



Inspection Report on

Ruthin Boarding School

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

Date Inspection Completed

22 & 23 June 2022.

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About Ruthin Boarding School

Type of care provided	Boarding School
Registered Provider	Ruthin School.
Language of the service	English
Previous Care Inspectorate Wales inspection	
Does this service provide the Welsh Language active offer?	<p>Ruthin school does not provide an 'Active Offer' of the Welsh language.</p> <p>Nevertheless, a change in culture and attitude towards the Welsh language is evidenced within policies and procedures. This demonstrates the ambition of the Council of Management (CoM) and the senior leadership team to work towards being able to provide an 'Active offer'.</p>

Summary

Ruthin School is an independent co-educational boarding and day school for children aged ten to twenty years. Since the last inspection in February 2021, an interim principal has been appointed. The Council of Management (CoM) members are trustees of Ruthin School Charity Ltd.

The Welsh Government requested Care Inspectorate Wales (CIW) and Estyn Inspectorate undertake a joint announced inspection of Ruthin School. The purpose of the inspection was to consider the progress made in response to previous inspection recommendations made by CIW and Estyn, which specifically related to health and safeguarding procedures and provisions.

This inspection confirmed recommendations made at CIW's 2018, 2019 and 2021 inspections had been addressed. As a result, children are safer and receive the right care and support in terms of their physical and emotional health.

The Council of Management (CoM) and senior leadership team have placed substantial focus on improving the school's culture and safeguarding arrangements. Senior leaders' model respectful, professional behaviour and values. They have high expectations of all staff in terms of their professionalism, conduct and attitudes to ensure children are appropriately safeguarded.

To further strengthen the developments made, we have identified five areas for improvement.

Well-being

Children who board, describe the school as being like a family. They treat one another, and boarding staff, with respect. They focus on their learning, and want to do well, and take pride in their achievements. Children contribute their views to the running of the boarding provision, through the student council. Children are encouraged to complete questionnaires about their boarding experience and in addition, there are post boxes located in each house to provide feedback at any time. Boarding staff analyse the responses and take action to meet children's requests. For example, school uniform is now gender neutral and this supports equality and diversity.

The school and boarding staff ensure children's health needs are met. Staff are familiar with children's physical and emotional health needs. A multi-disciplinary team consisting of boarding, academic staff, school nurses, school counsellor and safeguarding leads allows them to monitor children's needs. If required, children access external services for additional, specialist emotional health support. Well-being plans are available for children who need additional support either in house or by external services.

Children who board told us they are proud of their school. They like learning the broad range of subjects, they study hard but have access to a wide range of extra-curricular activities which promote their physical health and well-being. Children told us the food the school provided was good. However, there were varying views around mealtimes, and the freedom to choose what and when to eat, some children thought this had an impact on their well-being. The CoM and senior leaders may wish to consider a more flexible approach at mealtimes to support more effectively children's cultural and individual emotional health needs. We would also recommend including topics, such as eating disorders in staff training programs to ensure they are equipped to support children with their emotional well-being needs.

Children can talk to boarding, teaching staff, or school nurses about concerns they may have. They feel able to do so, because of the strength of relationships they have developed. Children who board told us they know how to raise a concern. A safeguarding and electronic data system allows staff to record low, moderate, and high-level concerns. The new designated safeguarding lead and four deputies have responsibility to review the electronic data system and take appropriate action. The CoM and senior leadership team have ensured health and safeguarding policies align with legislation and guidance to uphold professional standards and maintain children's rights.

Care and Support

Children enjoy boarding at Ruthin school, they make new friends and like socialising with children of all ages. Older children support younger children, or those new to boarding, to settle at the school. Although boys and girls have separate boarding houses, many social activities involve all the children, which they appreciate. Children develop positive relationships with boarding staff, some of whom they know as teachers. Children told us they can talk to boarding staff and can ask any question; share any concern or worry they may have. They make excellent progress with their education, have structured routines for their schoolwork and are supported by boarding staff with their studies. Children studying for Advanced Levels (A-Levels) are increasingly independent and told us this is good preparation for life at university.

A wide range of sporting and social activities are available to children, these provide fun experiences, increase children's confidence, team-building abilities and improve both social and leadership skills. This allows children to explore different areas of interests which physically and intellectually challenge, such as football, tennis, art & craft, drama, cooking, and outdoor pursuits. As a result, children have access to enjoyable activities which provides free time outside of the busy school day.

