



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

**A report on**

**Oakmont School**

**Date of inspection: December 2024**

**by**

**Estyn, His Majesty's Inspectorate for Education**

**and Training in Wales**

## About Oakmont School

Name of provider	Oakmont School
Proprietor status	Part of the portfolio of Oakmont Services Group
Language of the provider	English
Type of school	Independent special
Residential provision?	No
Number of pupils on roll	15
Pupils of statutory school age	15
Date of previous Estyn inspection (if applicable)	{PreviousInspectionDate}
Start date of inspection	09/12/2024
<p>School context:</p> <p>Oakmont School is an independent ALN specialist school set in a city location in Cardiff.</p> <p>The school opened in September 2023 and is part of the portfolio of Oakmont Services Group and a subsidiary of Audere Holdings Limited, which are both private limited companies.</p> <p>The school is registered for up to 16 pupils, aged 11 to 16 years old, who are facing challenges in relation to social, emotional and mental health (SEMH) difficulties. Currently, there are 15 pupils on the school roll aged between 12 and 15 years old. All pupils are placed by local authorities in Wales and England and have an individual development plan (IDP) or equivalent.</p> <p>The director of education for Oakmont Services has been in post since the school was established and is supported by a newly appointed headteacher and deputy headteacher, both of whom previously worked as teachers in the school. In addition, the school has two further qualified class teachers and seven teaching assistants, including one lead teaching assistant.</p>	

## Summary

Oakmont School caters for pupils with social, emotional, and behavioural difficulties, many of whom have a history of poor attendance or have been out of education for some time. Since its opening in September 2023, the school has experienced significant staff changes, which have hindered the progress it has been able to make.

New leaders are enthusiastic and supportive, introducing new systems and assessments to enhance pupils' learning and personal development. However, these changes are still in their early stages, and the wide variety of systems and processes generate information which is underused by the staff team to inform teaching and learning.

Staff build strong relationships with pupils and understand their interests well. Despite this, many pupils struggle with listening to staff and peers and do not interact appropriately. Inconsistent application of the behaviour policy impacts lessons and behaviour around the school and has a negative impact on learning.

Teaching quality varies, with a minority of teachers using individualised strategies for pupils with additional learning needs (ALN). However, around half of lessons lack challenge and do not engage pupils well enough, resulting in poor behaviour and limiting the progress pupils make.

The school provides valuable life skills sessions, including cooking and budgeting, but the school's careers guidance and vocational curriculum are underdeveloped. Recently introduced BTEC qualifications offer suitable new opportunities, but overall options for pupils to work towards accreditation are limited.

The school does not fully comply with the Independent School Standards (Wales) Regulations 2024.

## **Compliance with the regulations for registration**

Independent school inspections are governed by the Education Act 2002 and related regulations: the Independent School Standards (Wales) Regulations 2024. These regulations require an independent school to meet an appropriate standard in the following areas:

### **The quality of education provided by the school**

The school does not meet the regulatory requirements for this standard.

Although the school meets most of the regulatory requirements for this standard, in order to comply fully with the Independent School Standards (Wales) Regulations 2024 the proprietor should:

- Ensure the written policy, plans and schemes of work take into account the ages, aptitudes and needs of all pupils, including those pupils with an IDP [2(1)(b)i]
- Ensure that the teaching enables pupils to acquire new knowledge and make good progress according to their ability so that they increase their understanding and develop their skills in the subjects taught [2(3)(a)]
- Ensure that the teaching involves well-planned lessons, effective teaching methods, suitable activities and wise management of learning time [2(3)(c)]
- Ensure that the teaching staff demonstrate 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 [2(3)(d)]
- Demonstrate that a framework is in place to assess pupils' work regularly and thoroughly and use information from those assessments to plan teaching so that pupils can progress [2(3)(g)]
- Ensure that the teaching staff use effective strategies for managing behaviour and encouraging pupils to act responsibly [2(3)(h)]

### **The spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils**

The school does not meet the regulatory requirements for this standard.

Although the school meets almost all of the regulatory requirements for this standard, in order to comply fully with the Independent School Standards (Wales) Regulations 2024 the proprietor should:

- Ensure that principles are actively promoted which encourage pupils to accept responsibility for their behaviour, show initiative and understand how they can contribute positively to the school community, the locality and wider society [4(c)(iii)]

### **Welfare, health and safety of pupils**

The school does not meet the regulatory requirements for this standard.

Although the school meets almost all of the regulatory requirements for this standard, in order to comply fully with the Independent School Standards (Wales) Regulations 2024 the proprietor should:

- Promotes good behaviour amongst pupils by ensuring that a written behaviour policy is drawn up and effectively implemented that encourages and rewards good behaviour [11(a)(i)]

### **The suitability of proprietors and staff**

The school meets the regulatory requirements for this standard.

### **Premises of and boarding accommodation at schools**

The school meets the regulatory requirements for this standard that were inspected on this visit.

### **The provision of information**

The school meets the regulatory requirements for this standard.

### **The manner in which complaints are to be handled**

The school meets the regulatory requirements for this standard.

## **Recommendations**

We have made four recommendations to help the school continue to improve:

- R1 Ensure that the school complies fully with the Independent School Standards (Wales) Regulations 2024
- R2 Improve pupils' behaviour and attitudes to learning
- R3 Improve the quality of teaching and assessment to ensure that all pupils are stretched and challenged to meet their potential
- R4 Ensure that the curriculum is appropriate and relevant to pupils' needs and learning goals

## **What happens next**

Since the school does not meet the standards required for registration, the Welsh Government will require the proprietor to submit an action plan within a specified period of time. This plan will set out the steps that the school will take to meet the standards, and the timescale within which it will complete each step. Welsh Government may then request Estyn to support the school through an improvement process.

