



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

**A report on**

**Ysgol Bryn Derw  
Melfort Road  
Newport  
NP20 3FP**

**Date of inspection: March 2020**

**by**

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

## About Ysgol Bryn Derw

Ysgol Bryn Derw is situated in the city of Newport and is registered to provide day education for children and young people between the ages of three and nineteen.

All pupils that attend the school have a diagnosis of autistic spectrum disorder (ASD). Nearly all have speech, communication and language difficulties and the majority of pupils do not communicate using speech. Nearly all pupils have severe learning difficulties also.

Pupils come from a large catchment area across Newport. Just over a third of all pupils receive free school meals. No pupils speak Welsh as a first language. Just under a third of pupils come from ethnic minority backgrounds. A very few pupils are looked after by a local authority.

It is not appropriate to compare the standards that pupils achieve at the school with national averages or to analyse the performance trends of groups of pupils over time because of the nature of pupils' special educational needs.

The school was opened in September 2017. The senior leadership team, consisting of the headteacher and deputy headteacher were appointed for the opening on the school.

The number of pupils at the school has grown each year. Currently 69 pupils between the ages of four and sixteen are on roll. Due to the increasing numbers of pupils, over half of the staff were appointed after 2017.

This is the first inspection of the school since it opened.

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

Ysgol Bryn Derw is a close-knit, nurturing community that provides outstanding care, support and guidance for its pupils. It has an extremely caring and supportive ethos, which promotes the individual needs of its pupils exceptionally well.

The school has robust and well established systems in place to track the progress that all pupils make. In the short space of time since joining the school, nearly all pupils exceed their personal targets in social, communication and independence skills and many achieve or do better than expected in their literacy and numeracy skills.

The school provides exceptional opportunities for parents and carers to support their children's needs.

The inspirational leadership and collaborative approach of the headteacher have enabled staff, pupils, parents and governors to be part of a highly successful school.

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

## **Recommendations**

R1 Strengthen curriculum planning to meet the needs of pupils as they move through the school

## **What happens next**

The school will draw up an action plan to address the recommendations from the inspection.

Estyn will invite the school to prepare case studies on its work in relation to; establishing a new school for pupils with ASD and; meeting the communication needs of children and young people with ASD for dissemination on Estyn's website.

## Main findings

### **Standards: Excellent**

In the short space of time since joining the school, nearly all pupils exceed their personal targets in social, communication and independence skills and many achieve or do better than expected in their literacy and numeracy skills. Considering that the majority of pupils, prior to attending Ysgol Bryn Derw, experienced a variety of challenges in their education, these are highly significant individual personal achievements.

During lessons most pupils settle quickly and listen intently to staff. They maintain their attention and follow the instructions of staff closely. In a session with a visiting performer, pupils successfully and enthusiastically carry out instructions to sound out the noise a sheep makes and to pick up a shawl. More able and older pupils listen actively for extended periods of time. They listen carefully and respectfully to one another and respond to the requests of staff appropriately.

As a result of well-established and highly personalised communication systems, nearly all pupils, irrespective of ability or age, make their needs and wants known well. This ranges from using symbols, gesture, electronic tablets and speech. When ordering items in the local café, pupils are increasingly confident in using their preferred means of communication to order food and drink. Pupils' consistent and routine use of their communication systems assists greatly in increasing their ability to engage in worthwhile and meaningful social situations. These experiences prepare them very well for living more independently.

In school, most pupils use their communication systems to develop a sense of order and routine. This contributes to the exceptionally high level of engagement in activities during lessons and throughout the school day. Overall, pupils' use of their individual communication system is an outstanding feature in the school.

Pupils' spoken language skills vary considerably. Very quickly, with the sensitive support of staff, pupils feel secure in their environment. Where appropriate, and in line with their ability, pupils with limited speech, over time, develop confidence to sound out and repeat sounds and single words. More able and generally older pupils contribute willingly to class discussions including daily circle time activities where they share information on activities they took part in during the previous evening. They speak freely and confidently to their classmates, staff and visitors.

Most pupils become increasingly confident in reading as they progress through the school. Younger pupils begin to recognise single letters and numbers. They follow simple instructions to match colours, shapes and objects. During trips to the local supermarket, pupils read information on products before making a decision to purchase. In addition they read recipes and operating instructions successfully when using the washing machine. More able, older, pupils scan excerpts from given texts to complete comprehension tasks effectively. A minority make comparisons and evaluate information to reach a meaningful conclusion and a very few draw inference from set texts accurately.

