



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

A report on

Ruthin School

**Mold Road
Ruthin
Denbighshire
LL15 1EE**

Date of inspection: October 2024

by

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

This report is also available in Welsh.

About Ruthin School

Name of provider	Ruthin School
Proprietor status	The school is a private limited company owned by Ruthin Education Limited
Language of the provider	English
Type of school	Independent Secondary
Residential provision?	Yes
Number of pupils on roll	239
Pupils of statutory school age	111
Date of previous Estyn inspection (if applicable)	11/02/2019
Start date of inspection	21/10/2024

School context:

Ruthin School is a co-educational boarding and day school for pupils from the age of 11 to 18 years. The school is situated on the outskirts of Ruthin, a small market town in the Vale of Clwyd, Denbighshire.

The school is a limited company overseen by the Board of Management. There are currently 239 pupils in the school, of whom 128 are sixth-form pupils. Just over half of all pupils are boarders. Day pupils come from a wide catchment area that includes Denbighshire, Flintshire and Cheshire.

Around 74% of the school's pupils are from a minority ethnic background, over half of whom are Chinese. There are 141 pupils, including 85 in the sixth form, who speak English as an additional language. A very few pupils speak Welsh as a first language or to an equivalent standard.

The school selects pupils into the school based on ability and academic attainment. The school requires overseas pupils to have a good level of English before starting any examination course. The sixth form is selective. Pupils are expected to have achieved high grades at GCSE to embark on A level courses.

Around 45% of pupils attending the school receive scholarships or bursaries.

The school's last core inspection was in February 2019. Since the core inspection, the school has responded successfully to a focused inspection. Since this time the school has had four new headteachers and the senior leadership team and Board of Management have been restructured.

The headteacher has been in post since April 2024.

Summary

Since the headteacher's appointment, significant progress has been made in building trust and collaboration among staff, pupils, and parents, fostering a strong belief in the school's vision. While the school has strategic plans supporting this vision, many initiatives are still in the early stages of implementation, making it premature to assess their overall impact on the work of the school.

Pupils enjoy being part of a diverse community, with opportunities for leadership roles and they enjoy a broad, balanced curriculum. Programs such as electives and co-curricular activities enrich pupils' personal and social development. This is a strength of the school.

Lessons are generally focused and well-structured, fostering good pupil-teacher relationships, though around half of lessons lack opportunities for independent learning. The school's assessment practices provide timely feedback to pupils. However, these do not always indicate what pupils need to do to make further progress.

Most pupils demonstrate strong writing and analytical skills, effectively completing tasks such as annotating texts and creatively expressing ideas through diary entries. Listening skills are generally good, although oracy skills are less well developed, with many pupils hesitant to engage in detailed responses. In mathematics, pupils show advanced ability, progressing from basic algebra to complex problem-solving. Pupils' physical, artistic and musical skills are nurtured, including independently exploring creative projects. While pupils have strong digital skills their use across subjects is underdeveloped.

Safeguarding practices are robust, with a dedicated team overseeing pupil welfare and regular training ensuring staff are well-prepared to address concerns. However, ongoing suitability checks for staff do not comply with recent legislative changes.

Governance structures are sound. However, with the high number of leadership changes in recent time the Board of Management has not maintained a robust scrutiny of the work of the school, resulting in some compliance issues remaining unaddressed.

The school does not comply fully with the Independent School Standards (Wales) Regulations 2024.

Main evaluation

New beginnings and current actions

In the short time since joining the school, the headteacher has worked tirelessly to establish secure, productive working relationships with staff, pupils and parents and has gained an effective understanding of the local and national context of the school. As a result, nearly all members of the school community have a high level of faith in her vision and optimism for the future. The headteacher and senior leaders have established an effective shared ethos and have clear ambitions for their pupils founded upon high academic and pastoral standards. Staff and leaders feel trusted, listened to, and that they benefit from a highly effective balance between autonomy and accountability in their roles.

