



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

**A report on**

**Ysgol Bryn Castell  
Bryncethin Campus  
Abergarw Road  
Brynmenyn  
Bridgend  
CF32 9NZ**

**Date of inspection: January 2019**

**by**

**Estyn, Her Majesty's Inspectorate for Education  
and Training in Wales**

## About Ysgol Bryn Castell

Ysgol Bryn Castell, Bridgend is a maintained special school for pupils aged 7-19 years who have social, emotional and behavioural difficulties and a wide range of other needs including autistic spectrum disorder (ASD).

Currently, there are 147 pupils on roll at the school. This number changes frequently throughout the year, due to admissions made by the local authority.

At just over 51%, the percentage of pupils eligible for free school meals is higher than the national average. Around 11% of pupils are looked after by a local authority (LAC). Less than 10% of pupils are from cultural backgrounds other than white British. No pupils are from homes where Welsh is the spoken language. Just under half of pupils have statements of special educational needs.

Most pupils have experienced significant periods of disruption to their formal learning prior to their arrival at the school. Many join the school at times of personal crisis, often towards the end of their compulsory education, and at different points during the academic year. Many pupils receive multi-agency support outside of school to ensure their safety. As a result, there is considerable variation in pupils' individual starting points, motivation and learning ability.

The school's motto is 'together we can achieve' and the school aims to encourage all pupils to return to education, take responsibility for their learning, and to become resilient, resourceful and reflective young people.

The school has been on the existing site on Bryncethin Campus since 2015. It is co-located with The Bridge Alternative Provision and its Behaviour and Wellbeing Service.

The headteacher has been in post for five years.

Further information is available from the Welsh Government My Local School website at the link below.  
<http://mylocalschool.wales.gov.uk/Schools/SchoolSearch?lang=en>

## Summary

Many pupils respond well to the school's positive ethos of care and support, and make strong progress in learning in relation to their needs and abilities. By the time they leave the school, many pupils have made significant progress in developing the skills they need to engage successfully with learning.

Many pupils have good standards of wellbeing. During their time at the school, the pupils build very positive and respectful relationships with staff and their peers. They appreciate the caring, inclusive and welcoming ethos of the school, where they are encouraged to take responsibility for themselves and be helpful to others.

Teachers build positive relationships with their pupils and provide them with motivating experiences to stimulate their engagement. Despite the complex emotional and behavioural needs of the pupils, the learning environment is consistently calm and well organised.

Staff enable pupils, through a safe and supportive environment, to develop the skills they need to be successful and happy. The focus on establishing positive behaviours, working relationships and wellbeing is a consistently strong feature of the work of the school.

The school benefits from the vision and ambition of the headteacher to improve pupils' outcomes through a motivating range of high quality experiences to support their learning and wellbeing. A recently strengthened senior management team is beginning to influence change in provision, especially for the growing cohort of pupils with autistic spectrum disorders.

<b>Inspection area</b>	<b>Judgement</b>
<b>Standards</b>	<b>Good</b>
<b>Wellbeing and attitudes to learning</b>	<b>Good</b>
<b>Teaching and learning experiences</b>	<b>Good</b>
<b>Care, support and guidance</b>	<b>Good</b>
<b>Leadership and management</b>	<b>Good</b>

## **Recommendations**

R1 Improve pupils' attendance

R2 Ensure that all teachers have a clear understanding of pupils' progress and their next steps for learning

## **What happens next**

The school will draw up an action plan, to show how it is going to address the recommendations.

## Main findings

### Standards: Good

Many pupils respond well to the school's positive ethos of care and support, and make strong progress.

It is not appropriate to compare the standards pupils achieve at the school with national averages or to analyse trends in performance over time because of the wide range of pupils' special educational needs. There is no significant difference between the performance of all pupils and that of boys or girls, those pupils eligible for free school meals or those who are looked after by the local authority.

By the time they leave the school, many pupils make significant progress in developing the communication skills they need to engage successfully with learning. They make particularly effective use of their skills in the school café, serving politely and preparing food of a high standard. In lessons, they listen carefully to their teaching staff and to each other, and follow instructions and guidance from staff appropriately. They work together well in pairs and teams, and demonstrate growing independence as they move through the school. The majority of pupils also learn to apply these important skills successfully in the community, for example, when on educational visits or work placements. This helps to build their confidence and prepares them effectively for making the transition to further education or employment when they leave the school.