Many pupils make strong progress in their handwriting and number skills. Where appropriate, pupils engage very enthusiastically in multi-sensory, and often messy, beneficial pre-writing skills activities. They use sand, flour and shaving foam to make lines and basic shapes, letters and numbers. Through these activities, pupils develop their fine motor skills, grip and control. As pupils progress through the school, their handwriting becomes more legible and they pay increasing attention to presentation, structure and grammar. In line with their ability, pupils write with increasing confidence for a range of audiences. Fictional stories on, for example, the gingerbread man are imaginatively written and create strong visual images for the reader. Older, more able pupils use a range of techniques such as mind-maps and basic flowcharts to organise their thoughts and plan written tasks.

Most pupils develop their numeracy skills very well. Younger pupils learn to distinguish between big and small. They recognise single numbers and count confidently in twos and fives and count backwards from five. A minority successfully complete numerical reasoning problems and develop skills in creating their own mathematical problems to solve. Where appropriate, pupils develop their understanding of the four mathematical operations, decimals and simple fractions. They apply many of these with increasing confidence in a range of contexts.

As a result of the school's strong focus on developing independence skills, most pupils develop worthwhile and relevant independence skills and this increases as pupils become older. Many older pupils develop a secure understanding of money. They transfer these skills very well when shopping to a budget in the local community. They develop a range of self-care skills in relation to personal hygiene and invaluable domestic skills such as using a washing machine and food preparation.

Many pupils develop their information communication and technology [ICT] skills with growing confidence. They use a range of interactive software for different purposes, for example to experiment with colour, size and shading when colouring in, engaging with stories and matching sounds to instruments. Pupils of all ages enjoy basic coding skills where they learn to programme and control a robotic sphere.

Overall, many pupils make appropriate use of incidental Welsh and the majority understand and respond suitably to simple phrases. A minority of pupils make preferences for lunch known using Welsh.

Most of the older pupils have attained noteworthy externally accredited units of qualification in a range of topic areas including home based skills, personal presentation and fundraising for charity.

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

Pupils' wellbeing and attitudes to learning are exceptional at Ysgol Bryn Derw. Although the majority of pupils are not able to express their views through speech, it is evident that they feel safe, settled and valued at school. They benefit from the calm and nurturing environment that permeates the school. Pupils develop extremely strong, trusting working relationships with staff, and this helps them to gain in confidence and self-esteem.

In relation to their needs and abilities, pupils have exceptionally positive attitudes to their learning. They respond very well to tasks and are exceedingly proud of their achievements. On occasion, a very few pupils arrive at school anxious or upset or disengaged from learning. With very sensitive and skilful encouragement of highly capable and caring staff, they very quickly settle and engage in required activities.

Most pupils understand and follow their well-established and purposeful routines exceptionally well. This has a significant positive impact on their progress and wellbeing. Through the use of internationally recognised strategies they learn, for example, to accept that they have to finish their work before going out to play.

The behaviour of nearly all pupils in lessons and around the school throughout the day is exemplary. Pupils respect themselves, adults and their classmates. Many pupils wait and take turns appropriately when queuing for their lunch in school or taking part in a creative session with the visiting performer.

The contribution that pupils make to the development of the school through the school council is highly valuable. Pupils have suggested beneficial ideas to develop the school's outside learning areas and contributed towards the achievement of a nationally recognised autism friendly award. During their time in school, many pupils engage effectively as responsible citizens within their community. Older pupils from the recycling team have helped to collect litter locally. Where they are able, pupils are involved in fundraising activities and have raised substantial sums for a range of local and national charities.

In line with their individual needs, most pupils develop their social skills remarkably well. Pupils are very familiar with the routines of the school day and this assists greatly in pupils being able to regulate their emotions. During breakfast time, pupils choose from a range of options. Older pupils prepare toast for themselves and their classmates. Many pupils, without prompting, clear away, wash dishes and place yoghurt pots for recycling. These invaluable skills create a strong sense of community and collective wellbeing.

Pupils make healthy food choices and take part enthusiastically in physical activities such as climbing and running in the school's outdoor learning areas as well as walking a mile a day. Pupils who have specific needs in relation to eating learn over time to try new types of food, including new textures, smells and tastes. This is a significant achievement. Many pupils participate enthusiastically in extra-curricular clubs and activities such as the coding club, art club and the dance club.

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

In nearly all lessons, teachers and support staff have high expectations of pupils' work and behaviour. Teachers set meaningful objectives, plan interesting and engaging tasks and use an extensive and creative range of resources to support teaching and learning. In nearly all lessons, teachers plan relevant opportunities to develop pupils' communication, literacy and numeracy skills.

Nearly all teachers and support staff develop very productive and caring working relationships with pupils. This approach creates a consistently calm learning environment across the school that promotes effectively the positive behaviour of nearly all pupils.

