A report on

Chestnut Hill School

Kinsale Hall
Lanerch-Y-Mor
Holywell
Flintshire
CH8 9DX

Date of inspection: January 2025

by

Estyn, His Majesty's Inspectorate for Education

and Training in Wales

This report is also available in Welsh

About Chestnut Hill School

Name of provider	Chestnut Hill School
Proprietor status	Chestnut Hill School is owned by Outcomes First Group (Operations) 4 Limited and is a fully owned subsidiary of P Bloom Ltd, which is part of Outcomes First Group, a provider of children's services in the UK.
Language of the provider	English
Type of school	Independent ALN specialist
Residential provision?	No
Number of pupils on roll	16
Pupils of statutory school age	15
Date of previous Estyn inspection (if applicable)	05/02/2024
Start date of inspection	27/01/2025

School context:

Chestnut Hill School is an independent school that offers education for up to 30 pupils aged between 8 and 19 years who have complex needs and a diagnosis of autistic spectrum condition (ASC).

The school currently has 16 pupils on roll, placed by local authorities from both Wales and England. All pupils have an individual development plan (IDP) or equivalent.

The head of school and executive headteacher have been in post since September 2024. The education team consists of six class teachers, 11 teaching assistants and a pastoral support worker. In addition, the school has a clinical team comprising speech and language therapists, occupational therapists, an assistant psychologist and an educational psychologist. The executive headteacher also oversees Maple Grove School, which is based just over the border in England.

Over recent years there have been significant changes to the structure and leadership of the school. In August 2024, the school closed all residential homes which previously linked with the school and restructured the educational provision, changing the name of the school from Options Kinsale to Chestnut Hill. Chestnut Hill School began operating in its current structure in September 2024. As a result, many of the systems and processes are in the early stages of development.

Summary

Chestnut Hill provides a nurturing and engaging learning environment where staff demonstrate high expectations and a deep understanding of pupils' individual needs. Strong relationships between staff and pupils foster a happy, safe, and supportive school community.

The school has undergone significant changes in recent years, including leadership changes, transitioning from a residential school to a day school and undertaking major site renovations. Leaders have successfully navigated these developments while maintaining a clear strategic vision and ensuring minimal disruption to pupils' education. Staff have adapted well to these changes, and investment in professional learning has helped to strengthen the effectiveness of teaching and pastoral care.

The school ensures a smooth transition for new pupils, working closely with parents and carers to create tailored learning experiences. Effective home-school communication has a positive impact on pupil engagement, especially for those who have previously struggled to consistently attend school.

The curriculum is broad and well-structured, equipping pupils with essential life skills and preparing them for future destinations. Enrichment activities and the well-resourced learning environment enhance learning opportunities.

Teaching is effective, with most staff using their knowledge of pupils well to plan engaging lessons. Most pupils develop strong communication and social skills, and many make appropriate progress in reading and writing. However, written feedback is inconsistent and, in a few lessons, teaching assistant support is not sufficiently purposeful. Whole-school tracking systems to provide a clear and strategic overview of pupil progress over time are underdeveloped.

Collaboration between education and clinical teams is a significant strength, with therapists working alongside staff to enhance pupil well-being. The school provides personalised support, particularly for pupils with autism and attachment needs, ensuring that most make strong progress towards their learning targets.

Safeguarding is a priority, with clear policies and training in place. Pupil voice is well-embedded, with an active school council influencing decisions. Leadership and governance are strong, with leaders successfully managing recent transitions and improvements. However, opportunities for staff to take on leadership roles to further support school improvement are in the early stages of development.

The school meets the requirements of the Independent School Standards (Wales) Regulations 2024.

Main evaluation

Chestnut Hill provides a nurturing and purposeful learning environment for all pupils. Teaching staff are energetic and effective role models, demonstrating high expectations and extensive knowledge of pupils' needs and interests. Strong, respectful working relationships between staff and pupils foster a happy, safe, and supportive school community.

Pupils benefit from a smooth transition into the school, with tailored interventions ensuring that most pupils settle well. For example, staff work effectively in partnership with parents and carers to create appropriate timetables, mindful of pupils' previous educational experiences.

The school develops and maintains strong relationships with parents and carers, strengthened further by the appointment of the pastoral lead. Daily electronic communication celebrates achievements and shares key information. This reinforces home-school partnerships and contributes to improved pupil engagement, particularly for those with a history of poor attendance.

Curriculum and enrichment

The school provides a broad and well-structured curriculum that equips pupils with essential life skills and prepares them well for post-school destinations. Enrichment activities, including chess, crafts and tag rugby, enhance learning experiences. However, many of these activities have only recently been implemented and leaders have yet to evaluate their full impact on pupil outcomes.

The well-resourced and engaging learning environment supports pupils' learning through varied provisions. For example, the immersive room allows pupils to explore experiences such as being under the sea or interacting with stories in a multi-sensory way.

The school provides a comprehensive range of specialist support, particularly for pupils with autism or attachment issues. Lesson and curriculum planning is underpinned by person-centred practice and destination-led learning. Comprehensive cross-curricular baseline assessments provide data for teachers to plan appropriate learning goals and measure pupil progress. However, this is in the early stages of implementation.

Most teaching staff use their knowledge of pupils effectively to plan engaging and purposeful tasks that foster positive attitudes and progress. Strong class management encourages perseverance in learning activities.

Skill Development

Teachers successfully support pupils in developing key skills throughout their time at the school. Nearly all staff ensure that pupils have a beneficial opportunity to develop their communication and social skills. Many pupils enjoy each other's company in lessons and in the school bistro and are confident when meeting visitors.

