



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

A report on

**Ruthin School
Mold Road
Ruthin
Denbighshire
LL15 1EE**

Date of inspection: November 2019

by

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

About Ruthin School

Ruthin School is a co-educational boarding and day school catering for pupils from the age of 10 to 20 years. The school is situated on the outskirts of Ruthin, a small market town in the Vale of Clwyd, Denbighshire.

The school was founded in 1284 as part of a castle and garrison built by Edward I. It was re-formed in 1574 by a former pupil, Gabriel Goodman, Dean of Westminster and granted a Royal Charter by Elizabeth I as a centre of academic excellence in north Wales. The school is a charitable trust whose governing body is the Council of Management.

The Welsh Government formally requested Estyn to undertake an unannounced focused inspection of Ruthin School under section 160 of the Education Act 2002. The inspection had a particular focus on standard 3 of the Independent School Standards (Wales) Regulations 2003, which relates to the welfare, health and safety of pupils.

Estyn inspectors and inspectors from the Care Inspectorate Wales (CIW) visited the school from 18th to 21st November 2019. During the visit evidence was gathered from a range of sources including:

- interviews with staff
- interviews with members of the Council of Management, including the Chair
- scrutiny of documents

Main findings

Strengths

The school is a cohesive community that provides beneficial support and guidance to its pupils. Staff know their pupils well. They offer valuable help, within and beyond the classroom through the subject tutorial and pastoral systems, to meet pupils' individual needs effectively.

The school's pastoral support arrangements, together with the personal, social, health and economic wellbeing programme, help pupils to develop a strong sense of community, celebrate diversity and foster values such as appreciation, tolerance and respect. Most pupils feel safe and secure and say that the school responds well to any allegations of bullying.

The safeguarding policy is appropriate and covers all the key issues required for such a document. Instructions to staff are clear, as is advice in how to address safeguarding concerns.

The role of the designated safeguarding person is set out clearly. He has introduced useful systems to report safeguarding concerns. The designated safeguarding person has the lead in all safeguarding matters with the exception of allegations against staff. In such circumstances the designated safeguarding lead (the principal) has responsibility and allegations are addressed under the school's disciplinary procedures. This aspect is covered by a separate policy regarding allegations against staff.

The staff handbook contains comprehensive guidance for staff that covers almost all, if not all, relevant aspects of school life. It sets out clearly those covered by the guidance.

Areas for development

A few older pupils experience anxiety largely about study pressures and access to university places, although they know where to go for support. However, staff who provide this support have concerns about the wellbeing of individual pupils.

The Council of Management does not have suitable arrangements to consult with and gain a secure understanding of the attitudes, concerns and aspirations of staff and pupils.

Not all Council of Management members are fully informed about key issues relating to safeguarding.

The Council of Management receive safeguarding reports at their routine quarterly meetings. However, the reports seen are not fit for purpose. The wider safeguarding issues that impact upon the wellbeing of pupils in their daily lives are not reported routinely to the Council of Management. In addition, safeguarding reports do not include an evaluation of the application of specific policies such as the physical restraint policy, pupil behaviour and disciplinary policy, medical treatment policy and confirmation of fire and evacuation drills. The absence of appropriate reporting on

safeguarding does not allow the Council of Management to determine whether these policies are effective, whether there are any emerging patterns of issues, or critically whether pupils are safe.

There is no evidence in the minutes of meetings that the Council of Management review safeguarding reports in a robust manner.

The reporting of complaints to the Council of Management is focused on reporting formal complaints only. Other complaints have been incorrectly categorised as 'informal' when, due to either to the nature of the complaint or because they were made in writing to the chair of the Council of Management, they should have been dealt with as formal complaints.

There is no safeguarding 'team culture', deputy officer or internal sounding boards. As a consequence, the designated safeguarding person is not supported effectively in his work.

Within the staff handbook, the role of the principal is not defined precisely, so it is not clear to what extent the principal is exempt from specific guidelines and why this should be the case, how the principal is held to account, and consequently what the principal can and cannot do. There is also a lack of clarity and potential conflict in the respective roles of the designated safeguarding person and the designated safeguarding lead.

Although line management structures are clear, in many aspects only the principal can grant permission or authorise particular actions. This reduces managers' authority and potentially disenfranchises them from fulfilling their normal line management functions.

While most staff enjoy working at Ruthin, the management of recent concerns has impacted on staff morale. This has the potential to undermine the extent to which staff feel confident to report issues in line with school policies. For example, staff indicate reluctance to use the school's recording system to report safeguarding issues.

There is a lack of clarity regarding the responsibility of the principal in his role as 'guardian' for overseas pupils.

The Mental Health section of the school's Boarders Handbook contravenes the Equality Act 2010 and its nine protected characteristics. In particular the statements that "*no boarder that has medicated mental health issues will be admitted to Ruthin School*"; and "*If any current boarder visits a Doctor and is diagnosed with mental health issues that requires a referral to a specialist psychiatrist, the boarder will be sent home to their parents*", suggests that the school may not make reasonable adjustment.

Arrangements to support the professional practice of school nurses are underdeveloped since they do not have access to clinical supervision from a health professional.

The school's medication policy is out of date and does not reflect current good practice well enough.

Overall, the Council of Management at Ruthin School is not fulfilling its duty to safeguard pupils and to promote the wellbeing of all members of the school community. This judgement is supported by the following key evaluations:

- While the school has suitable policies and procedures that take due regard of 'Safeguarding Children in Education: The role of local authorities and governing bodies under the Education Act 2002', the Council of Management has not ensured that these are applied rigorously.
- The school does not have suitable procedures to quality assure the effectiveness of its arrangements for safeguarding pupils.
- The Council of Management has not engaged or consulted well enough about safeguarding arrangements with members of the school community including staff, pupils and parents. As a result, the Council of Management does not have a secure understanding of the effectiveness of the school's safeguarding arrangements.
- The Council of Management has not undertaken its monitoring and challenge role in a sufficiently robust manner.

Recommendations

1. The school should implement robust arrangements for reporting safeguarding concerns to senior leaders and to the Council of Management. These reports should be routine on a monthly basis, and include an analysis of patterns of activity. For example, reports should cover the imposition of sanctions, physical restraint, exclusions, and referrals to the local authority social services or the police. This reporting should include nil returns in order to confirm the presence of activity or not.
2. The school's recording of Council of Management meetings should include detailed reports, and should record members' acceptance or rejection or query of the detail in each safeguarding report, along with relevant actions arising.
3. The school's policies and procedures should be reviewed to ensure that guidance enables all staff to manage their duties, and that leaders at all levels are empowered to manage their teams effectively. The delegation of powers should therefore be more widely distributed to support the creation of a culture of safeguarding pupils across the school community.

Compliance with the standards for registration

Standard 1: The quality of education provided by the school

On this visit, Estyn did not inspect Standard 1.

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

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:

- 3(2b) – Safeguard and promote the welfare of children who are pupils at the school which complies with Welsh Office circular 52/95 "Protecting Children from Abuse : the Role of the Education Service"; This has been replaced by WAGC 005/2008 - Safeguarding Children in Education: The role of local authorities and governing bodies under the Education Act 2002

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 this visit, Estyn did not inspect Standard 6.

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

On this visit, Estyn did not inspect Standard 7.

Recommendation regarding continued 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.

The Welsh Government should work with the school to consider the findings of this report and determine whether an in-depth inquiry is required to support improvement.

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

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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