## Main evaluation

Pupils attending Oakmont School have a range of social, emotional and behavioural difficulties. Nearly all pupils have a history of poor school attendance. A few have been out of education for a considerable time.

Since the school opened in September 2023, there have been significant changes within the staff team at all levels. The inconsistency within the staff team has limited the amount of progress the school has made against its own development plan.

New leaders are dedicated and enthusiastic and staff feel well supported by the leadership team. Leaders have started to introduce a range of new systems and assessments to support pupils' learning and personal development better. However, many of these systems and processes are in the early stages of development and are not yet used by staff effectively enough to inform teaching and learning. In addition, the school operates too many information management systems leading to duplication of recording and the inefficient use of leaders' time.

Over time, many staff develop strong working relationships with the pupils and understand their interests and hobbies well. For example, as part of bespoke project work, staff support pupils to develop their skills by choosing a topic of interest within the termly theme of 'Cardiff Legends'.

Staff across the school provide appropriate support for the development of pupils' social and emotional skills across the curriculum. Around half of the pupils learn valuable skills as part of small group sessions in well-being. For example, pupils are supported to identify emotions using picture cards and encouraged to explain their feelings and explore how they would tackle challenging situations. A few members of staff have undergone recent training in trauma informed practices. In addition, a recently introduced anti-bullying programme is beginning to have a positive effect on pupils' understanding and awareness of how their behaviours affect others.

The majority of pupils do not listen well enough to their teachers or learning support assistants and use inappropriate language both in class and around the school. Training for staff to support them in dealing with challenging behaviours and de-escalating situations is in the very early stages of development. Work to encourage pupils to accept responsibility for their behaviour, show initiative and understand how they can contribute positively within the school community is impacted by a lack of consistency in application of the school behaviour policy. As a result, a few pupils continue to misbehave and this disrupts lessons and has a negative impact on the learning of others.

Teaching across the school is variable. Teachers' planning does not always link well enough to pupil needs and does not focus well enough on individual targets identified in IDPs. Where teaching is stronger, teachers use useful individualised strategies to support pupils' ALN. For example, breaking down activities into smaller chunks to make the work more manageable for pupils.

In around half the lessons, teaching lacks suitable challenge. Tasks do not build progressively on pupils' prior levels of attainment or focus well enough on developing

pupils' skills. In these lessons, activities do not engage pupils sufficiently well and the pace of learning is too slow. As a result, a minority of pupils do not engage with their learning and their poor behaviour impacts negatively on the learning of themselves and others in the school.

Many pupils engage positively with life skills sessions which include cooking, budgeting and shopping. A few pupils have had a tour of the local college to look at future courses. However, the school's wider provision for careers guidance and support is limited and work within the vocational aspects of the curriculum is at a very early stage. In addition, work to promote knowledge and understanding of Part 1 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) is at an early stage of implementation.

The school makes use of a suitable variety of external organisations to enhance the learning experience for pupils. For example, a minority of learners have visited the local dogs' home, have regular visits to a boxing gym and use the local shops to purchase ingredients for cooking.

The school has very recently introduced a suite of level 1 BTEC qualifications which will enable pupils to develop skills in a range of appropriate subjects such as science, sport, cookery and well-being. However, across the school the range of accreditation and qualification opportunities, including in English and maths, is very limited.

The school is well resourced and has a good amount of space, which allows leaders to be flexible to the needs of the pupils in the school. However, the use of valuable spaces such as the outdoor area to allow pupils to self-regulate is very limited.

The school does not comply fully with the Independent School Standards (Wales) Regulations 2024.

## Evidence base of the report

Before an inspection, inspectors:

- analyse the outcomes from parent/carer and pupil questionnaires and consider the views of teachers and support staff through their questionnaire responses

During an inspection, inspectors normally:

- hold a meeting with parents/carers to hear their views on the school and its effectiveness
- meet the headteacher, governors/proprietor(s), leaders and individual teachers to evaluate the impact of the school's work
- meet pupils to discuss their work and to gain their views about various aspects of their school
- meet groups of pupils in leadership roles, such as representatives from the school council and eco-committee
- visit lessons and undertake a variety of learning walks to observe pupils learning
- look closely at the school's self-evaluation processes
- consider the school's improvement plan and look at evidence to show how well the school had taken forward planned improvements
- scrutinise a range of school documents, including information on pupil assessment and progress, records of meetings of staff and the governing body (where appropriate), information on pupils' well-being, including the safeguarding of pupils, and records of staff training and professional development

After the on-site inspection and before the publication of the report, Estyn:

- review the findings of the inspection alongside the supporting evidence from the inspection team in order to validate, moderate and ensure the quality of the inspection



## Appendix 1: Numbers – quantities and proportions

The report makes references to different quantities and proportions e.g. '*most pupils...*' or '*very few pupils...*'. We use these terms to describe quantities and proportions as outlined in the table below:

nearly all =	with very few exceptions
most =	90% or more
many =	70% or more
a majority =	over 60%
half =	50%
around half =	close to 50%
a minority =	below 40%
few =	below 20%
very few =	less than 10%

## Copies of the report

Copies of this report are available from the school and from the Estyn website (<http://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 (Wales) Regulations 2024. 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 publication. Any enquiries or comments regarding this document/publication should be addressed to:

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