The newly established senior leadership team has a balanced focus on both strategic and operational matters. As a result of clear allocation of roles and responsibilities, senior leaders perform their roles, individually and collaboratively, both effectively and efficiently. In turn, staff have confidence in, and clarity regarding, the work of senior leaders.

Leaders' vision and ambition for the school are supported by appropriate strategic and practical plans. However, many of the procedures and practices to achieve these ambitions are in the very early stages of implementation and it is too early to evaluate their impact on the work of the school.

Middle leaders are a cohesive, collaborative group. They are beginning to use the autonomy given to them by senior leaders to develop practice within and across faculties. They recognise and appreciate senior leaders' strategic focus on staff development and feel that this has had a transformative impact on staff morale.

The school's staff includes highly qualified, experienced, specialist teachers, several of whom bring with them extensive experience in the worlds of industry and research, and/or postgraduate degrees.

A well-established and effective team of middle and senior leaders oversees the day-to-day safeguarding work of the school. The designated safeguarding person and their team of deputies meet regularly to discuss pupils' well-being and to manage any ongoing concerns. Decisions regarding safeguarding matters are made collaboratively by this team and, as a result, this helps to ensure that timely and appropriate actions are undertaken by the school, including appropriate contact and referrals to external agencies. The school has robust systems for recording and following up on pupils who may be absent from school.

Staff receive suitable safeguarding training upon appointment and subsequent update training is broad, regular. A large proportion of the staff have undertaken safeguarding training, equivalent to that required to be a safeguarding lead officer. As a result, staff have a clear understanding of how to identify and report any concerns they may have about pupils' well-being or the conduct of other professionals.

The school has robust processes to ensure that safer recruitment procedures are completed for all newly appointed staff. However, ongoing checks to establish the continued suitability of staff have not kept pace with recent changes to legislation and do not meet statutory requirements.

Pupil experience

Nearly all pupils feel safe at the school and know that there are members of staff that will support them if they have any concerns.

Many pupils enjoy being part of the school community. They value the diverse community they belong to and the opportunities provided to further develop their understanding of other cultures, for example through a successful 'international day' celebrating different nationalities, food and traditions.

Across the school, nearly all pupils trust and have constructive working relationships with their teachers. In lessons, nearly all pupils behave well and engage purposefully with set tasks. Many sustain concentration for extended periods of time and have positive attitudes to their learning. When given the opportunity, a minority of pupils demonstrate confidence in contributing to class and small group discussions.

The school offers pupils a wide range of opportunities to hold positions of responsibility, such as prefects and houses captains. These roles provide authentic situations for pupils to develop their self-confidence and leadership skills. Pupils value these experiences and feel that staff value their contributions to school life, for example organising events to support local and national charities and supporting staff in arranging sporting events throughout the school year.

The school provides pupils with a broad and balanced curriculum. Older pupils can choose from a broad range of subjects at GCSE and A Level and new subjects are added in response to pupil demand, for example psychology and a range of arts subjects.

The curriculum is enhanced by the school's electives programme which offers pupils a range of courses, within the school timetable which develop their knowledge, understanding and skills in a variety of areas. For example: pupils in Form 3 can opt to learn basic cookery skills and join the 'introduction to economics' course; pupils in Form 4 learn CV writing and basic spreadsheet skills; and pupils in the sixth form can study mathematical modelling and physiology.

The school offers a range of co-curricular activities that contribute to pupils' personal and social development and well-being. These include opportunities for older pupils to start and run their own activities and an extensive number of weekend trips and activities, specifically for boarders. As a result, pupils' academic and co-curricular experiences are broad and comprehensive.

Spotlight 1: Planning effective learning opportunities to prepare pupils for adult life

The school's curriculum incorporates a range of learning opportunities that very effectively supports pupils' personal development. A well-structured personal and social education programme (PSE) is in place throughout the school and a pastoral programme which focuses on character development has been developed in-house, tailored to pupils in Forms 1 to 3. Pupils reflect on their experiences and think deeply about their own personal development. As a result, pupils develop confidence and self-awareness over time, allowing them to take on leadership positions and to participate in a wide variety of activities which broaden their horizons. For example, pupils in Forms 1 and 2 participate in the art award and pupils in the sixth form have opportunities to undertake work experience and to listen to expert visiting speakers. This complements the school's careers education programme, which is delivered by form tutors across the school, resulting in a positive and comprehensive approach to careers education, university preparation and preparation for adult life.

