



# Inspection Report on

**Ruthin Boarding School**

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

## **Date Inspection Completed**

24 February 2021.

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## About Ruthin Boarding School

Type of care provided	Boarding School.
Provider	Ruthin School, Council of Management (CoM).
Language of the service	English.
Previous Care Inspectorate Wales inspection	27 November 2019.
Does this service provide the Welsh Language active offer?	No.

### Summary

Ruthin School is an independent co-educational boarding and day school for children aged ten to twenty years. The school is located on the outskirts of Ruthin, North Wales. The Council of Management (CoM) are trustees of Ruthin School Charity Ltd, are responsible for the overall control and management of Ruthin School. The day-to-day running of the school is delegated to the headteacher and the senior leadership team. The deputy head has responsibility for the boarding facility.

Welsh Government requested Care Inspectorate Wales (CIW) and Estyn Inspectorate undertake a joint announced inspection of Ruthin School, due to concerns relating to the robustness of welfare and safeguarding arrangements for children.

Children spoke positively about their experiences of boarding at the school, felt safe and supported by the boarding staff. Policies and procedures' have been updated to ensure they promote and respect the rights of children and uphold the conduct of all staff. Children now receive specialist services to support their emotional health. The routine maintenance, servicing and testing of equipment provides children with a safe and secure environment to live. The CoM leadership and management arrangements to safeguard and promote the wellbeing of children are beginning to improve, although requires further improvements' to the systems and processes to enable it to function consistently and effectively.

### Well-being

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Children can be confident their wishes and feelings are respected. Their welfare is promoted and they have positive relationships with each other and with boarding staff. Children told us they feel safe living in the boarding houses, know how to complain or raise concerns, and are positive about the care and support they receive. The boarding community is international and children's feedback indicated that cultural differences were celebrated. The school now uses a school counsellor, the impact this service has had on the children is significant. At the time of inspection, there were thirteen children in receipt of this service, which demonstrates the need and potential benefit for the service.

Children can be confident that beneficial improvements have been made to ensure their safeguarding, health, and wellbeing are protected. The drive to understand awareness, and matters relating to equality and safeguarding have improved. There has been a focus on promoting and improving children's wellbeing and emotional health. Children can be confident that relevant staff have effective partnerships with external agencies to ensure their safety and wellbeing. Boarding staff, school nurses and the designated safeguarding lead know the children well and are able to recognise when they are feeling anxious and require additional support.

Despite the current Covid-19 situations, children have access to a variety of activities and sports. They are able to participate in online activities organised by boarding and teaching staff. Children maintain contact with people, family and friends who are significant to them. This demonstrates that children have opportunities to maintain relationships, which support their well-being.

Children are engaging in online educational lessons due to Covid-19. They are supported with their education and consistently there is a high expectation of achievement from children, they are well supported by staff members of boarding and teaching staff. Children told us they are happy with the boarding accommodation.

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The care and support provided to children who board enables them to explore their own and other's identities and well-being. Boarding staff are committed to their roles and know the children well. Children told us they enjoy having constructive and positive relationships with boarding staff and highlighted differing staff they would talk to if they had any concerns. An independent listener and independent school counsellor whose contact details are well publicised throughout the school and boarding areas, expressed children are able to access this support if required. The information in the student handbook meets its purpose.

The designated safeguarding lead and deputy are committed to improving safeguarding arrangements, they are provided with autonomy to carry out their responsibilities in dealing with safeguarding concerns. The designated safeguarding lead provides monthly safeguarding reports to the CoM. The reports are informative and helpful; however, reports should include an analysis of patterns of activity such as the imposition of sanctions, physical restraint or intervention, exclusions, and referrals to the safeguarding authority, health services or the police. Boarding staff and teaching staff have received safeguarding training that is specific to their roles. They understand the need to promote the welfare of children and are aware of how to identify and respond to any concerns they may have or children bring to them. Safeguarding concerns are managed well by the designated safeguarding lead; there are open lines of communication, which supports consultation and information sharing with the safeguarding authority. Generally, boarding and teaching staff are vigilant and share concerns on the electronic system, with their colleagues or other relevant professionals.

There are clear behavioural expectations and boundaries for children. The arrangements for dealing with and responding to concerns and issues is supported by children having constructive and positive relationships with all staff. Children respect the school's rules and are generally well behaved. For a minority of children, when behaviour or expectations fall below the required standard, sanctions are applied fairly and consistently. There has been no record of staff having to use physical intervention to ensure the safety of others.

There has been a clear focus on the promotion of children's emotional and mental health. Policies have been updated to encourage and promote children to access support in relation to their emotional health. All staff are mindful of children's needs and those who may be experiencing difficulties. Boarding staff and the three school nurses make safeguarding a priority for each child, and understand the risks and vulnerabilities for all children including the specific needs of children from overseas. Welfare meetings are held focusing on the individual needs of children and ensuring they have the appropriate support. Individual healthcare plans are in place for children who require them and initial health screenings take place at the start of the academic year.

Improvements have been made to systems for sharing information internally and externally. Boarding and academic staff acknowledge they are improving their use of the electronic

system to record concerns and this was an ongoing process. All staff have received suitable child protection and safeguarding training at the appropriate level. The school has provided specific training in relation to mental health and online safety. The school nurses now receive safeguarding group supervision and clinical supervision from a safeguarding specialist at Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board (BCUHB). All Boarding staff were sensitive to the backgrounds and needs of individual children separated from their family during a national pandemic.

