



# Inspection Report on

**Ruthin Boarding School**

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

**Date Inspection Completed**

27/11/2019

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## **Description of the service**

Ruthin School is an independent co-educational boarding and day school for young people aged ten to twenty. The school is located on the outskirts of Ruthin, in the Vale of Clwyd, Denbighshire, North Wales. The Principal is Toby Belfield; the Vice Principal is the head of boarding and responsible for the delivery of the day-to-day care of all boarders. The school is a charitable trust whose governing body is the Council of Management (COM).

## **Summary of our findings**

### **1. Overall assessment**

The school has suitable policies and procedures as required to fulfil their safeguarding responsibilities; however, the COM has not ensured these were applied rigorously. The systems in place for governance and monitoring were not sufficiently robust, with no evidence of challenge; this had led to serious shortfalls in the safeguarding arrangements at the school. We found that some staff did not always feel supported, morale was low and they felt undermined and vulnerable by the lack of effective oversight by the COM.

Young people in the main, spoke positively about their experiences at the school, felt supported by the boarding staff, but some did share they felt under pressure to achieve, particularly during exam times. Young people are more susceptible to have emotional well-being needs, especially those that live away from their families, however, the current policies are not ensuring young people have the appropriate access to specialist services to support their emotional health and well-being needs.

### **2. Improvements**

The focussed inspection carried out in May 2018 with Estyn, which specifically looked at concerns relating to the safeguarding of young people at the school, had a number of recommendations to further improve systems and safeguarding procedures.

The principal and COM had considered some recommendations, however, we were not provided with the supporting evidence, that all had been addressed to ensure young people were appropriately safeguarded.

### **3. Requirements and recommendations**

The recommendations relating to this inspection can be found under Section 5.2 of this report. The recommendations' are to strengthen the COM and principal's governance, accountability, suitability, leadership and management of Ruthin School to ensure young people are safeguarded.

# 1. Well-being

## Our findings

Young people are involved in activities that promote their development and the facilities available supports this, and they had access to a wide range of leisure activities within the community. Opportunities were also available to undertake academic and non-academic activities, which resulted in school trips within the United Kingdom and further afield. Young people told us they were happy with the boarding accommodation, the layout of the accommodation was suitable and the security of the premises was effective in keeping them safe. We observed young people busy conversing with one and other, having fun and looking at their mobile phones, which were generally used to maintain contact with their families and friends. The boarding community was international, and we were told that cultural differences were respected and valued. The boarding lounges, kitchens and facilities allowed young people to develop independence skills in cooking, cleaning and laundry. Young people who had specific dietary needs and preferences were able to prepare and cook their own meals with the supervision of boarding staff. Young people are supported in developing their skills and encouraged to maintain contact with their family and friends.

We found that young people cannot be confident they are appropriately safeguarded and protected in a way that supports their overall well-being. The COM do not have robust enough processes in place to safeguard the emotional health and wellbeing of young people. The leadership, management and governance relating to safeguarding was found to be inadequate and as a result, young people were not fully protected. Significant and widespread concerns in respect of the wellbeing of young people were identified and the arrangements for dealing with concerns about young people's safeguarding were inadequate. Those responsible had failed to demonstrate they had the skills and knowledge required to effectively manage and oversee concerns about young people's well-being. On many occasions, records evidenced that inappropriate action had been taken without prior consultation or referral to the relevant safeguarding authority. This lack of action and consultation with relevant authorities had the potential to increase the risk of harm to young people rather than reduce it and may suggest to young people they were not being listened to. The systems in place to co-ordinate roles and responsibilities for safeguarding were inadequate, the All Wales Child Protection Procedures 2008 were not always followed, and when they were, the actions implemented by those responsible did not always ensure young people were appropriately safeguarded.

## 2. Care and Support

### Our findings

Young people are supported through the school's pastoral support systems. We found that staff knew young people well and were offering care and support to boarders so that individual needs were being met. Within each boarding house, there was a house parent, with additional staff to ensure young people were supervised and cared for at all times. We observed that young people were confident to approach staff, they conversed in a relaxed manner and demonstrated humour and kindness towards them. Young people told us they had good relationships with boarding staff and they could speak to them about anything that worried them. Young people have positive relationships with boarding staff.

The school employs three nurse's onsite, to support young people's health needs throughout the day and night. In addition, a General Practitioner (GP) held a surgery at the school on a weekly basis. The school held information about young people's health needs that had been obtained on admission and health records were updated each time a young person accessed support. However, the school's medication policy is out of date and does not reflect current good practice and specifically there is no requirement for staff who administer medication to have a competency assessment.

Young people felt safe and secure and said there were appropriate responses to any allegations of bullying. We did not observe any concerns regarding behaviour management, but we were informed of an incident that did give concern regarding the 'public' humiliation of a young person by a member of the school staff. Whilst a sanction book of serious incidents and records of sanctions and physical interventions was being maintained, the governance arrangements were ineffective and did not include reviewing and analysing the data to ensure compliance with policies and procedures and identify any patterns and trends. Therefore, young people cannot be assured that fair and consistent behaviour management approaches are used, which ensures their well-being is respected and promoted.

