



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

**A report on**

**Amberleigh Therapeutic School**

**Date of inspection: September 2024**

**by**

**Estyn, His Majesty's Inspectorate for Education**

**and Training in Wales**

**This report is also available in Welsh.**

## About Amberleigh Therapeutic School

Name of provider	Amberleigh Therapeutic School, Golf Hall
Proprietor status	Amberleigh Care Ltd.
Language of the provider	English
Type of school	Independent ALN specialist
Residential provision?	Yes
Number of pupils on roll	13
Pupils of statutory school age	13
Date of previous Estyn inspection (if applicable)	21/11/2016
Start date of inspection	23/09/2024
<p>School context:</p> <p>Amberleigh Therapeutic School is an independent school, which provides education, care and therapy for up to 20 pupils aged between 11 to 18 years who have social, emotional and behavioural difficulties. There are currently 13 pupils on roll.</p> <p>The school is administered by Amberleigh Care Limited, a specialist children's services agency, which has another independent special school in England.</p> <p>Around half of the pupils have an individual development plan (IDP) or equivalent. All of the pupils are looked after by local authorities in Wales or England and live in the on-site children's home.</p> <p>The headteacher has been in post since September 2024, having been in post as deputy headteacher since January 2021. They are supported by a deputy headteacher who was new in post at the time of the inspection.</p> <p>The school offers a tailored curriculum, which is differentiated for each pupil within a 'stage not age' approach. Pupils have the opportunity to study and gain accreditation for an appropriate range of subjects at GCSE, BTEC, Functional Skills Level 1 &amp; 2, Entry Level Awards, Certificates and Diplomas. Class sizes do not exceed four pupils. Staff at the school meet daily and hold twice weekly extended therapeutic process community meetings to ensure that they are fully aware of the needs of the pupils. All pupils at the school attend at least one therapy session weekly to address trauma and associated needs.</p>	

The school was last visited by a team from HMI in March 2023. At this time, the school met the requirements of the Independent School Standards (Wales) Regulations.

## Summary

Nearly all pupils at Amberleigh Therapeutic School respond well to the nurturing and supportive environment it provides. Over time, most of pupils make sound progress from their initial starting points in literacy and numeracy. Pupils are well supported to build their interpersonal skills including listening, empathy and reflection and make extremely effective progress in developing social and communication skills. However, there are limited opportunities for pupils to develop their digital and ICT skills.

Teaching staff are highly committed, know the pupils well and develop good working relationships with them. Where planning, assessment and feedback are effective, both staff and pupils have a good understanding of progress and how to move learning forward. However, teachers' planning does not always link to pupil additional learning needs (ALN) and focus on individual targets identified in pupils' individual development plans (IDPs) or equivalent well enough.

The school supports the pupils very well to develop 'career action plans' and experience the best possible opportunities within work experience programmes. Staff plan purposeful opportunities for pupils to improve their understanding of the world of work and potential future careers. In addition, the 'Golfa Produce' enterprise helps pupils to gain valuable skills for the workplace. This is a particularly strong feature of the school.

All pupils have one-to-one therapeutic sessions through the opportunity to work individually as part of a nurture session, and attend valuable group meetings where they can raise issues that are important to them. As a result, pupils' interactions with each other and staff are positive and respectful.

Pupils have a strong voice across Amberleigh and help influence the work of the school. They are confident that staff listen and act on their views. In addition, across the school, pupils develop valuable leadership skills, for example as part of regular community meetings.

Leaders, education staff and staff from the wider team hold regular meetings, which provide valuable opportunities for staff to discuss operational matters and share practice in areas such as safeguarding, planning, and assessment. However leaders do not extract and analyse information well enough to identify patterns and trends effectively.

Leaders use the information from their self-evaluation activities well to agree school priorities for improvement. They have a good track record of improvement and have successfully addressed the recommendation from the monitoring visit in 2023. They evaluate progress and feedback regularly and are not afraid to amend their approaches or change direction if something is not working. However, many of these changes, such as the necessary improvements to professional learning, are in the very early stages of development due to recent changes in leadership and have not yet started to have an impact.

## Main evaluation

### Learning and progress

Most pupils who attend Amberleigh Therapeutic School make secure progress from their individual starting points. The majority recall previous learning well and apply this to new contexts and tasks. They develop their knowledge and understanding successfully.

In lessons and around the school, many pupils develop their social skills particularly well. They develop strong working relationships with staff and learn to work appropriately alongside their peers. They listen attentively to their teachers and respectfully to their peers. Nearly all pupils demonstrate appropriate social interaction skills and greet visitors to the school with exemplary manners and polite language.

Most pupils make strong progress in developing their literacy skills. They respond to teachers' questioning suitably, using short sentences, relevant examples and subject specific vocabulary. They confidently share their opinions with many providing well thought out reasons to support their views, for example when discussing careers in the hospitality industry or when planning and building a bird box.

Most pupils make sound progress in developing their numeracy skills in mathematics lessons and across the curriculum. For example, they calculate the size of wood required to make a bird box by drawing scale diagrams and are able to measure to the nearest millimetre.