## Environment

Children are accommodated in seven boarding houses and staff provide twenty-four hours, seven days a week support for children. Younger children share bedrooms, while in the sixth form; bedrooms are single or shared, many with en-suite bathrooms. Wi-Fi is available throughout the boarding facilities, so that children can communicate with family and friends and undertake research into their educational studies. The Wi-Fi connection is switched off late evening when children also have to hand over all electronic devices to boarding staff.

Children feel comfortable and have areas in which they can relax. Boarding staff told us they are aware that children who are having difficulties are often more likely to open up in the more relaxed boarding situation, and understand the importance of listening to children; listening to their concerns and supporting their emotional health needs. Boarding staff told us, it was their role to actively monitor children and have started using the electronic software to record any issues or concerns that arise in the evenings and weekends creating a joined approach with the academic staff. All Boarding staff were sensitive to the backgrounds and needs of individual children separated from their family during a national pandemic.

The routine maintenance, servicing and testing of equipment provides children with a safe and secure environment. However, fire drills were not consistently carried out, and records evidenced that the last fire drill in boarding was undertaken October 2020. We recommend that fire drills in all boarding houses be carried out on a regular basis.

## Leadership and Management

The CoM leadership and management arrangements to safeguard and promote the wellbeing of children has improved, although requires further improvements' to the systems and processes to enable it to function consistently and effectively.

Children are safer because the safeguarding arrangements are clearly defined and the process for reporting safeguarding concerns is more open and transparent, but there are still areas for improvement. Boarding and teaching staff are more confident in reporting safeguarding concerns; this has raised standards and improved children's well-being. Policies and procedures including child protection, health policies and staff behaviour have been updated to ensure they meet recommendations and guidance. However, the CoM need to consider revising the staff behaviour policy to include a staff code of conduct, setting out expected standards of behaviour from all staff to minimise risk of inappropriate conduct and actions. This would further promote a safer culture for children with their rights to be treated with dignity and respect actively encouraged as part of the schools values and principles.

Safeguarding systems, processes and records need to be developed and implemented more robustly to ensure children are appropriately safeguarded. There is ambiguity in a few areas of the internal investigation system and process and these need to be strengthened. Recent incidents, raises concerns about staff fully understanding their professional boundaries, which suggests the culture, and ethos the CoM are trying to embed into the school needs further strengthening. All staff, regardless of their seniority, should model the highest expectations of behaviour and follow a professional code of conduct that protects them and the children in their care. The raised concerns have resulted in the CoM being required by the safeguarding authority to carry out an internal investigation. The CoM must ensure when dealing with safeguarding matters or a breach in policy and procedure, they respond to these matters quickly and consistently, and in a way, that provides effective protection for all concerned.

Whilst there are overall improvements in the safeguarding processes, there continues to be a minority of staff whose understanding, or trust in the reporting processes and procedures to report safeguarding concerns about other staff and children is not secure. It may take the CoM time to instil trust within the school, given staff members' previous experiences and those responsible need to re-affirm that when allegations are made, staff will be listened to and protected.

The CoM have demonstrated accountability and clarity in respect of their roles and responsibility and we found improvements in this area. The CoM has separated the roles of headteacher and bursar, and appointed a bursar who also acts as clerk to the CoM. The



CoM promotes leaders at all levels to be empowered to manage their teams effectively, be accountable; this includes the headteacher and bursar.

The CoM is now responding appropriately in relation to many of the failings identified in the previous inspection reports. A new chair of the CoM has been appointed. The CoM has recruited new members including a parental representative to strengthen its capacity and accountability to provide improved leadership and oversight. The CoM has established a multi-disciplinary safeguarding subcommittee; the work is at a very early stage. The chair of the subcommittee is a trustee with experience in safeguarding and child protection.

**Areas for improvement and action at, or since the previous inspection**

The focussed inspection carried out in 2018 and 2019 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.

### **Areas where immediate action is required**

The CoM to continue to work towards the recommendations made within the 2018 and 2019 inspection report.

The CoM to consider setting out a professional code of conduct which should be included in the staff handbook setting out the standards of behaviour expected from all staff at the school to minimise risk of inappropriate conduct.

The CoM must ensure when dealing with an internal investigation, they are committed to dealing with this fairly, quickly and consistently, and in a way, that provides effective protection for all concerned.

The CoM must ensure when dealing with an allegation, risk assessments include the impact of staff behaviour on the wellbeing and safety of children and staff.

The CoM to consider including in the child protection policy the arrangements for dealing with allegations of abuse against all staff and the timescales for completion.

The CoM to consider including in the child protection policy the roles and responsibilities of the Designated Safeguarding Lead, Safeguarding Deputy Lead, the CoM members.

The CoM to consider including in the child protection policy, information regarding financial abuse as a category of harm, and the symptoms of the categories of abuse to enable staff with a useful guide on identifying possible abuse or harm.

The CoM to consider including within the child protection policy how staff should respond to concerns about a child in regards to practical advice, and a flowchart to guide staff through the reporting of safeguarding concerns.

The designated safeguarding lead's monthly safeguarding reports to the CoM should include an analysis of patterns of activity such as the imposition of sanctions, physical restraint or intervention, exclusions, and referrals to the safeguarding authority, health services or the police. In turn, the CoM need to develop the ability to analyse information from safeguarding reports in order to identify trends and key issues affecting the wellbeing of children.

Fire drills in all boarding houses need to be carried out on a regular basis.

**Areas for improvement and action at, or since, the previous inspection. Achieved**

**Areas for improvement and action at, or since, the previous inspection. Not Achieved**

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**Areas where priority action is required**

None	
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**Areas where improvement is required**

None	
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