



Arolygiaeth Gofal a Gwasanaethau Cymdeithasol Cymru
Care and Social Services Inspectorate Wales

Inspection Report on

Aran Hall School

**Aran Hall School
Rhydymain
Dolgellau
LL40 2AR**

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Description of the service

Aran Hall School is an independent residential special school, open all year round. It is registered as a children's home to provide care and accommodation for a maximum of 20 children and younger adults, between the ages of 11 and 19 years.

The school is approximately 4 miles from Dolgellau and set within its' own grounds. There are 5 'houseroms' (flats). The young people living at the Aran Hall School have mild to moderate learning disabilities, autism and associated behaviours that challenge.

The registered manager is Andrew Pryer-Smith. Brian Jones is the responsible individual.

Summary of our findings

1. Overall assessment

Overall, young people feel safe and listened to at Aran Hall School. They trust the staff and find them helpful. They have a variety of activities and all are encouraged to develop life skills. They spoke easily with staff and were responded to warmly and knowledgeably. Young people have a say and input into plans for their care, being supported to prepare for and attend their reviews. They have several avenues to voice their opinions or concerns. The behaviour programme is adaptable to meet individual needs. Improvements centre on paperwork to ensure a young person-focused approach is maintained, assessments are actioned and staff supervision is reflective of practice.

2. Improvements

The young people have a student's handbook (a service guide) drawn up according to easy read principles. This has been further reviewed and shows attention in its completion, with good use of colour and layout. If shortened, with simpler terminology and less repetition of phrases, it would be even more beneficial for the young people.

The school has responded to a previous inspection recommendation. Young people now have the opportunity to sit with staff and have a de-brief following an incident. This is to ensure they have space to express their views on what happened, how they feel and what may be of use to them in future similar situations. There is a section for this to be recorded. This is reviewed and signed by the manager. Some additional support to staff in completing this section would make it more useful in identifying useful support to individual young people.

Each houseroom now has a communication book. This has been introduced to try and ensure some consistency and continuity of approaches for the young people when cared for by different shifts of staff.

3. Requirements and recommendations

Section five of this report sets out our recommendations to improve the service and the areas where the home is not meeting legal requirements. These include the following:

- Ensure each young person has a copy of the student handbook.
- The student handbook is reviewed in terms of length and repetition.
- Make Risk and Management Plans (RAMPS) are young person-focused, not service-led.
- Clear consultation with those with parental responsibility regarding prescribed medicines reviews.
- Ensure probation supervisions take place as timetabled and are reflective of practice.
- Access training in 'mental health 1st aid'.
- Access Deprivation of Liberty Safeguards (DoLS) training.
- Continue with work towards providing an active offer in relation to the Welsh language.

1. Well-being

Summary

Young people experience safe care at the school. They have a voice and many activities to follow. The school understands the importance of providing a positive experience in the lead up to admission. Not all young people have copies of the student handbook. Efforts are made to provide an inclusive community. Further attention is required to ensure individual cultural and/or religious needs are met as far as is practicably possible. Consultation forms encourage and support young people to input into plans for their care. Some paperwork needs attention to keep it young person-focused. Workers impressed placing professionals with their knowledge of young people and efforts to include parents.

Our findings

Young people feel safe at Aran Hall School. In questionnaires, they were asked what made them happy at the home. Responses included *“that it is keeping me safe”*, *“they look after you well. The staff are very helpful”* and *“too many things to write down”*. This was repeated when speaking directly with young people. Staff questionnaires also commented safety issues were acted on quickly. Young people are safe and protected from abuse.

All the young people have access to an independent advocate. A member from the Tros Gynnal advocacy service visits once a month and speaks with the young people. This was confirmed by them in questionnaires. They also told us they also had a community meeting once a week in each houseroom. The regulation 32 reports (by the independent visitor) also showed young people are spoken with or their opinions discussed. The young people are encouraged to speak out, have a voice and have an active advocacy service.

Children and young people are being encouraged to be creative and follow their interests. Some staff questionnaires said they felt more community activities were needed. This was not something the young people raised and we were told, in questionnaires and directly, of numerous activities e.g. horse-riding, badminton, football, swimming, cinema, walking, shopping, crafts and cooking. They also had X box. We saw craft projects underway and completed works on show in private and communal spaces. Young people are able to do things that matter to them and give them a sense of achievement.

