

**A report on**

**Dan y Coed**

**Dan y Coed House  
Huntington Close  
West Cross  
Swansea  
SA3 5AL**

**Date of inspection: March 2025**

**by**

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

## About Dan y Coed

|   |                          |
|---|--------------------------|
| Name of provider                                  | Dan y Coed               |
| Proprietor status                                 | Orbis Education and Care |
| Language of the provider                          | English                  |
| Type of school                                    | Independent special      |
| Residential provision?                            | Yes                      |
| Number of pupils on roll                          | 30                       |
| Pupils of statutory school age                    | 21                       |
| Date of previous Estyn inspection (if applicable) | 14/11/2022               |
| Start date of inspection                          | 10/03/2025               |

### School context:

Dan y Coed school is an independent special school situated in the West Cross area of Swansea. The school opened in November 2017 and is owned by Orbis Education and Care. It is part of the portfolio of August Equity, a private equity investment company.

The school is in a large, detached property with easy access to the Mumbles coastline and the city of Swansea. The school shares the site with its residential provision, which provides a 20 bed, 52-week provision, which opened in May 2019.

Currently the school is registered for 30 pupils and is full. Nearly all pupils have an Individual Development Plan (IDP) or Education Health and Care Plan (EHCP). Most pupils speak English as their first language. Eleven pupils have looked after status. Pupils are placed at the school from local authorities in Wales and England.

A regional executive headteacher is managing the school with the support of a deputy headteacher and assistant headteacher whilst a new headteacher is recruited. The school has five class teachers and 35 learning support assistants.

The school has an on-site clinical team, which includes behaviour practitioners, speech and language therapists, and occupational therapists.

The school's aim is to 'provide a safe and secure school environment that encourages individuality, confidence and self-esteem'.

## Summary

Dan y Coed offers a bespoke curriculum for each pupil, which is broad and balanced. The curriculum is enhanced further through the school's offer of ASPIRE (Autistic Support Promoting Independence, Relationships & Equality) and FLIGHT (Friendships, life skills, Independence, Goals, Health and Trauma) model.

Pupils' academic, social, and vocational development is enhanced through the school's outside learning experiences.

Pupils benefit from the school's comprehensive careers programme, which provides them with a range of authentic experiences in the local community.

Over their time at the school, nearly all pupils make significant progress from their starting points.

In the most effective lessons, teaching is delivered with pace and clarity, and is matched to the needs and starting points of the pupils well.

Where teaching is less effective, lessons lack challenge or pace, which limits pupils' progress. Further, in a very few lessons, teachers lack confidence in the delivery of specialist subjects, which impacts upon pupil engagement and progress.

The school is strongly committed to embedding the principles of the United Nations Rights of the Child Convention (UNCRC) and have introduced 'Orbi' as their mascot promoting children's rights. Staff embed UNCRC principles across the curriculum, ensuring a rights-respecting ethos.

The school has a strong culture of safeguarding. As a result, pupils are kept safe and are nurtured.

The school has a strong community focus with partnerships that enhance the learning experiences for pupils, for example St Fagans National Museum of History, with local schools and businesses.

The school has a detailed professional learning programme, which covers important areas such as communication, behaviour management, planning and assessment. However, due to changes in the staff team, the consistent use of signing is underdeveloped across the school.

Leaders have a clear vision for the school and robust quality assurance processes are embedded. As a result, leaders have a thorough understanding of the school's strengths and areas of development.

## Main evaluation

Dan Y Coed is a welcoming and highly nurturing school. Staff work diligently and collaboratively to try and secure the best possible outcomes for all pupils.

### Curriculum

The school has a clear vision for its curriculum. A notable feature of the school's broad and balanced curriculum is its personalised approach for each pupil. The curriculum is enhanced through a bespoke model called, ASPIRE (Autistic Support Promoting Independence, Relationships & Equality) and FLIGHT (Friendships, life skills, Independence, Goals, Health and Trauma), which caters for the needs of all pupils at the school.