Policies are discouraging young people from coming forward, accessing support in relation to their mental health in fear of losing their place at school or university. This is because, we found the policies and practices relating to their emotional health were inadequate and discriminatory. The current policy had recently been updated by those responsible and approved by the COM, and it did not comply with the Equality Act (2010) and Article 2 (1), (2) of The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). The Mental Health section of the Boarders Handbook disregards the nine protected characteristics of the Equality Act 2010. In particular, it stated 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*". In addition, the school policy states that a school counsellor is available to support young people in managing their low feelings and emotions. However, the counsellor had not visited or supported any young person at the school in the twelve months preceding this inspection, even though the need was apparent for such a service. Therefore, young people were being denied the professional support they may require to support them in managing their emotional health. Young people's rights to access community support services are not respected, and their emotional wellbeing may deteriorate further by not allowing the access to such services. (Following the inspection, we were told by the COM that the boarders' handbook was being amended to ensure it was promoting and respecting the rights of young people).

### **3. Environment**

#### **Our findings**

Young people's living accommodation and communal areas are good. Boarding houses were clean, warm and provided facilities for young people to store their clothes and study. Communal areas revealed that young people had the opportunity to socialise, play electronic games or board games and had sufficient space to do so. Feedback from young people was positive about the food provided and the new canteen building and its facilities. Regular checks of equipment were completed which ensured safety for young people. All boarding houses had keypad entry to prevent entry by any person other than those authorised and all visitors were expected to wear identification. Sleeping areas, recreational areas, toilet and bathroom provision were reasonably separated for young people of significantly different ages and gender. There were appropriate arrangements in place for the segregation of boys and girls within the boarding accommodation. Young people commented on the older furniture and ventilation in older rooms but we observed that the older rooms were spacious which compensated to some extent. To ensure safety of belongings each young person had a keypad entry safe in their room. The in-house laundry service was available for young people and each had their own laundry bag that would be returned to them with clean clothes within an allocated time. Young people, when boarding, are provided with good accommodation that is maintained, clean and secure from unauthorised public access.

The systems in place for responding to complaints regarding the environment were responded to and monitored appropriately. The internet policy was satisfactory and young people were allowed to have access of the Wi-Fi internet up until 22:00, however, young people told us that they accessed the internet after this time using their own data. Therefore this created a loophole in the policy and potentially allowed young people to access inappropriate material on the internet. We recommend the policy be reviewed to ensure young people are safeguarded. The COM manage concerns about the environment well, however, young people's access to the internet, needs to be reviewed to ensure young people are appropriately safeguarded.

## 4. Leadership and Management

### Our findings

Young people are not appropriately safeguarded as the COM have not demonstrated capacity to provide effective leadership, challenge and oversight to ensure policies and practice are implemented effectively. A safeguarding policy is in place that covers all the key issues required, including designated roles and responsibility, however, these had not always been followed and had left those responsible exposed and young people not safeguarded appropriately. The COM must ensure that all policies conform to legislation, guidance and good practice and should focus on ensuring young people are protected at all times. Young people cannot be confident that policy and practice support staff to carry out their safeguarding duties appropriately.

The COM are responsible for providing strategic leadership and accountability in relation to the performance of the school, holding the principal to account, and ensuring clarity of vision, ethos and strategic direction. In addition, overseeing the management of the school, to challenge and act as the decision making body relating to all school business including safeguarding matters. This inspection has found serious shortfalls in all these areas with the COM failing to carry out their areas of responsibilities effectively and have not ensured young people are appropriately safeguarded. The COM had not provided rigorous oversight in the implementation of policies and procedures and there was no evidence to support effective challenge of leaders at the school. The arrangements for providing information to the COM was not robust, reports often lacked detail, and records did not confirm rigorous oversight and challenge. There was no evidence to support effective monitoring that policies were adhered to including; restrictive practice, pupil behaviour, staff disciplinary, medical treatment, boarders' handbook and confirmation of fire safety. Furthermore, records did not provide any details of actions to be taken to address shortfalls. Likewise, we found that key safeguarding information was not being shared fully with all COM members, in order to ensure they fulfilled their safeguarding responsibilities' effectively. The COM need to ensure there are systems in place to demonstrate effective governance and oversight and take a more proactive objective role in monitoring the operations of the school at all levels. Young people cannot be assured that the COM are acting with due diligence, to ensure their well-being is promoted.

We observed young people and staff having mutually respectful relationships, however, recent safeguarding concerns and a failure by the COM to ensure that all staff understand and follow a professional code of conduct that protects them and the young people in their care, has resulted in young people being placed at risk of harm. We found a culture where there was a lack of robust challenge prevalent at all levels, with an autocratic and controlling management system in place. Whilst there were designated line management systems in place, these were not implemented effectively and there were times when it was apparent that senior staff were excluded from fulfilling their normal line management



functions. Staff morale was low, and there was a lack of confidence amongst some staff to report their concerns. The COM have not demonstrated strong and effective governance to ensure they challenge the management and leadership structures in place and have not ensured staff feel supported and this has impacted on staff and young people's well-being.