Young people are prepared for admission to the school. We saw records showing introductory visits made by young people as part of the admission planning process. Staff had also visited those who lived at a distance. Young people can know what to expect and start building relationships before they arrive so they have familiar faces to turn to. This also means they have carers who are familiar with parents/people in their life, before coming to the school, who they can talk to. We saw the student handbook was written according to easy read principles of pictures and corresponding wording. This told young people what support they could expect, their rights, basic rules and other information regarding their care. Although colourful, informative and well laid out, the handbook needed to be shorter, with less repetitive phases and simpler terminology. Several young people said (in returned questionnaires) they did not have one of these. Without this handbook, young people have no independent reminder of their rights, rules and what they can expect.

We found efforts are made to recognise and value different cultures, treating young people with dignity and respect. One young person told us they knew they were respected because they were listened to. They had a religious book to follow their faith and the school had celebrated a religious holiday of their faith. The young person told us they had asked for regular meetings with a religious leader but this had not happened. This was not having an adverse impact as the young person was able to practice their faith on fortnightly visits to family. However, opportunities and links need to be established with the different religious and cultural groups and services in the wider area, in preparation for young people who attend the school. Alternatives means need to be identified for when this proves impossible or impractical. Without this, young people can feel separated and undervalued by those around them.

Changes to some paperwork would help staff to support young people to develop an understanding of, and deal with, issues and feelings that arise. Young people are supported to develop and increase their self-esteem through positive behavioural support from staff. RAMPs were in place to guide staff in this. We saw these were completed diligently for each child and staff had signed their reading on each one. However, they were wordy, with standard information repeated. This stopped the RAMP from being young person-focused and made it difficult to note the pertinent points which would aid staff in their support. In addition, there was no inclusion of what the young person might see as an achievement to them or what activities would best help to distract them when emotions or behaviours were heightened. There was nothing to suggest a negative impact for the young people. However, given these are standard reading for staff, such changes would make it a more powerful tool in supporting young people to learn and develop to their full potential.

Young people are supported to have safe and healthy relationships with family, peers and staff. Each young person has a keyworker who works with them, reviews plans, updates family and the placing authority etc. We spoke with an independent reviewing officer (IRO) who commented on one keyworker's "*great understanding of ~*". They spoke of the keyworker working well with the parents to ensure they had understanding of their child's daily life. They were also complimentary of the work done to maintain the young person's links with their home life and community. One parent (in a questionnaire) said "*I get weekly reports, [have] always felt welcome at Aran Hall, all staff working with my child I have a great relationship with*". Young people are supported in a placement which helps them develop safe family relationships and keeps them a place in the family.

The young people are encouraged to do things for themselves and develop their individual skills, including life skills. We read plans for young people to gain independent living skills and all the returned questionnaires said they were learning these. Young people's questionnaires said "*it is a good place to get independent*" and "*I feel more independent and confident*". We spoke with a young person cooking the dinner. They said they usually shopped for the food to build their planning and budgeting skills but had an additional tuition session in preparation for their exams. We saw a mix of guidance by staff and the young person checking with them in the task. Everyone ate together at the table, the atmosphere was relaxed and with banter. The staff showed they were alert to the young people's triggers, guiding the young people away from potentially contentious topics at an early stage. This was done in a natural way and the young people responded easily. Young people are able to engage and contribute to their immediate community whilst learning and developing independence now and for the future.

2. Care and Support

Summary

Relationships with staff are positive and young people feel listened to. They have different forums available to them to voice their views and opinions. Young people take part in reviewing their progress and planning using easy read consultation forms and with their keyworkers. Young people are encouraged to behave well and manage their behaviour. The system can be adapted for individual differences and ensure it is a positive learning experience.

Our findings

Young people feel they matter, that staff listen and talk to them appropriately and in a way they can understand. This was said in several questionnaires, for example *“if something is on my mind I can talk to [staff]”; “[staff] advises me and redirects me when I am doing wrong”; “[staff] looks after me well”* and *“staff help me through difficult times”*. Staff questionnaires told us they had access to care plans so they could ensure the young people were cared for appropriately. Staff questionnaires frequently commented on keyworkers taking their role seriously. A social worker and IRO were very impressed at how well one keyworker knew their young person. Young people are treated with dignity and respect and have good relationships with staff who understand their individual needs.

