

Inspection of Bettws Lifehouse Independent Special School

Kingsland Grange, Old Roman Road, Shrewsbury SY3 9AH

Inspection dates: 10 to 12 May 2023

Overall effectiveness

Requires improvement

The quality of education

Requires improvement

Behaviour and attitudes

Good

Personal development

Good

Leadership and management

Requires improvement

Sixth-form provision

Requires improvement

Does the school meet the independent
school standards?

No

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils join Bettws Lifehouse School after a turbulent journey through education. For many, the school represents the final opportunity to achieve the qualifications and skills needed for success in adult life. Staff know this and do not let pupils down. They treat pupils with kindness, understanding and compassion. Pupils know and value this. Over time, they rise to meet leaders' high expectations of them.

The school is a happy and safe place, full of smiles and warmth. Pupils and staff get on well together. The inclusive culture means that bullying does not often factor in school life. However, pupils do sometimes struggle to manage their behaviour. Staff address any poor behaviour or bullying incidents consistently and calmly. They work patiently to help pupils reflect on their actions and the impact they have on others. This helps pupils to manage their emotions and reduce their anxiety. Consequently, pupils reconnect with education and begin to find their place in the wider world.

Leaders want pupils to achieve well academically. They know there is work to do so that the quality of education consistently matches the quality of pastoral care. Some curriculum thinking lacks detail, and staff's subject expertise is not universally strong. Additionally, pupils do not get to experience and learn about a wide variety of workplaces.

What does the school do well and what does it need to do better?

The proprietors and headteacher have a clear vision for the school. They have recruited staff who share their moral purpose and embody the school values of 'empathy, kindness and patience'. Every member of staff acts with integrity and willingly goes the 'extra mile' for each pupil. Much has been done since the school opened. Leaders have the capacity to make further improvements.

All pupils at the school have an education, health and care plan (EHC plan) to address their special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). The SEND coordinator uses this as a starting point when a pupil joins the school. Staff then make every effort to really get to know each pupil. This helps them draw up a 'Lifehouse learning pathway'. This defines the academic route and pastoral programme that each pupil will follow. This has the pupils' hopes, aspirations and dreams at its heart.

Pupils can choose to study a broad range of qualifications. These range from equine studies to construction to psychology. Pupils also complete a preparation for adulthood course. This aims to build pupils' confidence and practical skills ready for life beyond school. The personal, social, health and economic education (PSHE) curriculum sits alongside this. This helps pupils learn about issues such as toxic relationships, criminal exploitation and equality and diversity. Leaders comply with schedule 10 of the Equality Act 2010, and there is an appropriate accessibility plan in place.

Staff are acutely aware that pupils have substantial gaps in their knowledge. They try to make learning interesting and relevant while checking what pupils know. One pupil summed this up saying, 'The teachers pull you in, help you learn and tap into your interests.' However, leaders have not thought enough about the substance of the curriculum in every subject. In some subjects, they have not identified and ordered the important building blocks of knowledge that pupils must know. This means that some learning is 'hit and miss'. This is because staff are selecting learning activities without a clear knowledge of where they sit in pupils' learning journey. Therefore, it is the activities that are dictating the curriculum, rather than the curriculum dictating the choice of resources and activities.

Leaders encourage staff to complete training to help them build their expertise. Staff make the most of these extensive and varied opportunities. They bring their learning back to school to benefit pupils. However, leaders have not focused enough on developing teachers' knowledge of each subject and how best to teach it. This reduces the impact of their hard work and dedication.

Pupils' chequered experience of education has affected their reading. Some pupils have gaps in their phonic knowledge. Others lack fluency as they have simply not read enough. Leaders have invested in a structured phonics programme for pupils. Key staff have the expertise needed to help pupils improve their phonic knowledge. However, other staff do not. Staff do sometimes read and share books with pupils. They use pupils' interests to help them with this. Nevertheless, leaders have not considered how they can weave reading into the fabric of the school. This lack of strategic thinking shows that leaders have not sufficiently prioritised reading.

