

A report on
Bettws Lifehouse

The Old School
Bettws Cedewain
Newtown
Powys
SY16 3DS

Date of inspection: September 2025

by

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

About Bettws Lifehouse

Name of provider	Bettws Lifehouse
Proprietor status	Bettws Lifehouse Limited
Language of the provider	English
Type of school	Independent
Residential provision?	No
Number of pupils on roll	23
Pupils of statutory school age	23
Date of previous Estyn inspection (if applicable)	10/07/2024
Start date of inspection	22/09/2025

School context:

Bettws Lifehouse is an independent day school in Bettws Cedewain, Powys. The proprietor is Bettws Lifehouse Limited, a private limited company. The school is registered to provide education for up to 25 pupils aged seven to sixteen years. Pupils have a range of additional learning needs (ALN), including social, emotional and behavioural difficulties, and autistic spectrum condition (ASC).

There are currently 23 pupils on roll aged seven to fourteen years. Older pupils are generally educated at an independent school in England that is part of the wider Lifehouse provision.

All pupils have an individual development plan (IDP) or an education, health and care plan (EHCP). Most pupils are placed by local authorities in England.

The school places strong emphasis on therapeutic and holistic approaches to education. Its ethos is to provide a safe and nurturing environment where pupils can develop confidence, resilience and independence. The curriculum is tailored to individual needs, combining core academic subjects with opportunities for personal development, vocational experiences and creative learning. The rural location provides pupils with access to outdoor learning opportunities that support wellbeing and engagement.

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The headteacher has been in post since February 2020. She is supported by seven teachers and fourteen teaching assistants.

The school's last monitoring visit was in July 2024.

Summary

Bettws Lifehouse is a caring and inclusive school where pupils' well-being is central to daily life. Staff model the school's values in their work, and pupils reflect these values in their behaviour and attitudes. The school's golden words 'respect, safe, learn' are evident in daily routines and relationships. This creates a calm and supportive environment where pupils feel ready to learn and succeed.

A notable strength is the 'Champion' system. Every pupil has a trusted adult who provides guidance and reassurance. This consistent support helps pupils feel secure and confident, and underpins the strong progress they make in resilience, independence and social skills.

Teaching is well matched to pupils' individual needs. Staff know their pupils well and plan lessons that are both engaging and appropriately challenging. Teaching approaches encourage pupils to be curious, reflective and willing to try new things. Pupils learn to overcome challenges, build resilience and take pride in their achievements. Relationships in classrooms are positive, and staff manage learning with sensitivity and high expectations. As a result, nearly all pupils make strong progress in their social, emotional and academic skills.

The curriculum is broad, balanced and practical. Activities such as gardening, beekeeping and outdoor numeracy give pupils meaningful real-life experiences and develop essential skills for the future. The school also provides valuable opportunities for pupils to think about adulthood and life beyond school. Careers advice has strengthened, and visits to external organisations broaden pupils' understanding of the world of work and further study. This important work is developing well, though it is not yet fully embedded.

The school has a strong safeguarding culture and works closely with families to ensure pupils are safe and well supported. Staff are trained in child development, trauma and well-being practices, which helps them to respond effectively to pupils' needs.

Leadership is highly effective and places pupils at the centre of decision-making. Leaders set clear strategic direction and foster a strong culture of collaboration across the staff team. They also place a high priority on staff development, with regular opportunities to share practice and learn together. However, links with other schools are in the early stages of development.

Main evaluation

Bettws Lifehouse is a highly nurturing and inclusive school where core values are securely embedded across all aspects of provision. The well-being of the pupils is at the heart of the school. The values of kindness, integrity, acceptance, aspiration, balance and positivity, alongside the pupil's 'golden words': respect, safe and learn, are demonstrated daily by staff and pupils. Staff model these values consistently, and pupils reflect them in their behaviour, relationships and attitudes to learning. This creates a culture of respect, care and aspiration where pupils feel safe, valued and ready to learn.

Well-being, safeguarding and personal development

The school's nurturing ethos provides consistent care, particularly during transitions. Consequently, nearly all pupils feel secure and engage positively in learning. Close work with families and other agencies further strengthens provision.

Pupils have bespoke well-being plans with clear targets and long-term outcomes drawn from statutory assessments and documentation. Regular assessments add rigour to the bespoke well-being curriculum. As a result, nearly all pupils make strong progress in developing their social and emotional skills.

Every pupil has a trusted adult, known as their Champion, who provides consistent advocacy and support. This helps pupils feel secure, develop resilience and engage positively with their learning. Nearly all pupils report that they feel safe in school and know who they can turn to if they have a concern. They value these trusted relationships, which offer comfort, guidance and reassurance.