The school's external learning experiences enhance pupils' academic, social, and vocational development. Work placements build confidence and employability, and cultural trips broaden knowledge. Independence-focused activities, such as public transport training, promote self-sufficiency. In addition, the diversity and inclusiveness of the curriculum, including Tamil language support, cultural studies, and varied work experiences, promotes equality and personalised learning opportunities.

### Spotlight 1 - Careers and preparation for future destinations

The school utilises its strong relationships within the local community to ensure that the majority of pupils receive access to a wide range of career experiences, for example working at local farms, toy shops, cafes and running a school bank. These experiences and the school's comprehensive plan ensure that all pupils make informed choices around their own careers and future pathways. The school monitors and evaluates this work robustly.

Pupils have opportunities to engage in a range of activities as part of the PSHE, (personal, social, health education) program, which includes road safety, healthy eating, sensory circuits and self-care.

### Teaching

Nearly all staff have very positive relationships with pupils. They provide effective support and respond well to the needs of all pupils.

Staff use consistent routines purposefully to support pupils' learning and well-being. As a result, the majority of pupils engage well in their learning. Most staff demonstrate a sound understanding of the total communication approach and use communication boards,

symbols and objects of reference with confidence. However, many staff are less confident in the use of signing.

In the most effective lessons, teaching is delivered with pace and clarity, and is matched to the needs and starting points of the pupils well. Teachers use the achievement continuum assessment system confidently to assess pupils' progress against skills being taught. This enables teachers to successfully plan for progression.

In a very few lessons, where teaching is less successful, lessons lack challenge or pace, which limits pupils' progress. Further, in a very few lessons, teachers lack confidence in the delivery of specialist subjects, which impacts upon pupil engagement and progress.

### **Pupil progress**

Over their time at the school, nearly all pupils make positive progress from their starting points.

There is a structured approach to developing reading skills in relation to pupils' needs and abilities. As a result, nearly all pupils develop and improve these skills appropriately. For example, pupils recognise and understand symbols and signs to indicate their choice of activity and develop a love of reading by listening to the class teacher read a story. A few more able pupils read aloud confidently to a member of support staff.

The school effectively utilises a reading software package in collaboration with external providers, enabling pupils who use digital communication devices to develop strong reading skills. This innovative approach ensures that nearly all pupils make demonstrable progress.

Where appropriate, nearly all pupils develop their oracy skills well. For example, less able pupils are supported to form letter sounds and build this into word sounds. More able pupils are able to present their opinions with confidence.

Nearly all pupils develop their numeracy skills at an appropriate level, for example solving quadratic equations, completing tally charts and matching numbers to words. Further, pupils are provided with authentic opportunities to apply their numeracy skills when out in the community.

Nearly all pupils develop their physical skills appropriately through a variety of opportunities, such as weekly gymnastics, swimming and bouldering sessions. Around half of pupils across the school participate in the national 'Parasport Festival' through Disability Sport Wales. This provides opportunities for pupils to participate in a range of sporting events with other peers from across Wales. This further enhances pupils' development of physical skills alongside their social and communication skills.

Pupils develop their creative skills well across a range of learning opportunities, for example making chocolate pancakes to recreate a model of their favourite character from a book and using animation tools to bring drawings to life.

Pupils develop their digital skills through a range of beneficial opportunities in line with their abilities, for example independently using the self-checkout machine at a local supermarket, creating animation videos of their own art work or producing bar charts using online platforms.

### **Pupil voice**

Pupil voice is embedded in all aspects of school life, with many pupils engaging in meaningful discussions, debates and decision-making. The use of digital communication devices and communication tools ensures that all pupils can express their thoughts and preferences.

The school council effectively empowers pupils, enhancing confidence, decision-making and involvement in school improvements and charitable initiatives through regular meetings.