The school has successfully embedded beneficial routines that facilitate pupils' access to the curriculum, which they embrace with confidence and growing independence. All staff support pupils thoughtfully to develop their emotional and physical resilience as they move through the school.

Nearly all staff make excellent use of a highly effective range of communication strategies when supporting pupils with their learning throughout the school day. They use these strategies very skilfully to deliver teaching and learning activities in ways that meet the individual needs and abilities of pupils. The consistent use of schedules, visual and auditory cues and songs enables pupils to manage their transitions exceptionally well. As a result, many pupils are well prepared to move around school and between activities calmly, such as from a soft-play activity into a class-based focus task.

Teachers use the school's highly effective and robust assessment and tracking systems very well to capture pupils' progress and plan further learning opportunities effectively.

Teachers and support staff provide constructive verbal feedback to pupils throughout the day. This helps them stay motivated and develops their understanding of what they need to do to improve. Feedback in home-school books and other means of communication shows parents what their child has done well and what they can do to help them to improve. This communication is valued highly by all parents.

The school provides a broad, balanced and stimulating curriculum that meets the needs of nearly all pupils well. As new pupils arrive, the school has modified the curriculum to meet the needs of pupils with more complex needs, including the very recent introduction of two discrete learning pathways.

The school places a strong focus on developing pupils' skills that prepares them well for their next stage of learning and adult life. The consistent focus on developing pupils' communication, numeracy, life and independence skills links well to purposeful accreditation pathways for older pupils.

Provision for ICT skills generally meets the needs of pupils of all abilities. Pupils access a suitable range of technology, such as communication aids, touch screens for numeracy programmes, symbol software to support literacy, and electronic tablets for the lunchtime coding club.

The school enhances the curriculum with beneficial enrichment activities, including activities which are delivered by highly skilled external providers. For example, a children's performer delivers sessions through expressive arts funding obtained by the school. Additionally, there are valuable opportunities for older pupils to apply their knowledge and skills in real life situations in the local community. For example, staff at a local supermarket embrace the use of a communication system by pupils to purchase items.

There is suitable provision for pupils to experience the Cwricwlwm Cymreig, for example through the Eisteddfod and visits to local places of interest.



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

Ysgol Bryn Derw is a close-knit, nurturing community that provides outstanding care, support and guidance for its pupils. It has an extremely caring and supportive ethos which promotes the individual needs of its pupils exceptionally well. The strong commitment of all staff to pupils' wellbeing has a positive impact on their personal development.

Staff understand pupils' needs outstandingly well. Detailed initial assessments of pupils' individual learning and care needs are completed before they join the school. These assessments and careful transition processes support pupils' progression to the school from their previous settings very effectively.

The school makes very strong provision for the development of pupils' personal and social education both in the classroom and throughout the day. Teaching staff plan a range of valuable opportunities to allow pupils to express their feelings and emotions. This has increased pupils' participation and engagement in activities. Pupils undertake purposeful activities to develop important life skills such as tolerating new foods and teeth brushing. The school has also developed highly effective practice to promote pupils' spiritual, moral social and cultural development. This includes the school Eisteddfod and assemblies that celebrate pupils' achievements and successes well.

The school has robust and well-established systems in place to track the progress that all pupils make. Teachers and support staff make effective use of the varied and rich sources of information they have on its pupils. The tracking of pupils' progress and wellbeing during their time at the school is an outstanding feature of the work of the school. The school uses this information exceptionally well to plan additional support for pupils and to set individual targets for improvement. The school works successfully with a wide range of external support agencies to ensure that pupils have access to specialist advice and support where required.

The school provides exceptional opportunities for parents and carers to support their children's needs, for example through workshops that focus on sleep, toileting and personal hygiene. School coffee mornings provide parents with valuable opportunities to share experiences and support each other. The school has also produced a range of valuable information leaflets to develop further parents' understanding of autism. Where appropriate, these signpost parents usefully to other services. The strong relationship between school and home helps parents support their child at home using many of the strategies in place at school.

Parents appreciate the schools engagement with, and support for, them and their children. As a result of the exceptional care, support and guidance provided by the school and reflecting on their past experiences, many parents have commented "this school allows us to be parents again".

The school makes thoughtful use of a range of approaches to provide parents with regular information on their child's progress and wellbeing. For example, through home school books, digital technology and regular parents' meetings. Annual reports on pupil progress highlight pupils' achievements and attitudes to learning exceptionally well. They are detailed and provide valuable information regarding next steps in development. As a result, parents are well informed about the progress that their child makes at the school.

The school has robust arrangements to promote healthy lifestyles. Pupils prepare and cook healthy meals during their independent living sessions and are encouraged to clean their teeth as part of their daily routine at school. Many pupils take advantage of the extensive opportunities provided to take regular exercise such as swimming and dancing.