A minority of pupils achieve a range of qualifications in subjects such as English, mathematics, catering, hospitality and enterprise, which are well matched to their ability, interests and needs. In the last academic year, a minority of pupils achieved their Duke of Edinburgh award at either bronze or silver level.

Over their time at the school, nearly all pupils make very strong progress in improving their attendance and engagement from their individual starting points.

### The curriculum and teaching

The school has a broad and balanced curriculum, which focuses on pupils' developmental stages rather than their chronological ages. This curriculum provides meaningful opportunities for pupils to progress in all subject areas, often in a real-world context.

The approach to developing pupils' literacy and numeracy skills has been embedded successfully across the curriculum. Pupils have valuable opportunities to apply their numeracy skills in subjects such as craft and in their science lessons. Many teachers plan or build on naturally arising opportunities, to develop skills such as when calculating the speed and acceleration of a model car in a science lesson. However, a lack of systematic planning limits the progress pupils make in the development of their ICT and digital skills.

Many pupils enjoy a range of beneficial and rewarding physical and outdoor activities as part of the school's curriculum offer, for example hill walking, undertaking a fitness programme, working towards a 5km run, or playing basketball and football.

Additionally, the school provides strong opportunities to develop pupils' social skills through participating in valuable teambuilding activities such as raft building and paddleboarding. As a result, most pupils successfully improve their fitness and well-being.

### **Enrichment activities and holistic learning**

Many pupils also participate in a range of beneficial enrichment activities after school, which contributes effectively to their learning, engagement and well-being. For example, pupils have the opportunity to attend maths, language (including Welsh and German), model building and performing arts clubs in addition to study skills sessions. Nearly all pupils are able to take part in Duke of Edinburgh bronze, silver and gold activities. They enjoy these activities and attend consistently, providing opportunities for pupils to enhance their learning alongside meaningful social interactions outside of the classroom.

The school has a detailed personal, social and health education (PSHE) scheme of work, which includes relationships and sexuality education (RSE), delivered at the level appropriate to the needs of the pupils. The school works collaboratively with outside agencies to successfully support pupils' understanding and build positive relationships. For example, regular visits from the local police community support officers deliver valuable sessions on topics such as drink driving and county lines. Whilst the PSHE scheme of work covers vital topics enabling pupils to understand how to keep themselves safe and understand their rights, reference to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of a Child (UNCRC) within the curriculum is limited.

Across the school, staff foster positive working relationships with pupils based on a culture of trust and mutual respect. In most lessons, teachers have high expectations of pupils. They use questioning securely to check pupils' understanding, monitor their progress and provide useful verbal feedback and praise.

Across the school, lessons are generally well organised and consequently pupils have a clear understanding of what is expected of them. However, there are inconsistencies in the development of schemes of work and a lack of coherent planning to apply strategies to support pupils with additional learning needs (ALN). In addition, teachers' understanding of how individuals' ALN may hinder their learning is limited.

### **Careers and experiences in the wider community**

The school provides comprehensive career advice and support to all pupils including regular meetings with the school careers lead to develop detailed 'career action plans' detailing their future aspirations. This allows the school to provide appropriate work experience placements with targeted skill development.

In partnership with local businesses, pupils gain meaningful experiences and placements at various settings including the fire station, butchers, charity shop, railway station, cafes and national companies like agricultural manufacturers and supermarkets. Where appropriate, pupils also have valuable opportunities to develop career skills onsite, through placements with the school maintenance team. The school's enterprise project, 'Golfa Produce', also allows pupils to develop a valuable range of skills while allowing to sell and celebrate their creations at local market events.

As a result of this tailored approach, nearly all pupils engage positively in the careers process understanding its importance for future progression.

### **Community and nurture**

Pupil voice at Amberleigh is very strong. Nearly all pupils believe that they have a voice in the school and are confident that education staff will listen to them to influence change. Feedback to pupils on their views is punctual, and the pupils are often actively involved in decision-making, including the appointment of staff, supporting them to feel valued and respected. There are multiple opportunities across the school for pupils to share their views appropriately in both group and individual meetings. In addition, the school offers meaningful opportunities for pupils to take on leadership roles.

### **Amberleigh Extended Community**

The school's integrated therapeutic and community living approach fosters a nurturing and trusting environment where pupils are encouraged to talk about how they feel, take on responsibility and develop a sense of belonging.

At the heart of this culture are daily meetings immediately before and after school, along with extended meetings twice a week allowing pupils to share their thoughts and experiences in an open, honest and safe way. Through these experiences, many pupils learn to articulate their views positively, developing skills to understand and appreciate different views or opinions.

Timetabled nurture sessions provide a safe place for pupils to build trusting relationships and learn strategies to help to regulate their emotions. For example, nearly all pupils develop the skills to know when to withdraw themselves from lessons for short periods of time and how to then re-engage promptly in their learning. As a result, nearly all pupils are able to engage fully in the school's wider curriculum. The nurture intervention lead meets regularly with the school's therapists to discuss individual pupils and observes pupils in class on a regular basis. Successful strategies are communicated to the wider staff team both informally through day to day interactions and formally through staff meetings.