Young people are not protected by a robust complaint process where all complaints are considered and acted upon appropriately. The reporting of complaints to the COM is focused on reporting formal complaints only, complaints categorised as 'informal' should have been re-categorised as formal due either to the nature of the complaint or because they were made in writing to the COM. The current system was not transparent which does not confirm all concerns are considered robustly, ensuring the rights of parents and young people are being fully considered in a way that ensures young people are appropriately safeguarded.

## **5. Improvements required at the previous inspection.**

### **5.1 Good practice recommendations made at the previous inspection that have not been fully addressed.**

- The Principal and members of the council of management should ensure that the policies and procedures for safeguarding young people, including handling allegations of abuse against staff, are reviewed and are consistent with the All Wales Child Protection Procedures 2008 and other related policies and Welsh Government Guidance;
- The COM need to re-examine the policies ratified by them to encourage and ensure young people are safeguarded;
- Review the quality assurance and governance process to demonstrate effective independent scrutiny and challenge;
- The ability of staff to put their learning from training into practice should be monitored and evidenced, e.g. within the supervision and appraisal process and safeguarding matters discussed;
- The internet usage policy should be reviewed to ensure that it considers how boarders can use the internet at night and what safeguards are required;
- The service should consider Welsh Government's 'More Than Just Words follow on strategic guidance for Welsh language in social care'.

### **5.2 Recommendations for improvement identified during this inspection.**

- The COM must consider the unachieved recommendations for improvement made at the previous inspection.
- Policies and procedures need to comply with all aspects of discrimination law and apply the principles of fairness and justice to ensure equality and diversity is respected and young people's rights are promoted.
- The agreement of expectations of the COM developed by the principal should be reviewed to ensure COM members remain accountable for upholding major strategic decisions, evaluating risks, and maintaining the safety of young people and staff.
- The delegation of powers should be more widely distributed, ensuring effective management structures are implemented with effective governance by the COM.
- All staff and young people must adhere and work within the schools policies and procedures, regardless of their roles, responsibilities' and seniority within the school.
- The COM need to play a crucial role in holding the principal and senior management team to account by challenging key decisions for securing the best possible outcomes for young people.
- Safeguarding reporting to the COM needs to include an analysis of patterns of activity of all safeguarding issues within the school. This reporting should include nil returns in order to confirm the presence of activity or not.
- Recording of COM meetings and safeguarding agenda items should accurately capture evidence of the COM discussions and decisions, including the wider

safeguarding issues impacting upon the wellbeing of young people, and actions arising.

- The school's records of sanctions and physical interventions need to be reviewed at least twice a term by a senior member of the school's staff and COM. To monitor compliance with the school's disciplinary, control and physical intervention procedures and to identify any patterns in incidents leading to sanctions or physical restraint becoming necessary.
- The school to consider implementing a policy on the use of physical intervention and the circumstances in which it may be used, which is consistent with relevant current guidance. The school provides or secures the provision of training for staff in safe and appropriate physical intervention techniques with young people.
- To ensure that health professionals receive clinical supervision in order to ensure their practice is supported by local and national guidance and good practice.
- To ensure that the medication policy and procedures supports the safe and effective administration of medication.
- The COM consider involving more staff in the recruitment of overseas pupils, as they would be a point of contact in the school for young people.

## **6. How we undertook this inspection**

CIW and Estyn undertook an unannounced focused inspection of Ruthin School, following concerns regarding safeguarding arrangements at the school. The inspection took place from 18<sup>th</sup> to 20<sup>th</sup> November 2019, with four inspectors two from each inspectorate throughout, with an additional inspector from CIW for one day who focused on speaking to young people.

The inspection methodology involved:

- Interviews with teaching staff, boarding staff, vice principal, designated safeguarding person and qualified health staff.
- Interviews with members of the Council of Management, including the Chair.
- Scrutiny of documents pertinent to safeguarding, staff personnel files, minutes of COM meetings, sanction books, safeguarding logs.
- Interviews with boarders / young people of different ages, gender and ethnicity.

We provided feedback regarding the findings of the joint inspection to the COM on Wednesday 27 November 2019 between 12:00 and 3:30 at Ruthin School.

Further information about what we do can be found on our website:

[www.careinspectorate.wales](http://www.careinspectorate.wales)

## About the service

<b>Type of care provided</b>	<b>Boarding School</b>
<b>Principal</b>	<b>Toby Belfield</b>
<b>Date of previous Care Inspectorate Wales inspection</b>	<b>23 / 30 May 2018</b>
<b>Dates of Inspection visits</b>	<b>18 / 19 / 20 / November 2019 &amp; 27 November 2019</b>
<b>Operating Language of the service</b>	<b>English</b>
<b>Does this service provide the Welsh Language active offer?</b>	<b>No</b>
<b>Additional Information:</b>	

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