The school is successful in encouraging pupils to participate actively in the life of the school and the wider community. The school offers beneficial opportunities for all groups of pupils to take on responsibilities and to become active citizens. For example, a few older pupils take a mentoring and leadership role in the lunchtime sports club.

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

### **Leadership and management: Excellent**

Ysgol Bryn Derw opened as a new school in 2017 with 32 pupils. Since then, it has been on a continuous journey of development, with rapidly increasing numbers and a wider range of needs. The inspirational leadership and collaborative approach of the headteacher throughout this time has enabled staff, pupils, parents and governors to be part of this journey. As a result, Ysgol Bryn Derw, in a short period of time, has become a highly successful school.

The school has an extremely clear vision, which has been developed by the whole school community. The vision is based on the name of the school, Bryn Derw (Oak Hill). The hill represents the obstacles that pupils have to overcome and the tree represents the idea that all pupils will flourish. Pupils took part in a competition to design the school logo. This has helped pupils to understand the vision in a way that is meaningful to them.

The school ethos, one of 'unconditional positive regard', is understood by all and is evident throughout the school.

The headteacher and deputy head provide extremely strong leadership and management. Since opening the school, the head has placed a clear focus on appointing staff with management responsibilities who have the skills, experience and personalities needed to create a highly effective team.

Shared leadership across the school is a strength. In addition to the extended management team, other teachers and teaching assistants take responsibility for different aspects of the work of the school, for example areas of learning and experience, communication, health care plans, pupil voice and outdoor learning. This means that all staff have a clear sense of working together to drive improvement.

The headteacher has established a robust system of quality assurance activities. These include lesson observations, learning walks, book scrutiny and monitoring of planning and pupils' individual education plans. Since opening the school, the headteacher has gradually increased the number of staff involved in carrying out these activities. Information from these activities is shared constructively with staff and, where there is good practice, staff are encouraged to observe each other.

Performance management for teachers and teaching assistants is robust. Objectives link well to the school development plan. Where there is underperformance, senior leaders address this appropriately and effectively.

The governing body consists of highly committed members with a variety of relevant skills and experience. The school benefits greatly from their contribution. They provide extremely effective support and challenge for the school. In addition to full governing body and sub-committee meetings, governors take part in beneficial quality assurance activities, including learning walks and work scrutiny and projects such as looking at transport issues. This project resulted in training for taxi drivers. Governors have a clear understanding of national priorities, and the work that the school is doing in relation to these, including the curriculum for Wales and the ALN Act. Headteacher reports to the governing body are strategic and highly informative, with a clear focus on data. Governors provide robust challenge.

Self-evaluation and development planning are a strength of the school. There is an ethos of continuous reflection at all levels across the school. The school obtains the views of parents and pupils through regular surveys. Peer reviews from other schools also contribute to the process.

Since opening the school, the headteacher has gradually developed a very collaborative approach to development planning involving staff, governors, and where appropriate, pupils. For example, during professional development days, staff discuss possible priorities, marking them as high, medium or low priority, as well as suggesting priorities of their own.

The school places a particularly strong emphasis on upskilling staff. Senior leaders understand clearly the strengths of each member of staff and provide them with regular opportunities to develop in other areas. All staff receive regular training on key areas related to both teaching and learning and wellbeing.

Teachers and teaching assistants have benefited strongly from visits to other schools. A particularly effective and creative example of this is where teaching assistants from Bryn Derw swap places with teaching assistants from another special school for a day. Questionnaires completed before and after the visits show that all staff involved feel that they have gained in knowledge and confidence.

Budget management, including grants, is robust. The headteacher has managed the challenges created by a rapid increase in numbers extremely well, ensuring that resources are directed towards the pupils. The school makes very good use of the facilities it has to ensure a calm environment which supports successfully teaching and learning, and the wellbeing of staff and pupils.

## Copies of the report

Before an inspection, inspectors:

- analyse the outcomes from parent and pupil questionnaires and consider the views of teaching, support staff and the governing body through their questionnaire responses

During an inspection, inspectors normally:

- hold a meeting with parents to hear their views on the school and its effectiveness
- meet the headteacher, governors, senior and middle leaders (where appropriate) 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, where appropriate
- visit lessons and undertake a variety of learning walks to observe pupils learning and to see staff teaching in a range of settings
- observe and speak to pupils at lunch and break times and at a sample of after-school clubs
- attend assemblies and daily acts of collective worship
- 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 has 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, information on pupils' wellbeing, 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:

- reviewed 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

## 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.

Every possible care has been taken to ensure that the information in this document is accurate at the time of going to press. Any enquiries or comments regarding this document/publication should be addressed to:

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