The multi-disciplinary approach to meeting pupils' social, emotional and mental health needs to support their learning is a strong feature of the school's work.

### **Keeping safe**

Nearly all staff have a good understanding of pupils' well-being and wider mental health needs. They provide pupils with a beneficial range of tools to support their social and emotional development, regulate their behaviour and prepare them well for life after education. Nearly all pupils independently and confidently draw upon these tools appropriately when required.

The school's approach to behaviour management is effective and creates a calm learning atmosphere at the school. There are suitable arrangements in place to manage, record and report any instances of challenging behaviour. Individual pupil risk assessments are updated after significant incidents, which supports staff to understand the best strategies to support the pupils. The positive approaches to managing pupils' behaviour in school are well co-ordinated between the school and the home and staff in the linked residential home support the school very effectively.

The school consistently approaches any instances of bullying and focuses suitably on developing a positive ethos and lack of tolerance to bullying, valuing and celebrating individuality and supporting the development of emotional literacy, self-esteem and resilience. Pupils respond very well to the community meetings, which allow them to raise concerns and discuss issues with their peers.

The school places a strong emphasis on ensuring that pupils are safe. Leaders encourage all staff to understand their responsibility to provide a safe environment for pupils with varied and complex needs. However, whilst safeguarding concerns are handled appropriately and in a timely manner, a lack of cohesion in the recording of concerns limits the schools ability to readily provide a detailed overview for each pupil, with any patterns and issues presented clearly.

### **Leadership**

In a very short space of time, the headteacher has a clear vision for the school. This is based around promoting pupils' well-being, ensuring that all pupils have high quality opportunities for learning and that staff and pupils share a sense of ambition for what pupils can achieve. Leaders have high ambitions for their pupils and high expectations of their staff.

Since their appointment, the headteacher has begun to review the schools policies and procedures and introduced comprehensive processes and systems to strengthen the quality assurance arrangements. Senior leaders have developed a detailed programme for evaluating the work of the school. This provides a useful overview of key events over the year and includes a programme of lesson observations, assessment dates, meeting dates and professional learning sessions. The headteacher has recently appointed a new deputy headteacher who will increase the capacity to drive improvements in key priority areas.

Leaders have placed staff well-being at the heart of their work and provide opportunities for regular reflection and support. This includes valuable opportunities



for the education staff to discuss any issues or concerns with the therapy team as part of 'dynamic' group meetings. As a result, staff feel valued and this contributes positively to the strong sense of community.

Leaders collect a wide range of data to support self-evaluation and improvement planning. However, this data is not used well enough to identify trends in teaching and learning and interaction with support services to gauge whether there is enough provision to meet the needs of learners. In some important areas, leaders do not evaluate the impact of actions and initiatives fully.

### **Understanding responsibilities and developing professional learning**

Staff have a secure understanding of their individual roles within the school. Education staff responsibilities are agreed as targets within performance management processes and discussed on an annual basis. Furthermore, roles and responsibilities are set out in generic job descriptions. Leaders meet regularly to discuss the performance of individual staff members, their needs and any future support and challenge required. However, in nearly all cases, as job descriptions do not fully document the wide-ranging and extensive responsibilities of the post holders, this impacts the ability of the proprietor to make accurate assessments of individual performance or hold them to account.

The school provides personalised opportunities for professional development. For example, staff have the opportunity to complete postgraduate qualifications and national professional qualifications. However, professional learning does not always effectively link to improving teaching and learning or implementing strategies to support pupils with ALN. Leaders are in the early stages of strengthening the training programme. However, it is too early to evaluate the impact of this work.

Leaders recognise the challenges that lie ahead, and display a commitment and determination to address these. However, much of the work done to address the aspects of the school that need improvement are in a very early stage of development and it is too early to judge the impact of this.

## **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 2024. 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.

## **Safeguarding**

The school's arrangements for safeguarding pupils do not give any cause for concern.

## **Recommendations**

We have made four recommendations to help the school continue to improve:

- R1 Consolidate essential information to enable leaders to more effectively evaluate the impact of school initiatives
- R2 Ensure that staff use information regarding pupils' ALN when planning lessons and learning activities
- R3 Further develop professional learning to focus more sharply on teaching and learning and strategies to support pupils with ALN
- R4 Strengthen the curriculum to provide pupils with further opportunities to develop their digital skills and an awareness of UNCRC

## **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.

## 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

## Appendix 1: Numbers – quantities and proportions

The report makes references to different quantities and proportions e.g. '*most pupils...*' or '*very few pupils...*'. We use these terms to describe quantities and proportions as outlined in the table below:

nearly all =	with very few exceptions
most =	90% or more
many =	70% or more
a majority =	over 60%
half =	50%
around half =	close to 50%
a minority =	below 40%
few =	below 20%
very few =	less than 10%

## 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 (Wales) Regulations 2024. In schools that provide non-maintained nursery education, this report also satisfies the requirements of Schedule 26 of the School Standards and Framework

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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