The young people are included in making decisions about the day to day running of the home and feel listened to. Young people told us in questionnaires that they have weekly community meetings. The young people said they felt listened to by staff. They knew this because requests were responded to e.g. a TV put up on a wall, items bought for the houseroom. Staff questionnaires told us the young people plan the weekly menu and the quality of care review highlighted the thought and consideration paid to their peers' different dietary requirements. This was also observed when speaking with the young person cooking the evening meal. The young people are involved in planning and making decisions which affect their every day life.

Young people are involved in their placement planning and children looked after (CLA) reviews. We saw young people directly inputted to their placement plans, some in their own writing. We saw the placement plans were reviewed on a consistent monthly basis, with young people a part of this. In questionnaires, young people told us staff help them prepare for CLA reviews. They all said they attended the meetings and felt they had a say in the plans made. We read several 'What do you think?' easy read consultation forms for the reviews. These were either written directly by the young person or dictated to a staff member, clearly written in the young people's own words. These were very powerful forms to read, with a real focus on the young person and staff identifying areas of progress and what they wanted to happen next. These really support the young people to have their say in the decision-making process on how and what care they receive whilst also promoting them to feel involved and valued.

The young people are supported to aim for positive behaviours in a way they can understand. The school uses a programme which rewards co-operative and safe behaviour. We spoke with an independent reviewing officer and two placing social workers

who told us about working with the school and the care of their young people. The young people would get a reward when they had gained 5 points. When a consequence to behaviour was put in place, a young person would be put 'on review'. When 'on review', they would not go out on community activities for two full days. One social worker told us this sometimes meant their young person might not access the community for three days, depending on what time the sanction started. They told us they had queried this as being too difficult for their young person to achieve and/or understand. All reported the school had been receptive and reduced the points required and review times to better suit the young people. The quality of care review also recorded the school reviewing the programme for one young person who had not progressed on it as well as their peers. The school is adaptable to the needs of individual young people so their learning is relevant rather than feeling unattainable or punitive.

3. Environment

Summary

Young people are cared for in accommodation that meets their needs. They are cared for in small groups, a maximum of four. We had a tour of the school and were able to speak to young people in groups and individually. Generally, the houserooms were well-maintained, homely and clean. They provided communal areas of sufficient size and personalised private spaces. Young people are able to choose furnishings. Young people have safe outdoor spaces they can use.

Our findings

The accommodation's resources provide the young people with opportunities to achieve and do things for themselves. The kitchens are generally large enough to have a dining table so everyone can eat together. We saw this was the case in each houseroom visited and confirmed as usual when speaking with the young people. Young people told us they regularly cooked and the dishes they were best at. These showed a healthy and varied diet. Staff were complimentary of their skills which prompted smiles and talk of other skills. All houserooms visited were eating meals prepared by one of the young people. One young person, in their questionnaire, said the layout made them happy as it was on the ground floor. A staff questionnaire and the quality of care review commented on a planned refurbishment of one kitchen, with the hope of adding a utility room. Maintenance was good and staff questionnaires commented on quick attention to works or damage. Young people are able to practice doing things for themselves as the facilities support this.

Young people feel valued, cared for in a homely and personalised houseroom. We saw young people's bedrooms if they were happy to show these. These private spaces were personalised with their own belongings. One young person had lots of books, memorabilia, awards and photos and showed us photos of their day at a horse show. They recalled the events of the day, including staff in this, and the awards on show in their room. They were very proud and confirmed plans for more such events. Young people told they are expected to keep their rooms tidy, much as might be expected in a family home. Several reported varying degrees of success and/or attention to this and that staff would remind them what they needed to do. All told us there were alarms on their doors so they were safe when asleep (we were told there were no door alarms). Young people have private spaces they can use when they need quiet time to themselves.

Relationships are enhanced by accommodation that encourages young people to come together. We saw the lounge areas were big enough for young people and staff to sit in together. They were well furnished and decorated in different styles. For instance, one was more homely but another more in keeping with the older youngsters living there. Staff and young people's questionnaires told us they were able to choose furnishings for their houseroom and bedrooms. Young people told us they would sometimes sit together, to watch films for instance. All questionnaires said they got on "*most of the time*". All spoken with said there were times they didn't get on with their housemates but nothing to the extent they wanted a change. None had changes they would make to the communal areas other than one kitchen which sometimes felt cramped when all were sat around the table. Returned questionnaires showed young people were happy with the comfort and furnishings. We saw Halloween decorations throughout the accommodation and were told

who had made what. Young people have communal areas where they can relax together when they want to. They are cared for in an environment which aids them to develop skills for social situations.