Spotlight: The Role of the Champion

A notable strength of the school is the Champion system, where every pupil is allocated a trusted adult from across the staff team, including members of the leadership team. Champions are carefully matched to pupils' individual needs to provide consistent advocacy, support and stability, helping pupils to feel secure, valued and heard.

In addition to being available throughout the school day, pupils and their Champions meet weekly to reflect on the week, discuss challenges and celebrate successes. The system is guided by a clear handbook and rooted in nurture principles. As a result, staff approach the role with empathy and compassion, which strengthens pupils' sense of belonging and trust. Pupils report that having a Champion makes a significant difference to their well-being, as it gives them a safe base, a reliable relationship and a voice in school life.

Over time, this consistent support has become central to the school's provision. By ensuring that every pupil has a dependable adult to turn to, the Champion system models safety, trust and connection and supports pupils to develop resilience and engage more positively with their learning.

The school has a strong safeguarding culture with clear roles and responsibilities. Incidents are logged systematically and reviewed through regular panel meetings, ensuring oversight and accountability. Comprehensive training, including trauma, child development and the Prevent duty, ensures that staff are confident in managing disclosures and escalating concerns. Consequently, pupils are protected by a robust system that prioritises their safety.

The school's provision combines nurture with learning effectively. Leaders and staff recognise that feeling secure is a prerequisite for learning, and this principle is firmly embedded in the school's ethos. Staff are encouraged to engage deeply with pupils' experiences, guided by a strong ethos of empathy, compassion and shared responsibility.

The school promotes healthy lifestyles well. Linking garden produce to lessons on healthy eating gives most pupils practical experience that reinforces positive choices. This contributes to their physical health and emotional resilience, strengthening the link between well-being and learning.

Teaching, learning and curriculum

Nearly all staff plan learning activities highly effectively to meet pupils' individual needs and contexts. Learning activities provide a well-judged level of academic, social and emotional challenge. Lead teachers oversee medium and long-term planning effectively to ensure that all pupils experience a broad, coherent and engaging curriculum.

Nearly all staff adapt activities skilfully, reacting in real time to pupils' levels of engagement and are highly successful at maintaining pupils' interest. They use a sensitive balance of constructive praise and prompting to guide learning activities, allowing pupils to take evident pride and enjoyment in their achievements. Consequently, classrooms and other learning spaces are purposeful environments where nearly all pupils make rapid progress towards their targets. Across the school, this atmosphere of enjoyment, engagement and industry ensures that the pace of learning remains high and that time is used effectively.

During learning activities, nearly all staff use questioning purposefully to encourage curiosity, prompt thinking and drive progress. They adapt questions skilfully to meet individual needs, ensuring that all pupils experience a productive level of challenge.

Nearly all staff use informal, formative assessment skilfully to adjust learning activities. Their focus on reflection and improvement means that nearly all pupils habitually seek to improve their work and offer constructive suggestions to peers.

The school has a well-developed system for monitoring progress. Detailed baseline assessments inform individualised curriculum pathways. The school's diary system records each pupil's day and is used successfully by pupils and their Champions to reflect on the week. As a result of these and other processes, staff are able to accurately assess pupils' progress against their individual targets. They communicate this to pupils and parents and carers through regular reports.

Skills for learning and life

Nearly all staff communicate clearly, using appropriate subject specific vocabulary. As a result of effective language modelling and planned opportunities in learning activities, nearly all pupils develop their oracy skills rapidly. They are enthusiastic in conversation with visitors and proud to share their achievements.

Nearly all pupils use their verbal communication skills well when working in groups. For example, they strategise to approach novel situations in role-play sessions, showing listening skills, compromise and collaboration. Many also use creativity to construct imaginative narratives with peers.

Nearly all pupils develop their writing appropriately during their time at the school. From varied starting points, many make steady progress and write effectively for a range of purposes and audiences.

The school is adopting a whole-school approach to promoting reading. This includes timetabled sessions, a dedicated literacy space and targeted interventions. Although not

yet fully embedded, these approaches are beginning to foster a culture where reading is both valued and enjoyed.

Many staff plan highly effectively for opportunities to use and develop numeracy skills in real life contexts. For example, during a session focused on constructing catapult launchers, pupils successfully developed skills in estimation, rounding, measuring and volume calculation. Further, outdoor numeracy sessions use the school's extensive woodland to good effect, allowing pupils to improve their numeracy skills through well-planned, engaging orienteering and puzzle-solving activities. This authentic approach is a significant strength of provision. Consequently, many pupils, including those with gaps in prior education, make rapid progress in skills and confidence.