Older pupils develop useful practical and vocational skills in subjects such as food technology, animal care and construction. They apply these skills in worthwhile work experience placements with a wide range of local employers, for example in shops, a building company and a dogs' home. A few pupils benefit from regular opportunities to develop their catering skills working in the school café, 'Y Cwpan Bach'. Pupils who find formal learning more challenging develop valuable practical skills through community projects supported by the school's off-site education co-ordinator, 'the man in a van'. These projects include repairing and decorating a local youth centre, painting fences and horticulture projects.

Many pupils develop their physical skills well through regular timetabled opportunities for physical exercise. Pupils in key stage 2, for example, develop their fitness, strength and co-ordination when completing circuit-training sessions. Post-16 pupils participate successfully in camping expeditions. A few more vulnerable pupils at risk of disengaging from learning, take part in challenging activities such as gorge walking and kayaking that help to build their resilience and self-esteem. The progress pupils make in these areas prepares them very effectively for their future lives and is a notable strength of the school.

Many pupils make sound progress in the development of their reading skills. For example, they use a range of suitable strategies to locate information in factual and narrative texts. Over time, many pupils improve the quality of their written work, particularly the accuracy of their spelling and punctuation. More able pupils summarise successfully the main events in a story, provide detailed accounts of the rules of short tennis, or apply rhyme successfully to create their own poem based on the witches' greeting to Macbeth.

Many pupils make suitable progress with their numeracy skills. They consolidate their understanding of the basic rules of number through regular practice and assessment and develop well the accuracy of their measuring and calculation skills. Pupils across the school develop their data recording skills using tables, simple graphs and charts. They apply these skills suitably to real-life scenarios, such as working out prices at the cinema or when calculating the area and materials needed to build a raised garden bed.

Most pupils use their information and communication technology (ICT) skills effectively in ICT lessons and across the school to research and locate relevant information, prepare presentations, or re-draft their written work. In ICT lessons, pupils develop their programming skills when building games online or programming model robots to move and speak.

Many pupils make strong progress in developing their understanding of the Welsh language. They develop their confidence and practise their skills during a residential stay at the Urdd camp in Llangrannog. Nearly all pupils develop their understanding of the culture and heritage of Wales effectively.

By the time they leave the school, all pupils gain a suitable range of qualifications or units of credit in courses that are well matched to their future aims and aspirations. These qualifications include units at entry level, GCSE qualifications in mathematics and English, and vocational qualifications in construction, cooking and horticulture. Over the last three years, all pupils have moved on successfully to further education or employment.

### **Wellbeing and attitudes to learning: Good**

Many pupils who attend Ysgol Bryn Castell have good standards of wellbeing. They appreciate the caring, inclusive and welcoming ethos at the school where they are encouraged to take responsibility for themselves and be helpful to others.

During their time at the school, many pupils build very positive and respectful relationships with staff and their peers. They are polite and respectful to each other and staff and form trusting relationships. This contributes positively to the progress many make, in raising their self-confidence when speaking to new people. This increase in self-confidence of many pupils is particularly impressive.

The pupils' parliament is a strength of the school. Pupils benefit from the training to support their understanding of democracy and their specific roles and responsibilities. The formal structure with a suitable range of sub-committees enables them to influence issues such as attendance targets, behaviour policy and staff appointments.

Pupils enjoy the range of opportunities offered to learn about keeping fit and healthy. Generally, they make healthy food choices and enjoy the usually calm, orderly environment of the school. Each morning, on arrival to school, many pupils engage enthusiastically in structured games in common rooms with staff support. Nearly all pupils interact purposefully with each other and staff during these sessions. Many take part enthusiastically in lunchtime activities such as film club, listening to music and a range of physical activities in the sports hall or outside areas. Over time, during these unstructured activities, they learn to manage their emotions and work well as part of a team. This helps them to return to classes ready for afternoon learning.

Over time at the school, many pupils develop and implement a powerful understanding of right and wrong. They respond consistently well throughout the school day to the helpful staff modelling of appropriate behaviour. Pupil behaviour in classes and around the school is usually positive and courteous. In relation to their needs on entry to the school, this shows strong progress. Many pupils settle quickly to work, concentrate well when following instructions, and persevere diligently. Generally, the minority of pupils who need more instructions and guidance in relation to their behaviour and concentration respond very positively to support.

