



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

A report on

Options Kinsale School

Date of inspection: November 2021

by

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

This report is also available in Welsh.

About Options Kinsale School

Options Kinsale School opened in 2007. The school is part of the Outcomes First group, which seeks to provide integrated education and residential services for young people and adults with autistic spectrum condition (ASC), moderate and severe learning difficulties, and social and emotional difficulties.

Options Kinsale School offers residential education and care for up to 30 pupils aged between 8 and 19 years who have complex needs and a diagnosis of ASC. The school currently has 22 pupils on roll. Local authorities in Wales and England place pupils at the school. All pupils have a statement of special educational needs (SEN) or an education, health and care plan (EHCP). Most pupils are children who are looked after and many reside in the company's children's homes. A few pupils attending the school are day pupils. Many pupils are from English-speaking backgrounds.

The principal has been in post since November 2019. An education team that consists of five class teachers, three higher level teaching assistants, and thirteen teaching assistants supports the principal.

Inspectors last visited the school for a monitoring visit in September 2019 following a core inspection in September 2018.

Main findings

Strengths

In common with all schools, the school has faced considerable challenges over the last 18 months due to the pandemic. Staff have showed great commitment to ensure the school has remained physically open to provide a caring and safe environment for its pupils for nearly all of this period.

Pupils respond well to the caring and committed approach of staff. Over time, the strong working relationships between pupils and staff help to improve pupils' confidence and wellbeing. In lessons, many pupils are well motivated and engage well in learning. In relation to their starting points, many make secure progress in developing their knowledge and skills.

The principal provides assured and effective leadership for the school. Since she was appointed shortly after the last monitoring visit in September 2019, she has increased successfully the rigour of accountability and governance of the school. This has enabled the school to make secure progress against the recommendations from the core inspection and monitoring visit.

Areas for development

Overall, there is too much variability in the quality of teaching across the school. As a result, the school does not fully meet the Independent Schools Standards (Wales) Regulations 2003.

The school benefits from the support of a clinical team that consists of a clinical psychotherapist, an occupational therapist, and three therapy assistants. The school receives further support from a speech and language therapist for one day a week. This team works closely with the education team to inform pupils' positive behaviour support plans and contribute to reviews of pupil progress. However, this work does not inform the practice of teaching staff in the classroom consistently enough. As a result, a few pupils with more complex needs do not engage with their learning as successfully as they could.

The school has a full range of policies in place to support the work of staff. Generally, these are comprehensive and contain useful information in relation to the policy area. However, a few policies are too generic and do not reflect the particular context of the school well enough. Overall, policies do not have sufficient regard to Welsh Government guidance.

Recommendations

The school should:

- R1 Comply fully with the Independent School Standards (Wales) Regulations 2003
- R2 Ensure that the work of the clinical team better informs the support that teaching staff provide for pupils so that all pupils engage more consistently with learning
- R3 Ensure that all policies and procedures reflect the specific context of the school and make suitable reference to Welsh Government guidance

Progress in addressing recommendations from previous note of visit or inspection report

Recommendation 1: Comply fully with the Independent School Standards (Wales) Regulations 2003

Since the last monitoring visit in September 2019, the school has taken suitable actions to meet Regulation 1(2) of the Independent Schools Standards (Wales) Regulations by ensuring that the curriculum policy is supported by effective schemes of work that are implemented successfully.

Although the school meets almost all of the regulatory requirements for Standard 1 of the Regulations (The quality of education provided by the school), in order to comply fully with the Regulations the school should ensure:

- lessons are well planned, teaching methods effective and suitable activities used, with class time managed wisely 1(3)(c)
- teaching staff show a good understanding of the aptitudes, needs and prior attainments of the pupils, and ensure these are taken into account in the planning of lessons 1(3)(d)

Recommendation 2: Implement effective systems to track pupils' progress in learning across a wider range of skills

The school has refined and developed its use of the tracking system introduced after the core inspection to monitor pupils' progress in learning across a wider range of skills.

Regular pupil assessments evaluating each pupil's progress against learning outcomes and individual education plan (IEP) targets are now recorded on detailed progress tracking sheets. These are reviewed half-termly by class teachers, with progress shared with individual pupils and their parents and carers. Leaders routinely monitor, analyse and discuss with teaching staff progress at individual pupil, class and whole-school levels. This information is helping the school to celebrate pupils' achievements better and, where appropriate, take prompt action if progress is slower than to be expected. It is also beginning to make an important contribution to informing teachers' planning and whole-school self-evaluation.