The electives, co-curricular and PSE programme combine well to provide for the holistic development of the pupils and is a strength of the school.

Nearly all lessons are calm and purposeful, allowing teachers to develop positive working relationships with pupils whom they know very well. Teachers reinforce understanding of key words and terms highly effectively, benefiting most pupils, in particular those for whom English is an additional language.

Most teachers apply their subject knowledge and understanding of public examinations highly effectively when structuring their lessons, enabling pupils to achieve particularly good public examination results and progress to their preferred universities. These teachers have high expectations and are committed to supporting pupils' learning.

In a few lessons, where pupil progress is strongest, teachers provide independent activities rooted in authentic contexts. These activities provide pupils with tailored levels of challenge and allow them to make progress at their own pace. Where this happens, teachers act as effective facilitators, validating pupils' approaches and outcomes, while allowing for an appropriate degree of self-direction. However, in around half of lessons, learning is constrained by the teacher, meaning that opportunities are missed for pupils to develop independent learning skills or work collaboratively with others.

A very few teachers use open, responsive questioning effectively to drive learning and provide appropriate challenge. Most teachers use questioning to check and evaluate pupils' understanding and recall.

Many teachers provide pupils with effective verbal feedback, for example when work is being completed. Most pupils receive detailed feedback on regular tests and assessments, which helps them to understand their current level of attainment. However, overall written feedback does not always ensure that pupils know what they need to do to make progress. In addition, there is limited expectation for pupils to respond to written feedback and teachers do not always use this information to inform future planning.

Learning

Most pupils write clearly and complete written tasks accurately. For example, Form 2 pupils highlight and annotate an excerpt from 'The Dead of Winter' by Chris Priestley to show how the writer creates mood and atmosphere and Form 4 pupils with English as an additional language create imaginative acrostic poems using complex adjectives accurately to describe their own personality. Many pupils employ a range of techniques accurately when writing creatively. For example, when Form 2 pupils write diary entries about their experience as a 'hare' in the 1885 Paper Chase at Ruthin School and in Form 3 when pupils re-write 'The Charge of the Light Brigade' in a modern context.

Nearly all pupils put their writing and recording skills to effective use when summarising and capturing outcomes from class discussions. For example, Form 4 pupils use mind maps well to organise and examine themes in 'Of Mice and Men'. In the sixth form, nearly all pupils structure highly effective notes and respond to examination questions.

Pupils across the school use subject specific terminology highly accurately, due to the constant reinforcement by teachers. The majority of pupils take care over the presentation of their written work.

Across the school, nearly all pupils listen carefully and are attentive and respectful to their peers and adults, for example when listening to Japanese exchange pupils talk about their lives in Hiroshima prefecture.

Pupils' oracy skills are less well developed by teachers. When given the opportunity, most pupils articulate their ideas with fluency. For example, Form 4 pupils recite quotations from 'Of Mice and Men' confidently and go on to explain their meaning, such as "live offa the fatta the lan" as a reference to wealth, independence and the American dream. Most of these pupils speak with purpose and clear diction. Their thoughts are well organised and developed. However, many pupils are reluctant to respond to teacher questioning. Those that do frequently respond with few words and undeveloped detail.

Across the school, most pupils demonstrate advanced mathematical skills relative to their age. As a result of highly effective curriculum planning, they develop these skills rapidly and progressively as they move through the school. For example, most pupils in Form 1 confidently substitute values into algebraic expressions and mentally calculate the result accurately. By the end of Form 5, most pupils fluently manipulate expressions to solve increasing complex equations. As they move into the sixth form, most pupils who elect to study mathematics make fluent and effective use of a broad range of mathematical knowledge, concepts and techniques. They apply these with increasing levels of independence and ingenuity in a variety of contexts. As a result, their solutions to complex problems are often elegant and innovative.