Pupils benefit from high-quality pastoral care. This is exemplified in the 'hub'. Here, staff focus on building relationships with pupils. These act as a vehicle for pupils to begin building their confidence and faith in staff. Some pupils have not attended school for months or even years. Staff know that by building pupils' trust, they can encourage them to attend and begin to enjoy school. This pastoral care and mutual respect spill out across the school. Pupils and staff talk and listen to each other. This means that pupils trust staff to help them put things right if they go wrong. When pupils struggle to manage their emotions and behaviours, staff step in. They do so sensitively and with care. Leaders review the actions of staff to check that everyone stays safe.

Pupils participate in a range of activities outside of formal lessons. These range from an informal 'kick-about' with staff to drama and Lego clubs. Pupils make good use of the extensive and well-maintained grounds, including the forest school resource. This 'workshop, woods and wellies' space develops pupils' curiosity as they make, forage and create with staff.

Pupils learn about careers and get support to consider their next step. Staff help pupils weigh up their options, visit colleges and complete applications. However, leaders have not established good links with local employers and businesses. This means that pupils do not have as many encounters with the world of work as they should.

The proprietors have the motivation, experience and knowledge needed to run a school. They provide scrutiny and support to leaders and hold them to account. They listen to staff and are mindful of their well-being. Staff know that leaders value them, and they are proud to be part of the school. The proprietors' determination and expertise contribute significantly to the ongoing progress of the school.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

The safeguarding policy adheres to the guidance issued by the Secretary of State. It is available on the school's website.

Leaders have created a school culture with safeguarding at its heart. Staff are alert to the signs that a pupil may be at risk of harm. They report concerns promptly. Leaders follow these up swiftly to make sure that no pupil slips through the net and that pupils and families get the help they need. Leaders are dedicated and committed.

Some strategic aspects of safeguarding are less well managed. Leaders do not always check and audit the work of others. For instance, leaders do not always know if staff have completed all the safeguarding training they have been tasked to undertake or double-check the way that pupils' non-attendance is recorded.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and proprietor)

- Leaders have created an effective safeguarding culture in the school. However, they have not ensured that there is sufficient strategic oversight of safeguarding and some aspects of attendance. This means that there is a lack of collective oversight and auditing of some of the checks that leaders complete. The proprietors should ensure that leaders robustly and regularly audit all systems and processes and that all staff have a detailed knowledge of safeguarding statutory requirements.
- Leaders have not ensured that the curriculum in all subjects is coherently planned and sequenced. This means that as pupils reengage with their education, staff are not clear about exactly what pupils should be learning. Leaders should ensure that the curriculum in all subjects is well sequenced so that staff know exactly what they are teaching and why they are teaching it.
- Leaders have not ensured that there is a sharp focus on supporting those pupils at the early stages of reading. This means that pupils do not secure the phonic knowledge they need to help them read accurately. Leaders should ensure that they prioritise the teaching of reading and that staff have the expertise and knowledge to support pupils to develop their phonic knowledge.
- Leaders have not made reading a bedrock of the school's culture and ethos. The

lack of strategic planning around the promotion of reading means that pupils are missing out on the joy of sharing a good story with staff and peers. Leaders should develop a clear strategy to promote reading to build pupils' social and language skills and help them discover new things.

- Leaders have not ensured that professional development focuses on improving staff's subject knowledge and subject teaching knowledge. Consequently, teachers occasionally have gaps in subject knowledge and sometimes do not use the most effective strategies to maximise pupils' learning. Leaders should strengthen their focus on staff's subject knowledge and understanding of how best to teach each subject so that as the curriculum develops staff can deliver it effectively.
- Leaders have not ensured that pupils benefit from a wide range of encounters with the world of work. This means that pupils do not see the range of opportunities that are open to them to broaden their horizons and foster their ambition. Leaders should ensure that all pupils in key stages 3, 4 and 5 get to talk to an array of employers and experience a wide range of workplaces.

How can I feed back my views?

You can use [Ofsted Parent View](#) to give Ofsted your opinion on your child's school, or to find out what other parents and carers think. We use information from Ofsted Parent View when deciding which schools to inspect, when to inspect them and as part of their inspection.

The Department for Education has further [guidance](#) on how to complain about a school.

