

Main findings

Strengths

Across the school, staff work together effectively to create a positive and supportive learning environment that helps ensure that pupils feel safe and are ready to learn. This collaborative approach to meeting pupils' needs and support their learning is a strong feature of the school's provision. For example, almost all teaching staff know their pupils' context, ability and what motivates and interests them. They use this information skilfully during sessions to support and challenge pupils with their work.

In lessons observed during this monitoring visit and around the school, most pupils display positive attitudes to their peers, visitors and staff and towards their learning. Overall, many pupils engage well, display enthusiasm during tasks and are eager to demonstrate their knowledge and skills. In relation to their individual starting points, these pupils make at least suitable progress over time.

During the COVID-19 pandemic the school successfully established an outreach provision team that it is continuing to expand and develop. The work of the team is targeted at both pupils and their parents and carers to better support each pupil's behaviour, well-being and learning. This development has been integral to improving the re-integration of pupils to education. The development has also made a positive contribution to strengthening the school's relationship with parents and carers. For example, parental and carer attendance at pupil progress meetings has improved from less than 10% three years ago to 92% in the 2021- 2022 academic year.

Areas for development

Whilst the school has a supportive approach to enhancing pupil attendance, a minority of pupils do not attend regularly.

The school's improvement plan identifies areas for development clearly, which are mostly ambitious and accompanied by a suitable implementation strategy. However, within the plan, and other areas of the school's work, whole-school targets for improvement, and the analysis and use of data, are too variable.

Recommendations

The school should:

R1 Improve pupil attendance

R2 Ensure that the analysis and use of data informs target setting and improvement planning more effectively

Progress in addressing recommendations from previous visit or inspection report

R1. Ensure that the school complies fully with in the Independent School Standards (Wales) Regulations 2003

At the time of the school's last monitoring visit in 2020, on one of the school's campuses a few pupils were observed smoking during break times, which was condoned by staff. Since this time, the school has taken suitable actions to address this recommendation fully. For example, with support from ASH Cymru, an education and support campaign has taken place successfully for pupils and staff who were active smokers, and a suitable lead-in time introduced for all sites to follow the school's 'clean air campus' policy. As a result, the school now complies fully with Regulation 3[2][b] of the Independent School Standards (Wales) Regulations 2003.

R2. Improve requests for information from local authorities, in relation to pupils' ability levels, prior to accepting pupils on the roll of the school

The school has strengthened its arrangements for requests from placing authorities for information on pupils' ability as part of its admissions and referral process. This approach includes gathering specific information about each pupil's prior attainment and current working levels and targets. This information, together with recently revised baseline assessments, is used to identify if there are gaps in each pupil's prior learning. It is also being used suitably by the inclusion and outreach teams and the teaching staff to plan and support pupils' learning appropriately. However, it is too early to evaluate the long-term effectiveness of this work on improving pupils' progress and outcomes.

R3. Further improve the progress in addressing the two recommendations from the last monitoring visit

The school has generally taken suitable actions to strengthen self-evaluation and improvement planning and further develop and make best use of teaching assistants.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the school established an 'advisory group' to oversee all aspects of its strategic work. Members of this group are independent of the school and provide valuable expert practitioner perspectives in key areas of pupil and school development. These areas include knowledge of best practice nationally and internationally in ALN and improving learner outcomes and well-being. The group has started to act as a critical friend and influence the school's improvement planning processes positively. However, the school's analysis and use of data for self-evaluation and improvement planning are too variable.

Other developments include enhancing opportunities for listening to and taking account of pupils' views through, for example, the learner council and regular pupil surveys. These activities are successfully influencing improvements in the quality of provision such as enhancing the range of enrichment sessions for pupils.

The school has taken several useful actions to further develop the role of teaching assistants and how they are deployed to make best use. For example, training has

been provided to support teaching assistants to lead on the monitoring of pupil targets. The school has also recently extended its teaching and learning quality assurance framework to include teaching assistants. It is not possible to evaluate the impact of these early developments yet.

More generally, whilst the school has made several useful improvements to its lesson observation forms, overall, they do not have a strong enough focus on pupil progress.

Compliance with the standards for registration

Standard 1: The quality of education provided by the school

On the basis of this visit, there is no evidence to indicate that the school does not meet the regulatory requirements for this standard.

Standard 2: The spiritual, moral, and cultural development of pupils

On this visit, Estyn did not inspect Standard 2.

Standard 3: Welfare, health and safety of pupils

On the basis of this visit, there is no evidence to indicate that the school does not meet the regulatory requirements for this standard.

Standard 4: The suitability of proprietors and staff

On this visit, Estyn did not inspect Standard 4.

Standard 5: Premises of and boarding accommodation at schools

On this visit, Estyn did not inspect Standard 5.

Standard 6: The provision of information

On the basis of this visit, there is no evidence to indicate that the school does not meet the regulatory requirements for this standard.

Standard 7: The manner in which complaints are to be handled

On the basis of this visit, there is no evidence to indicate that the school does not meet the regulatory requirements for this standard.

Recommendation regarding continued registration

When considering this school's registration the Welsh Government may wish to have regard to the following recommendation:

On the basis of this visit, there is no evidence to indicate that the school does not meet the requirements of the Independent School Standards (Wales) Regulations 2003.

Inspectors' judgements on this limited inspection should not prejudice the findings of a future full Section 163 inspection.

Copies of the report

Copies of this report are available from the school and from the Estyn website (<http://www.estyn.gov.wales>)

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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