Boarding provides a positive experience for children, who told us they are well cared for and spoke positively about boarding staff and have good relationships with them. Children told us bullying, and discrimination rarely happens, although unusual, boarding staff are quick to identify and resolve any incidents which do take place. Sanctions are effective and appropriate, and support children to develop good behaviour standards. The CoM and the senior leadership team may wish to consider introducing Welsh Governments guidance on restrictive practice to further develop its behaviour policy.

Significant improvements have been made in providing children with the right care and support to meet their physical and emotional health needs. Each house has a house parent and housekeeper who oversee the children and monitor their physical and emotional needs. Housekeepers are available in the day when the house parents are teaching. The on-site medical centre is permanently staffed by qualified nurses, they receive clinical supervision and support from Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board (BCUHB) clinical nursing team. Children are better supported with their emotional well-being needs, they can access advice and support from the school nurses, and a school counsellor is employed permanently on a part time basis. The school has strong links with a local general practitioner who offers weekly appointments to children who need medical support. The improvements made are now ensuring children have access to a range of support services to meet their physical and emotional health needs.

To further enhance the improvements made to the provision of support to children, the CoM and the senior leadership team may wish to consider introducing well-being plans for all children who board. To ensure their individual needs are identified and considered. Specifically, as most children who board are from overseas and they are residing at the school for a significant amount of time, away from their families. In addition, there is a lack of formal structure to ensure children are supported during their first few weeks at the

school. Even though boarding staff are aware of potential anxieties, and any physical and emotional needs the children may have on arrival, these may be missed. Introducing a formal process of check-in meetings between children and boarding staff would enable them to have one-to-one conversations with children, have oversight of their physical and emotional needs to offer the right care and support at the right time.

Overseas boarding children have education guardians who are registered with an accredited organisation and regulatory body. An education guardian is appointed by parents to act on their behalf and as their representatives while their child boards at Ruthin school. Education guardians are required to adhere to safeguarding legislation, and guardians' code of conduct, and this arrangement and framework can offer peace of mind to parents.

Environment

The school has one hundred and thirty-two children who board full time in five boarding houses. Each boarding house has a house parent who is responsible for the day-to-day management of boarding. The head of boarding allocate children to their houses according to similar interests, culture, and language, although this is not always possible and there is flexibility around this to allow for change. Telephones located in each corridor of boarding houses, allow children to report any concerns they may have at any time of the day. There are night wardens who patrol the boarding houses to ensure children are safe. If a child needs closer supervision for any reason, they are placed in a bedroom close to boarding staff to provide timely care and support.

Boarding houses are of an acceptable standard and children feel comfortable in their environment. The five boarding houses vary in characteristic, some boarding houses are newbuilds, whilst others are old. There are gender neutral changing rooms to support equality and diversity. Each house has an electronic entry code and pass system to ensure children remain safe and deter unauthorised people. The security arrangements in place, ensure children are safe and secure without compromising their rights, privacy, and dignity. Children personalise their bedrooms to their choice. The routine maintenance, servicing and testing of equipment provides children with a safe and secure environment. There have been visits from trade and professional people to ensure the boarding is safe.

Children who board told us they enjoy boarding at Ruthin school. They have a sense of belonging to their individual boarding houses and feel they are part of a boarding family. Boarding staff provide twenty-four hours, seven days a week support for children. Children told us they value the relationships they develop with boarding staff and other children who board from various international communities. These relationships support children to feel safe and secure, boarding at Ruthin school. The school is in an area where children can access a variety of activities and amenities. Environmental policies and procedures are followed to promote health and hygiene and consider current legislation and guidance, for example, those which relate to food handling; hand washing; and cleaning and laundering.

Leadership and Management

The Council of Management (CoM) and senior leadership team have developed robust procedures to ensure all matters relating to the school, function effectively, specifically the function relating to safeguarding children. The senior leadership team is very well supported by the CoM who have been appointed due to their experience and expertise in specific areas of the school's work. The CoM and the senior leadership team have addressed the 2018, 2019 and 2021 inspection recommendations and this demonstrates their commitment to ensure the school's health and safeguarding responsibilities are upheld. The CoM trustee safeguarding subgroup continues to develop and improve. The CoM have appointed a new principal who will start their role in August 2022.