Recommendation 3: Improve the quality of teachers' long-term planning across the curriculum

Overall, teaching staff have worked together effectively to improve the quality of long-term planning across the school.

The school's curriculum policy and schemes of work have been re-designed to provide a more bespoke curriculum for the school, with individualised learning pathways. Many teaching staff use this structure and information assuredly to support their daily, weekly and long-term planning. They ensure that topics, activities and resources are closely related to pupils' individual targets, needs and interests, which helps pupils to make suitable progress.

In the lessons observed during this visit, overall, there was too much variation in how teaching staff planned and delivered activities to meet the learning needs of individual pupils. For example, the identified primary support strategies for individual pupils are not always actioned consistently, including little or no use of now and next boards or individualised communication approaches, such as the preferred use of Welsh first language. Further, the planning for the routine development of pupils' physical skills is inconsistent.

Recommendation 4: Ensure that learning support staff have the training and skills they need to fulfil their roles effectively

Since the last inspection leaders have taken suitable action to improve the provision of training for support staff. Staff speak positively about the investment in their training and professional development.

Staff have received training on topics such as communication, phonics, intensive interaction, safeguarding and the role of a teaching assistant. Staff report that leaders have tailored training to the specific context of the school to ensure that it is meaningful and that staff can apply what they have learnt to their daily practice.

Much of this training has taken place recently and it is too early to assess the impact on classroom practice fully. Further, a minority of teaching assistants are new in role and have not yet had the opportunity to access this training fully. Opportunities for teaching assistants to progress their roles and careers are in the early stages of development.

Recommendation 5: Strengthen processes for quality assurance, self-evaluation and improvement planning

The principal has strengthened significantly processes for quality assurance, self-evaluation and improvement planning. She has implemented robust procedures for the assessment and moderation of pupils' work and to review pupils' targets. This includes suitable opportunities for pupils to complete relevant accreditation where appropriate.

The principal has a clear understanding of the school's strengths and areas for development. Identified areas for development link well to the school's priorities for improvement. The school benefits from regular support and challenge from the school's governing body and from external consultants. These arrangements are helping the school to make secure progress against the recommendations from the previous visit.

Arrangements to involve a broader range of stakeholders in the school's self-evaluation processes are at an early stage of development. Pupils and parents have suitable opportunities to express their views at annual reviews and regular meetings and pupils are supported to express preferences and make choices about their timetable. However, arrangements to gather the views of stakeholders about the provision at a strategic or whole-school level are underdeveloped.

Recommendation 6: Secure leadership and staffing arrangements at the school

Since the core inspection in September 2018, and in the immediate period following the monitoring visit in September 2019, there were several key staff changes to the school and clinical team, including among the school's leadership team.

Since her appointment in November 2019, the principal has reviewed the school's staffing structure to strengthen leadership and teaching at the school. Two senior leaders provide effective oversight of teaching and learning for the pupils in each section of the school, and the introduction of a core staff team for each class is helping to promote consistency for pupils within each class. The principal has also appointed three higher level teaching assistants to take responsibility for distinct areas of the curriculum and skills (creative arts, independent living skills, and food technology) which is helping to improve planning and learning experiences in these areas.

The principal has increased the number of teaching assistants to support pupils in their learning and has strengthened the training available for them. However, this team is not fully staffed and care staff continue to provide additional support for pupils in their absence. In addition, the staffing of the clinical team remains unsettled. As a result, teaching staff do not have consistent access to advice from the clinical team to support their face-to-face work with pupils.

Compliance with the standards for registration

Standard 1: The quality of education provided by the school

The school does not fully meet the regulatory requirements for this standard. In order to comply fully with the Independent School Standards (Wales) Regulations 2003, the school should ensure:

- lessons are well planned, teaching methods effective and suitable activities used, with class time managed wisely 1(3)(c)
- teaching staff show a good understanding of the aptitudes, needs and prior attainments of the pupils, and ensure these are taken into account in the planning of lessons 1(3)(d)

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 this visit, Estyn did not inspect Standard 7.

Recommendation regarding registration

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

The school does not currently meet the requirements of the Independent School Standards (Wales) Regulations 2003. To comply fully with these requirements, the school should address the issues identified above for each standard.

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 (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:

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