Young people's well-being is enhanced by access to safe outdoor space. Three young people showed us their immediate outside space. The houserooms had fenced spaces where young people could sit, play ballgames etc. We saw basketball hoops up and tables and chairs out. They showed us how they could let off energy in these areas. Being able to 'let off steam' in a safe space is helpful to young people, especially when living in a communal environment.

4. Leadership and Management

Summary

Young people have confidence in staff and issues they raise will be listened to and addressed. They are cared for by safe staff, with management taking quick and decisive action where needed. Placement plans need to reflect accurately the care for the young person and any changes following reviews. Attention is required to the regularity and quality of staff supervisions. Records must evidence consultation with those with parental responsibility regarding medication reviews. The management run a transparent system.

Our findings

Young people know how to raise concerns and are aware of the lines of accountability. All the returned questionnaires from young people told us they knew how to make a formal complaint and had written information on this. They said they raised things with staff, keyworkers and managers and felt they were listened to. The quality of care review showed the Tros Gynnal advocacy service visited monthly to speak with the young people. Regulation 32 (visits by an independent person) also showed young people were spoken with. We saw there had been two internal investigations as a result of issues raised by staff and a young person. These had resulted in dismissals. Staff questionnaires commented on quick action by management to issues raised. The young people have confidence staff listen to them. They, and staff, have various avenues to raise issues and these are responded to seriously by management.

The management recruit and vet new staff robustly. We saw all the required checks were completed, with several attempts recorded to follow-up references with phone calls. We saw these are completed by the human resources (HR) co-ordinator, checked and signed by the registered manager. The quality of care review also reported a sample audit by the SENAD group HR. The regulation 32 reports also showed these are checked. Young people are supported by a safe staff group, whose recruitment is given strong attention by management.

Young people's experiences, progress and happiness are regularly monitored and reviewed so changes can be made. We read the quality of care review which reported a review of the rewards programme for one young person when they had not progressed as well as their peers. Placing social workers and an IRO also told us the management had been receptive to changes for their young person's benefit. Young people are supported to increase self-esteem through progress.

The school has further work to do to ensure it provides an active offer for the use of Welsh. Records showed one young person was 1st language Welsh yet the 'What do you think?' form was completed in English. We were told the young person preferred to speak English but found no record of this preference. Young people need to be able to use whichever language is easiest for them. Creating an environment of active Welsh as per the 'More than just words...' information pack from the Welsh Government will support this. However, communication preferences need to be clearly recorded for different aspects of care.

Placement plans are in place for all young people but they do not always reflect the placing authority's care plans or changes following reviews. This was raised by an independent reviewing officer regarding more in depth and outreach work for religious needs and life-story work after a CLA review. We saw a medication review for a young person had been completed and changes made by the consultant psychiatrist. We could find no record of consultation with those holding parental responsibility, either by the psychiatrist or school. It was unclear from paperwork whether this had been shared with them. The people who hold parental responsibility must be consulted as they are legally responsible for the young people. This needs to be clearly evidenced in paperwork. Young people need support to understand their life and why they are in care.

Staff are valued and supported to develop their skills. Staff told us they had regular supervision and training during induction. Some felt direct training (rather than e-learning) was more valuable and had fed this back to management. They reported their supervision was reflective and personal, with the recording allowing them to look back at their development. Management told us new staff received fortnightly supervision for the first six months (the probation period). However, we saw two files where this was not the case. Also, we read supervision records with one word recordings in sections e.g. 'reaction to incidents – fair'. The format seemed organisation focused with little evidence of reflection. Staff would be better supported in their work if supervision was structured to be more reflective. This would support the staff in understanding the dynamics of their work and how to make best use of this for the benefit of the young people.

We found direct staff training in specific areas would benefit the young people. We saw incident forms now had a section for de-briefing with the young person, as recommended in the previous inspection. These were completed and we saw management overview. However, staff would benefit from support in completing these as some were not clear as to the impact for the young person involved. Training in understanding and responding to incidents of self injurious behaviour would also be useful. The young people can then be confident they will have support from staff knowledgeable in responding to such behaviours and the de-brief would be more insightful regarding the impact for the young person.