Significant improvements in the culture are noted within the school, staff have clearly defined roles and responsibilities and fundamentally there has been a shift regarding the way in which the school is managed, the power imbalance which existed previously is no longer evident. CoM have implemented robust governance arrangements around audits, safeguarding leads and senior management respond constructively to safeguarding reviews completed by the Chair of the Council of Management (CoM) and the designated safeguarding representative from the CoM. Safeguarding leads work openly with safeguarding agencies and welcome the opportunity to improve their knowledge and act when advised. This approach is forward thinking and means shortfalls are not repeated, and children safer.

As a result of clear policies and processes, the Council of Management now has strong oversight of the school's work. As part of their self-evaluation processes, the CoM and senior leadership team recently commissioned the Association of Governing Bodies of Independent Schools (AGBIS) to conduct a review of the work and effectiveness of the CoM. Overall, their findings were positive. The CoM now need to have the confidence to step back and allow the senior leadership team and safeguarding leads to continue to strengthen and embed the processes they have implemented.

The CoM and the senior leadership team have demonstrated accountability that it is receptive to improvements and developments. Boarding and teaching staff are more confident in recording and reporting safeguarding concerns which has raised standards and as a result, improved children's safety. Children are safer because of the processes implemented, the health and safeguarding policies and procedures, including the staff code of conduct have been updated to ensure they align with current legislation and follow statutory guidance. All staff have completed safeguarding training which equips them with the skills and knowledge to recognise signs of harm. Boarding staff know how to report safeguarding concerns, and they do so accurately. The CoM and the senior leadership team have implemented more robust arrangements to ensure staff work within acceptable professional standards. Academic staff are now registered with the Education Workforce Council (EWC) and a professional code of conduct has been implemented which sets out the standards of behaviour expected from all staff to minimise the risk of inappropriate language and conduct.

Boarding staff feel well supported by the head of boarding. They receive regular reviews of their boarding practice. This supports them to focus on areas of development. The head of

boarding holds overall responsibility for the boarding provision. They are aspirational for children and encourage this approach in boarding staff. The head of boarding knows the strengths of the boarding provision and where areas for development remain. Staff regularly complete training to develop the skills they need to perform well. As a result of the support and training staff receive, they improve their ability to understand and meet the overall care and support needs of children.

National Minimum Standards for Boarding Schools (Wales)	Areas for Improvement:
4.2	The school has a clear and appropriate written policy and procedures on the control, disciplinary and restraint measures which may be used at the school, which also emphasises the need to positively reinforce children for the achievement of acceptable behaviour. The procedures are aligned to the Welsh Governments, Guidance on restrictive practice.
7.2	Individual records are available for boarders, containing relevant health and welfare information provided by parents and recording of significant health and welfare needs and issues.
21.1	There is an appropriate process of induction and guidance for new boarders.
24.1	Meals should be provided to boarders, which are adequate in quantity, quality, choice, and provision is made for special dietary, medical or religious needs.
34	Boarders are looked after by staff with specific boarding duties, with adequate induction and continued training in relation to children's specific needs.

Summary of Non-Compliance

Status	What each means
New	This non-compliance was identified at this inspection.
Reviewed	Compliance was reviewed at this inspection and was not achieved. The target date for compliance is in the future and will be tested at next inspection.
Not Achieved	Compliance was tested at this inspection and was not achieved.
Achieved	Compliance was tested at this inspection and was achieved.

We respond to non-compliance with regulations where poor outcomes for people, and / or risk to people’s well-being are identified by issuing Priority Action Notice (s).

The provider must take immediate steps to address this and make improvements. Where providers fail to take priority action by the target date we may escalate the matter to an Improvement and Enforcement Panel.

Priority Action Notice(s)

Regulation	Summary	Status
N/A	No non-compliance of this type was identified at this inspection	N/A

Where we find non-compliance with regulations but no immediate or significant risk for people using the service is identified we highlight these as Areas for Improvement.

We expect the provider to take action to rectify this and we will follow this up at the next inspection. Where the provider has failed to make the necessary improvements we will escalate the matter by issuing a Priority Action Notice.

Area(s) for Improvement

Regulation	Summary	Status
N/A	No non-compliance of this type was identified at this inspection	N/A

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