A structured approach to reading and writing is developing, with many pupils making appropriate progress. For example, pupils write clear 'fact sheets' on topics such as guinea pigs and recount historical events like the Gunpowder Plot. Individual pupils read well for a purpose in their activities across the curriculum. In addition, a few pupils read aloud confidently and with expression.

Most teachers use questioning well to support learning, particularly on an individual basis. Verbal feedback is immediate, positive, and supportive. However, written feedback is inconsistent and does not always provide pupils with clear next steps.

Overall, teachers and support staff work collaboratively to ensure that pupils take an active part in learning experiences and receive sensitive support tailored to their needs. However, in a very few lessons, there is limited purposeful support from teaching assistants.

Collaborative working

The school's strong commitment to pupil engagement is evident in its integrated approach to therapeutic support. The full time, on-site therapists collaborate effectively with teaching staff to develop a shared understanding of pupils' needs, model effective strategies and enhance well-being.

Pupils and staff benefit from personalised psychology services and psychotherapy, while a professional learning programme, including trauma and autism training, strengthens staff expertise. The clinical team provides valuable support to both staff and families, ensuring pupils' individual needs are met. As a result, most pupils make strong progress towards their learning targets.

Safeguarding and well-being

The school takes a proactive and reflective approach to behaviour management, supported by strong collaboration between education and clinical teams. Personalised learning plans and close partnerships with parents help pupils develop essential skills to

understand, recognise and regulate their emotions and behaviours. Effective recording systems track patterns and trends, enabling a deeper understanding of behaviours that challenge.

A strong safeguarding culture underpins school practice, with clear roles, structured training, and robust policies for referrals, online safety, and physical intervention. Pupils, parents and staff co-developed new anti-bullying and behaviour policies, reinforcing respect, inclusion, and awareness of pupils' rights in line with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). Online safety is further supported by school council-led podcasts and assemblies on cyberbullying.

Pupil voice

Pupil voice and community engagement are embedded, fostering a strong sense of ownership among stakeholders. Pupils actively contribute to school life, develop leadership skills, and take on responsibilities.

Nearly all pupils feel listened to by the school, both through the school council and by staff at all levels. Elected pupils are proud to be officers of the school council, represent their peers well and are highly active in making decisions on day-to-day school activities. For instance, recently, pupils implemented 'Smoothie Tuesday', which allows pupils to experience new and exotic fruits.

Leadership and governance

Senior leadership roles at Chestnut Hill are well-defined, aligning with the school's context and expertise. However, opportunities for staff to take on additional roles are still developing. Despite significant changes such as closing the residential provision, transitioning to a day school, and undertaking significant site renovations, leaders have maintained momentum and a clear strategic vision. Leaders maintain a visible presence, serving as role models for pupils and providing valuable support to staff.

The governing body provides strong oversight, ensuring a clear focus on high-quality education. Governors, including the chair and the quality and improvement team, are well informed and provide effective challenge and support to leaders. Governance structures promote accountability through regular meetings and collaboration across the school group.

Change management

Since transitioning from Options Kinsale School to Chestnut Hill, leaders have engaged staff effectively in the change process, strengthening their sense of involvement and understanding. Their strategic approach to change management has fostered a strong team ethos and, as a result, staff remain highly motivated and responsive.

Substantial financial investment from the proprietor has enabled significant site improvements. Staff report feeling more resilient, valued, and proud of their roles. Extensive training and recognition opportunities have further strengthened morale and professional growth.

In a short space of time, leaders have strengthened quality assurance through updated policies and structured self-evaluation. A well-implemented programme of learning walks, lesson observations, and professional learning supports improvement planning. Leaders, supported by the governing body and school improvement partner, effectively identify strengths and areas for development. In the autumn term, leaders appropriately prioritised embedding the new cohort and staff team. As a result, some of the changes are in the early stages of development.

The school development plan sets out key priorities, with safeguarding, mental health, and inclusion as core themes. Through carefully managed support from leaders, staff contribute meaningfully to self-evaluation through subject-specific action plans and have a strong understanding of school priorities. Consequently, leaders and staff have an accurate view of the school's strengths and areas for improvement, shaping the evolving school model effectively.

Leaders at the school are developing beneficial tracking systems to monitor and evaluate pupil progress. Most teachers gauge pupils' understanding through careful monitoring of pupils' learning and progress. However, processes to ensure a whole-school overview to evaluate progress are underdeveloped.

The school meets the requirements of 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

On the basis of this inspection, there is no evidence to indicate that the school does not meet the regulatory requirements for this standard.

The spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils

On the basis of this inspection, there is no evidence to indicate that the school does not meet the regulatory requirements for this standard.

Welfare, health and safety of pupils

On the basis of this inspection, there is no evidence to indicate that the school does not meet the regulatory requirements for this standard.

The suitability of proprietors and staff

On the basis of this inspection, there is no evidence to indicate that the school does not meet the regulatory requirements for this standard.

Premises of and boarding accommodation at schools

On the basis of this inspection, there is no evidence to indicate that the school does not meet the regulatory requirements for this standard.

The provision of information

On the basis of this inspection, there is no evidence to indicate that the school does not meet the regulatory requirements for this standard.

The manner in which complaints are to be handled

On the basis of this inspection, there is no evidence to indicate that the school does not meet the regulatory requirements for this standard.

Safeguarding

The school's arrangements for safeguarding pupils do not give any cause for concern.

Recommendations

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

R1   Further refine and embed whole-school tracking systems to provide a comprehensive and strategic overview of pupil progress over time

R2   Develop structured opportunities for staff to take on leadership roles across the school to support school improvement and succession planning

What happens next

Estyn advises the proprietor to amend its current development plan to show what actions the school intends to take in response to the recommendations. It is also advisable to circulate this plan, or a summary of it, to all parents/carers at the school.

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

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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