Many pupils develop their understanding of the importance of citizenship, equality and ecology issues through lessons and their work on the Eco Schools project. One important aspect of their work considered the implementation in practice of the Rights of the Child agenda.

Pupils who attend school regularly make strong progress in their attitudes to learning. They benefit from the many initiatives in place to support improving attendance, especially for those pupils who have substantial barriers to learning. Despite this, attendance remains a significant issue for too many pupils.

### **Teaching and learning experiences: Good**

The school provides a broad and stimulating curriculum that meets the needs of nearly all pupils. Schemes of work respond appropriately to the planned new curriculum and include a focus on Welsh culture and language. They provide suitable opportunities for personalised learning for pupils to develop the skills of literacy, numeracy and use of ICT. In addition, they ensure that pupils' wellbeing is at the forefront of a broad and balanced curriculum.

The key stage 4 and post-16 curriculum ensures the needs of individual pupils' learning pathways are well met through stimulating learning activities. These older pupils, all follow an appropriate and recognised accreditation route, such as entry-level qualifications. Additionally, the school offers highly valuable vocational opportunities including photography, construction and small animal care that motivate pupils well. Interesting and relevant work-related opportunities including enterprise projects and painting and decorating programmes help prepare pupils for their future.

Teachers build positive relationships with their pupils and provide them with motivating experiences to stimulate their engagement. Despite the complex emotional and behavioural needs of the pupils, the learning environment is consistently calm and organised. Teachers have very high expectations of pupils' behaviour and participation. As a result, most pupils demonstrate a readiness for learning and engage positively. Clear routines and structures result in a safe and ordered transition within sessions and across the various activities of the school day.

Teachers set suitable targets for the majority of their pupils so that they access experiences and continue to consolidate previous learning. Where necessary, pupils access regular and structured discrete sessions to develop their literacy and numeracy skills. However, there is an over-reliance on worksheets and, as a result, teachers do not consistently give pupils enough opportunities to develop their extended writing skills.

In lessons, staff use constructive verbal feedback highly effectively to encourage pupils to extend their learning. Their written comments support pupils to understand what they need to do next in order to make progress.

Teachers know their pupils' strengths and barriers to learning. They collaborate well to develop engaging and topical lessons that promote thinking skills and problem solving. For example in science, key stage 2 pupils investigate electricity generated from fruit. Key stage 3 pupils, as part of their design and technology work, investigate the issues surrounding plastic, go on a litter pick and make a blanket.

The school provides useful daily opportunities for pupils to develop team-building skills through highly engaging activities and literacy and numeracy sessions. For instance, in key stage 2, pupils experience opportunities to see, think and wonder, through the 'Into the Woods project'. In key stage 3 and the specialist provision, pupils are developing approaches to writing through focused communication sessions, drama and role-play where they consolidate their skills.

Teachers plan valuable opportunities for pupils to increase their engagement and develop confidence whilst improving their physical skills. These include regular swimming sessions and lunchtime games in the sports hall. Off-site learning opportunities are motivating and exciting. They offer pupils the chance to experience success in a range of different environments and activities, such as quad biking and go karting.

### **Care, support and guidance: Good**

The school is an inclusive and caring community that makes strong progress toward its aim to be a place where pupils can achieve and enjoy their education. Staff enable pupils, through a safe and supportive environment, to develop the skills they need to be successful and happy. Staff promptly include new pupils into the school, and skilfully focus on establishing positive behaviours, working relationships and improving their wellbeing. This is a consistently strong feature of the work of the school.

The school works well to develop and maintain supportive relationships with parents and carers. It keeps in touch with them via a school text message, or regular telephone calls home. The family liaison and learning team has a particularly useful role in helping families to build pupil motivation, self-esteem and learning skills.

The school has made very valuable partnerships with a range of multi-agency professionals. These help to build its capacity to meet the needs of all learners in a holistic way. As a result, the school can better support pupils' communication needs, offer help for pupils affected by family members imprisoned and, raise pupils' awareness of the importance of regular attendance and healthy relationships.

The school places a strong emphasis on developing healthy lifestyles and behaviours. Healthy eating and drinking is encouraged successfully throughout the school and is consistently signposted in classrooms and communal areas such as the school coffee shop, Y Cwpan Bach. Lunchtime clubs and activities throughout the week allow pupils to develop beneficial skills in fitness, social skills and build relationships with peers.

