



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

A report on

ACT Schools

Date of inspection: March 2020

by

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

About ACT Schools

ACT Schools is an independent special day school with campuses in Cardiff and Caerphilly.

The school provides education for pupils aged 11 to 16 years of age. All pupils have special educational needs specific to social, emotional and behavioural difficulties. Pupils are placed in the school by Cardiff, Caerphilly and the Vale of Glamorgan councils.

The school is administered by ACT (Holdings) Ltd, a subsidiary of Cardiff and The Vale College.

There are currently 107 pupils on roll at the school. A very few pupils are looked-after by their local authority, and a fifth have a statement of special educational needs.

The head of 11-16 education has been in post since the school opened in April 2018.

Main findings

Strengths

Overall, staff know their pupils well and have a secure understanding of their emotional needs. This helps to develop pupils' trust in their teaching and support staff, and increase their confidence.

Many pupils behave appropriately and engage well with their learning. They show interest in their work and maintain their concentration.

The school is developing a useful range of strategic partnerships to benefit pupils. For example, it is now involved in the education other than at school (EOTAS) review group of a local authority, which helps to ensure pupils' needs are met appropriately.

The school has recently appointed a number of highly experienced educationalists from a variety of relevant backgrounds to form an advisory board. The board is beginning to provide strong challenge and support to the school in areas such as how it moderates lesson observation process to ensure more accurate evaluations of teaching and learning.

Areas for development

As part of the admissions and referral process, the school requests information on pupils from the placing authorities. However, there is not a strong enough focus in relation to requesting information about pupils' ability levels. This impacts on the school's ability to plan well enough for the individual needs of all learners.

The school uses a generic template to evaluate the quality of teaching and learning. However, there is not a strong enough focus on the quality of pupils' progress and identifying the particular strengths and areas that staff need to improve individually and at whole-school level.

As part of improvement planning, the school is working hard to build networks with other providers, but this does not include opportunities for staff to observe effective practice elsewhere. Further, overall, there has not been a strong enough focus on developing staff professional knowledge in relation to subjects and skills.

The school does not comply fully with the Independent School Standards (Wales) Regulations 2003. Specifically, during break times, at one of the campuses, a few pupils were observed smoking and this was condoned by staff.

Recommendations

The school should:

R1. Ensure that the school complies fully with the Independent School Standards (Wales) Regulations 2003

R2. Improve requests for information from local authorities, in relation to pupils' ability levels, prior to accepting pupils on the roll of the school

R3. Further improve the progress in addressing the two recommendations from the last monitoring visit

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

Recommendation 1: Strengthen self-evaluation and improvement planning

The school has given a high priority to strengthening self-evaluation and improvement planning. For example, it has refined and piloted the introduction of new or different systems in areas such as focus groups and curriculum self-evaluation to help drive forward improvement. This approach is making a positive contribution to developing a culture of continuous improvement across the school.

Since the last monitoring visit, the school is making better use of information in relation to pupils' performance and aspects of wellbeing such as attendance and behaviour. This information is largely used suitably to compare and contrast outcomes over time. However, the information is not always used well enough to set realistic and ambitious whole-school targets for improvement that are suitably measurable. In a few cases, shortcomings identified by the school's self-assessment processes do not link closely enough to the school's priorities for improvement.

The school's arrangements for gathering the views of pupils, parents and placing authorities are under-developed.

Recommendation 2: Further develop and make best use of teaching assistants

While the school has a number of strands of activities that should help strengthen the role of teaching assistants, there is no clear plan in place to fully address this recommendation.

For example, to further develop and strengthen principles of inclusive teaching, the school has developed and is piloting the use of a teaching and learning framework. This framework considers the role of teaching staff in supporting the effective learning of all pupils. However, this framework does not extend to teaching assistants.

The school has recently strengthened its arrangements to support pupils' curriculum and wider needs. For example, the intervention worker role has been established to provide specific support for pupils in literacy and numeracy. In addition a very few support staff have been trained in an approach to understand better the reasons that contribute to pupils' behaviour. It is too early to evaluate the impact of this recent development.

During lessons observed on this visit, nearly all teaching assistants provide effective support and encouragement to pupils.

Compliance with the standards for registration

Standard 1: The quality of education provided by the school

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 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:

- Prepare and implement written policies to safeguard and promote the welfare of children who are pupils at the school in compliance with Welsh Assembly Government Circular 005/2008 3[2][b]

Standard 4: The suitability of proprietors and staff

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 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 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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