When given the opportunity, pupils effectively apply their mathematical skills across the curriculum to the level required. Overall, however, these opportunities are not firmly embedded across the curriculum.

Nearly all Form 1 and 2 pupils enthusiastically develop their creative skills independently as they work towards an art award. Pupils independently select activities including recreating a still life in the style of Sara Cwynar and developing architectural skills as they built a 3D model of their ideal kitchen. Form 1 pupils use their thinking skills effectively to design and build a handwashing device to stop the spread of water-based diseases in Kenya. In Form 3, pupils develop their musical skills well, for example many play chords as a triad, others begin to develop playing the chord melodically. Pupils add lyrics and sing enthusiastically. They hold the melody accurately with good diction and pronunciation.

Most pupils are confident users of a range of digital technologies and applications. However, opportunities for pupils to utilise these skills in wider curriculum areas are less well developed.

Across the school, there are a range of opportunities for pupils to develop their physical skills and many pupils make rapid progress. For example, Form 4 girls who have chosen elective football develop their situation-specific kicking skills for example, lobs and instep shots and, their physical endurance highly effectively through well designed sequences of activities.

The road ahead

As a result of appropriate collection of first-hand evidence through learning walks and observations, leaders at all levels are starting to develop a clear and accurate understanding of the effectiveness and consistency of practices across the school. However, due in part to the newness of the senior leadership team, actions resulting from quality assurance and self-evaluation activities are in the very early stages of implementation and their impact cannot yet be evaluated. For example, the school is in the early stages of developing a shared understanding of pupil progress and potential, and suitable processes to monitor this.

The school's development and improvement plans identify clear and well-structured actions that are informed by self-evaluation. These plans develop in a suitably collaborative fashion with input from staff and leaders at all levels. As a result, the plans are well-known by nearly all staff, and the level of 'buy-in' is high.

Teaching staff have begun to benefit from a recently established focus on continuing professional development. The range of training and development opportunities available, both internal and external, has expanded significantly in the recent past. There are clear links between the school's development aims and the training offer. However, processes to evaluate the impact of these opportunities are not yet embedded.

The governance of the school is well structured, with clear roles for the proprietor, the board of management and its sub-committees, and the headteacher. The board of management and recently appointed senior leaders have established an effective working relationship rapidly and securely. These relationships underpin appropriate collaborative work to determine priorities and agree realistic action plans. However, during recent periods of significant change in leadership, elements of the board's work relating to scrutiny and quality assurance have not been robust and detailed enough to ensure continuity in, and quality of, the school's operations. As a result,

issues of non-compliance with statutory standards detailed in this report have not been identified or addressed. Further, the school has made limited progress towards addressing the recommendations left at the time of the last core inspection.

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 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 2024 the school should:

- Ensure compliance with the Regulatory Reform (fire safety) Order 2005 [14]

The suitability of proprietors and staff

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 2024 the school should:

- Ensure the suitability of persons appointed as members of staff [20(2a-g)]
- Ensure all staff have a DBS check within the last 3 years [23(a)]

Premises of and boarding accommodation at schools

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 2024 the school should:

- Ensure the water supply meets the requirements of the school premises regulations [27(a)]

- Ensure the school has effective site security arrangements for the grounds and building [27(d)]
- Ensure the premises and boarding accommodation are not in such a state as to be prejudicial to health or a nuisance [27(i)]

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 three recommendations to help the school continue to improve:

- R1 Strengthen governance to ensure that the school fully complies with the Independent School Standards (Wales) Regulations 2024
- R2 Establish a shared understanding of pupil progress and ensure that teaching and assessment supports this
- R3 Embed newly established approaches to ensure that they impact positively in all areas of the school's work

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. Welsh Government may then request Estyn to support the school through an improvement process.

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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