There are robust monitoring systems in place to assess the quality of the service. Young people, parents and placing authorities are asked for their feedback by email and questionnaires for the quality of care review. Young people also email management with agenda items and requests prior to community meetings. Some also copied parents and/or social workers into these. Young people are confident in the transparency of the system and have taken a lead from this.

5. Improvements required and recommended following this inspection

5.1 Areas of non compliance from previous inspections

At the last inspection, we had advised the school that improvement was needed in relation to the percentage of staff who are qualified, in order to meet Regulation 25(1) (a) of the Children's Homes (Wales) Regulations 2002. A non compliance notice was not issued.

5.2 Areas of non compliance identified at this inspection

We have advised the registered persons of improvements needed, regarding percentage of qualified staff, in order to fully meet legal requirements. There are currently 66% of staff who hold the relevant qualification for working in a children's home.

We saw a system was in place to keep track of qualifications and training to increase this to the minimum of 80% as required under regulation 25(1)a of the Children's Homes Regulations (Wales) 2002.

We also saw the school has reviewed its pay-scales in an effort to recruit qualified staff but have so far been unsuccessful. Speaking with staff and returned questionnaires showed management support in gaining the NVQ level 3. The management are committed to staff gaining relevant qualifications. Difficulties in recruitment have led to this non compliance continuing.

A notice has not been issued on this occasion, as there was no immediate or significant impact identified for the young people identified. We expect the registered persons to take action to rectify this and it will be followed up at the next inspection.

5.3 Recommendations for improvement

We recommend:

- Checks are made intermittently, with each young person, that they have a copy of the student handbook. This will ensure they continue to have their own reminder about rights, rules, making complaints etc.
- The student handbook is further reviewed to make it less wordy, repetitive and shorter. This will make it an easier reference for the young people.
- RAMPS are reviewed to create a young person-focused document which provides quick and relevant reference for staff. This will aid the staff in supporting the young people.
- Consultation with people with parental responsibility is clearly recorded when changes are required to prescribed medications (as stated in the statement of purpose). It is they who are legally responsible for the young people.
- Management ensure supervision takes place fortnightly in the probation period and review the practice. It appears organisation focused with little evidence of reflective practice. Whilst we found no adverse impact for young people, reflective practice by staff will mean insightful support for young people.

- Training is accessed for staff in 'mental health 1st aid' for self injurious behaviour. Young people are more likely to receive safe support if staff are more confident. De-brief sessions would also be more informative and pertinent for a young person's care.
- Training is accessed for management and staff in DoLS. This will provide an understanding of the current legal situation in relation to potential restrictions and when an application for DoLS may be required.
- Further steps are taken to ensure there is an active offer in line with the Welsh Standards. It should be borne in mind that young people may have different communication preferences for different aspects of their care and these need to be clearly recorded.

6. How we undertook this inspection

This was an unannounced full inspection.

The inspection took place over two days (1st unannounced, 2nd arranged).

We observed:-

- Interaction between the young people and staff and
- the accommodation where the young people are cared for.

We spoke with:-

- Several young people in the company of staff;
- two young people in private;
- one staff member;
- the deputy head of care and quality improvement manager;
- two placing social workers (1 in person and 1 via phone) and
- one independent reviewing officer.

We read:-

- Files, plans and records regarding six young people;
- personnel and supervision files of two staff;
- DBS, NVQ monitoring and maintenance matrix;
- the statement of purpose (February 2016) and
- the quality of care review (August 2016).

We sent questionnaires to:-

- 10 young people (eight returned);
- 15 staff (nine returned);
- 10 parents (two returned) and
- 10 placing authorities (two returned).

Further information about what we do can be found on our website www.cssiw.org.uk

About the service

Type of care provided	Childrens Home
Registered Person	Aran Hall School Ltd (Senad Group)
Registered Manager(s)	Andy Pryer-Smith
Registered maximum number of places	20
Date of previous CSSIW inspection	3/12/2015
Dates of this Inspection visit(s)	20/10/2016 and 25/10/2016
Operating Language of the service	English
Does this service provide the Welsh Language active offer?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><i>The service is working towards providing the 'active offer' in relation to the Welsh language.</i>
Additional Information:	