School details

Unique reference number	149194
DfE registration number	893/6045
Local authority	Shropshire
Inspection number	10267734
Type of school	Other independent special school
School category	Independent school
Age range of pupils	5 to 19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	61
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	14
Number of part-time pupils	15
Proprietor	Bettws Lifehouse Ltd
Headteacher	Nici Jones
Annual fees (day pupils)	£45,000 to £72,000
Telephone number	01686 651166
Website	bettwslifehousekg.org
Email address	nici.jones@bettwslifehouse.org.uk

Information about this school

- Bettws Lifehouse caters for up to 100 pupils, aged between five and 19, with a range of SEND, including communication and interaction and social, emotional and mental health difficulties. All pupils have an EHC plan.
- This is the first standard inspection of the school. The school was registered by the Department for Education in August 2022 and opened in September 2022. It is located near Shrewsbury in Shropshire.
- Places are commissioned by three local authorities.
- The school makes use of three unregistered alternative provisions.
- The school does not have a religious ethos.
- The proprietor body, Bettws Lifehouse Ltd, has operated a similar school in Wales since 2008.

Information about this inspection

Inspectors carried out this inspection under section 109(1) and (2) of the Education and Skills Act 2008. The purpose of the inspection is to advise the Secretary of State for Education about the school's suitability for continued registration as an independent school.

The school has failed to meet the independent school standards. These are the requirements of the schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014.

This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with leaders and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.

- Inspectors met with the headteacher and the proprietors, as well as other leaders in the school.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: reading, PSHE, mathematics and catering. For each deep dive, inspectors discussed the curriculum with subject leaders, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers, spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work.
- Inspectors considered safeguarding by meeting the designated safeguarding lead. They scrutinised policies and records relating to child protection and examined the safeguarding checks made on staff before they join the school.
- Inspectors scrutinised policies and documents relating to the independent school standards. The lead inspector toured the premises.
- Inspectors considered the responses from staff and pupils to an online inspection questionnaire.
- Inspectors spoke informally with pupils at breaktime and lunchtime. They

observed the school at these times.

- Inspectors considered the responses, including written responses, to Ofsted Parent View

Inspection team

Ian Tustian, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Johanne Clifton

Ofsted Inspector

Annex. Compliance with regulatory requirements

The school failed to meet the following independent school standards

Part 1. Quality of education provided

- 2(1) The standard in this paragraph is met if-
 - 2(1)(a) the proprietor ensures that a written policy on the curriculum, supported by appropriate plans and schemes of work, which provides for the matters specified in sub-paragraph (2) is drawn up and implemented effectively; and
 - 2(1)(b) the written policy, plans and schemes of work-
 - 2(1)(b)(i) take into account the ages, aptitudes and needs of all pupils, including those pupils with an EHC plan.
- 2(2) For the purposes of paragraph (2)(1)(a), the matters are-
 - 2(2)(b) that pupils acquire speaking, listening, literacy and numeracy skills.
- 2A(1) The standard in this paragraph is met if the proprietor-
 - 2A(1)(e) makes and keeps up to date a separate written statement of its policy with regard to the provision of education as required by each of paragraphs (a) and (b),
 - 2A(1)(f) consults parents of registered pupils at the school before making or revising a statement under sub-paragraph (e).
- 3 The standard in this paragraph is met if the proprietor ensures that the teaching at the school-
 - 3(d) shows a good understanding of the aptitudes, needs and prior attainments of the pupils, and ensures that these are taken into account in the planning of lessons;
 - 3(e) demonstrates good knowledge and understanding of the subject matter being taught;
 - 3(f) utilises effectively classroom resources of a good quality, quantity and range;
 - 3(g) demonstrates that a framework is in place to assess pupils' work regularly and thoroughly and use information from that assessment to plan teaching so that pupils can progress.

Part 5. Premises of and accommodation at schools

- 23(1) Subject to sub-paragraph (2), the standard in this paragraph is met if the proprietor ensures that-
 - 23(1)(b) separate toilet facilities for boys and girls aged 8 years or over are provided except where the toilet facility is provided in a room that can be secured from the inside and that is intended for use by one pupil at a time.

Part 8. Quality of leadership in and management of schools

- 34(1) The standard about the quality of leadership and management is met if the proprietor ensures that persons with leadership and management responsibilities at the school-
 - 34(1)(a) demonstrate good skills and knowledge appropriate to their role so that the independent school standards are met consistently;
 - 34(1)(b) fulfil their responsibilities effectively so that the independent school standards are met consistently.

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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

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Textphone: 0161 618 8524
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