Many learning activities place a strong focus on creativity and problem solving in context. Pupils are encouraged to improve through reflection and learn to view mistakes as opportunities. As a result, nearly all pupils make rapid progress in their resilience and determination, overcoming barriers to learning and demonstrating self-awareness.

Nearly all staff interact with pupils and colleagues in a calm and supportive manner, adapting body language and speech skilfully to convey interest and gentle authority. As a result of highly effective modelling of social behaviours, nearly all pupils make rapid progress in their social skills and develop positive attitudes to learning. Many also improve group-work skills, showing helpfulness and offering constructive feedback to peers.

Many pupils work well independently, maintaining focus and productivity. Through engaging, well-planned activities, nearly all gain satisfaction and pride in their work, rapidly developing confidence and agency. Nearly all show a willingness to engage in unfamiliar activities. For example, during beekeeping lessons, pupils care for hives and carry out maintenance tasks with increasing independence.

Professional learning and staff development

The school has a well-developed and highly effective professional learning programme that is closely aligned with both self-evaluation and appraisal processes. Professional learning is sharply focused on the needs of individual pupils, making it consistently relevant and beneficial. Effective systems are in place to disseminate learning and to share best practice across the staff team.

A central feature of this programme is the collaborative 'Think Tank' meetings. These provide a structured forum for staff to identify professional learning priorities based on monitoring of pupils. The guiding questions, 'how can we do things better?' and 'what do we need to do better?' are embedded in staff and leaders' practice, making this reflective, evidence-based approach a strength of provision.

The 'Think Tank' also supports the ongoing development of staff expertise, enabling colleagues to reflect together, share insights from training, revisit strategies and explore research-informed approaches. Recent themes include trauma-informed practice, persistence and staff well-being. This process ensures adaptability to meet pupils' evolving needs

In addition, the school supports a few teachers to complete their newly qualified teacher induction with the local authority. This includes partnership work with a local primary school to broaden understanding of mainstream teaching and learning. However, opportunities for the wider staff team to share effective practice with other schools, or to learn from them, are at an early stage.

Leaders foster strong working practices across the staff team by promoting a shared commitment to collaboration and a person-centred ethos. Purposeful team-building activities, such as structured 'speed-dating' sessions, strengthen mutual understanding of one another's needs and interests. Consequently, the school benefits from a highly cohesive and effective staff team.

Leadership and governance

Leadership at Bettws Lifehouse is highly effective, child-centred and reflective. The headteacher places pupil well-being at the heart of decision-making, and nearly all staff feel supported and trusted as a result. Nearly all parents and staff report that this strong leadership has led directly to significant improvements in pupils' confidence, attendance and academic progress.

The school has responded well to previous recommendations and now provides strong careers advice that helps pupils make informed choices about their next steps. Pupils also benefit from visiting external organisations that broaden their understanding of opportunities beyond school. However, wider work to prepare pupils for adulthood is at an early stage and not yet fully embedded.

As part of ongoing improvement, the school has redistributed responsibilities across senior and middle leaders. This is strengthening strategic direction, building staff confidence and securing consistency in processes. Consequently, leadership at Bettws Lifehouse is both effective and sustainable.

Leaders deploy suitably qualified staff effectively and ensure that the premises are well resourced and suited to pupils' needs. They make purposeful use of a wide range of learning areas, including woodland and stable facilities, to provide rich opportunities for learning and play. This use of the environment and sensory resources enriches pupils' learning, supports emotional regulation and helps many to develop resilience and

practical life skills. In addition, the school's strong community links embed it as a valued part of village life.

The proprietors provide strong strategic leadership and effective governance. Their close working relationship with the headteacher and regular presence in the school ensure they are well informed and able to hold leaders to account. This provides effective financial oversight, efficient use of resources, and a clear focus on safeguarding and pupil progress.

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

On the basis of this inspection, there is no evidence that the school does not comply with this Standard.

The spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils

On the basis of this inspection, there is no evidence that the school does not comply with this Standard.

Welfare, health and safety of pupils

On the basis of this inspection, there is no evidence that the school does not comply with this Standard.

The suitability of proprietors and staff

On the basis of this inspection, there is no evidence that the school does not comply with this Standard.

Premises of and boarding accommodation at schools

On the basis of this inspection, there is no evidence that the school does not comply with this Standard.

The provision of information

On the basis of this inspection, there is no evidence that the school does not comply with this Standard.

The manner in which complaints are to be handled

On the basis of this inspection, there is no evidence that the school does not comply with this Standard.

Safeguarding

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

Recommendations

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

- R1. Strengthen and extend the school's work on preparation for adulthood to build on and embed emerging good practice
- R2. Extend partnership working with other schools to broaden collaboration and strengthen the sharing of knowledge and expertise

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/carers 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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