The eco-committee has helped make beneficial improvements to the school environment such as in the school wildlife garden and in recycling and composting projects. The school parliament is an active body of pupil representatives who meet on a monthly basis to work on projects such as fundraising. .

The school makes worthwhile provision for acts of collective worship at each key stage. To begin and end the week, staff effectively share topic themes and celebrations of achievement in whole school assemblies. Staff link assembly topics imaginatively to curriculum and wellbeing themes. For example, they offer interactive sessions for post-16 pupils to learn about the sugar content in energy drinks, fizzy drinks, milk shakes and water.

The school plans and delivers a successful personal and social education programme, this is a strength of the school. It provides pupils with a wide range of beneficial age and needs appropriate information. For example, it covers important areas such as radicalisation, sex and healthy relationships and on-line safety.

On pupils' entry to the school, staff generally make effective use of a relevant range of initial assessments. They make especially effective use of tracking and monitoring information about behaviour. They use this data very well to plan structured activities and positive interventions for pupils. Staff appropriately track progress of pupils' literacy, numeracy and social skills using the school's framework for assessment. However, there is a lack of clarity regarding the level of progress pupils' achieve within levels.

The school regularly gathers a suitable range of assessment information to inform targets in individual education plans (IEPs). However, some targets set for pupils on their IEPs are too descriptive and do not clearly specify the next small steps for improvement.

The school's arrangements for safeguarding pupils meet requirements and give no cause for concern.

### **Leadership and management: Good**

The school benefits from the vision and ambition of the headteacher to improve pupils' outcomes through a motivating range of high quality experiences to support their learning and wellbeing. The headteacher communicates well the vision of the school 'together we can achieve'. Her commitment to meeting pupils' needs in an inclusive nurturing environment is supported by the engagement of all staff and partners that work with the school.

The senior management team create a supportive and caring ethos where staff are committed to the school and work well together. They have high expectations of staff and pupils. The recently strengthened team is already beginning to influence change, for example strengthening the provision and planning for the growing cohort of pupils who have autistic spectrum disorder. There is a well-defined line management structure with regular timetabled meetings. These meetings address, appropriately issues relating to pupils' progress and wellbeing.

Effective leadership, self-evaluation and improvement planning have had a positive impact on important aspects of the school's work such as improving pupils' standards and wellbeing and effectively managing the recent significant growth in pupil numbers. Through suitable self-evaluation processes, senior leaders have identified appropriately most of the school's strengths and weaknesses.

Performance management arrangements are suitable and objectives align well with the school's priorities. Leaders know the strengths of their staff and when necessary, take relevant steps to improve staff underperformance. They have a strong record of rigorously addressing staff underperformance. They understand staff needs and make sensitive arrangements to support their wellbeing. This is particularly helpful in supporting staff resilience in maintaining a calm learning environment when the needs of pupils become highly emotionally and physically challenging.

The school is outward looking and seeks relevant research, expert advice and the good practice of others to inform its practice. A strength of the school is its support for staff professional learning to develop further their skills and expertise. This includes local and national external programmes and mentoring through the school's management structure. There are beneficial opportunities for all staff to share teaching ideas and practice through the peer observation, weekly sessions and INSET. Through regular training, the school is responding well to developing staff understanding and expertise to meet the needs of the higher number and wider range of pupils on roll.

Governors are enthusiastic and support the school well. They have established useful committees that, for example, focus well on finance and staffing. The clarity of information provided to them by the headteacher has enabled them to make effective appointments, resolve the school's deficit budget and improve the safety of the site through useful negotiation with the developer of an adjacent building development.

## Copies of the report

Copies of this report are available from the school and from the Estyn website ([www.estyn.gov.wales](http://www.estyn.gov.wales))

Estyn evaluates a provider's effectiveness using a four-point judgement scale:

<b>Excellent</b>	Very strong, sustained performance and practice
<b>Good</b>	Strong features, although minor aspects may require improvement
<b>Adequate and needs improvement</b>	Strengths outweigh weaknesses, but important aspects require improvement
<b>Unsatisfactory and needs urgent improvement</b>	Important weaknesses outweigh strengths

The report was produced in accordance with Section 28 of the Education Act 2005.

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