### **Spotlight 2 - United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC)**

Staff at Dan Y Coed School are strongly committed to embedding the principles of the UNCRC within the school's ethos and curriculum. This commitment is evident in the whole-school initiative to integrate the Rights Respecting Schools Award.

Staff have created 'Orbi' as their mascot promoting children's rights. They engage pupils in understanding and respecting their rights. Staff encourage a daily awareness of children's rights and embed UNCRC principles across the curriculum, ensuring a rights-respecting ethos. Staff training supports the integration of these values into classroom learning and wider school life, fostering equity and inclusion.

### **Culture of safeguarding**

Staff know the pupils very well and this supports them to effectively meet their needs. In addition, the school is supported by local community police officers and the fire service, who regularly visit the site and meet with pupils to discuss community safety. As a result, pupils are safe, secure and nurtured.

The well-being of pupils is a high priority for all staff throughout the school. As a result, the school has a positive safeguarding culture. At weekly 'feedback Friday' meetings, important information about pupil well-being is shared and safeguarding scenarios discussed, providing ongoing training to staff on safeguarding and Prevent topics. Safeguarding concerns are recorded appropriately, using an online digital platform and

responded to in a timely manner. Further, a designated member of the wider organisation with oversight of safeguarding is involved in the quality assurance of safeguarding reports and referrals and has a clear understanding of the work of the school in this area.

## **Communication**

Clear and consistent communication with parents and carers, including daily check-ins and electronic updates, strengthens home-school partnerships and ensures continuity in learning and well-being. Parents and carers value the staff's responsiveness, particularly during transitions or personal challenges. Effective transition processes, including personalised plans and familiarisation visits, ease pupils' adjustment and promote consistency in care.

The school works effectively with parents, carers, and stakeholders to provide pupils with educational opportunities, work experience, and enrichment activities that are inclusive and financially accessible. Policies provide a strong foundation for equality, diversity, and inclusion, ensuring that all pupils receive fair and dignified education.

The school maintains a strong community focus, with active partnerships enhancing learning experiences.

### **Spotlight - St Fagans Museum Collaboration**

Dan Y Coed's collaboration with St Fagans National Museum of History has significantly enhanced accessibility for neurodivergent pupils. The partnership emerged when the school arranged a field trip to the museum and many pupils found the unfamiliar environment overwhelming. As a result, the school team worked closely with St Fagans staff to develop a structured and supportive pre-visit experience. A key outcome was the creation of a welcome video story, which all schools could use in advance to prepare pupils for their visit. This initiative helps reduce anxiety by providing a clear, predictable narrative of what to expect at the museum. Additionally, staff worked with the museum to design visual resources with symbols tailored to the needs of pupils, further supporting their ability to navigate the site and engage with exhibits. The school shared best practices on using structured communication methods, enabling museum staff to better support neurodivergent visitors in the future.

## **Staff development and professional learning**

Dan y Coed has developed a strong leadership team and a highly effective, skills-based curriculum tailored to individual needs.

The school has a comprehensive and well-structured professional learning programme covering essential areas such as communication, behaviour management, planning and

assessment. However, due to changes in the staff team, the consistent use of signing is underdeveloped across the school.

Leaders have developed successful links with other schools to share best practice. In addition, they collaborate effectively with Swansea local authority to support newly qualified teachers to complete their induction. This is a significant strength of the school.

### **Leadership and governance**

Leaders have a clear vision and strong values, ensuring a well-supported staff team. The proprietor continues to invest in resources that enhance learning opportunities and meet pupils' diverse needs. Leadership roles are well-defined, maintaining high standards and fostering a positive ethos. Governance provides structured oversight, with termly development days and business review meetings ensuring accountability and strategic planning.

Leaders undertake regular quality assurance activities to ensure effective teaching and pupil engagement. While most pupils benefit from structured support, these activities have highlighted inconsistencies in quality of teaching across the school.

The school's dedication to continuous improvement is reflected in its successful pupil outcomes, collaborations, response to previous inspection recommendations and a clear commitment to high standards of education and well-being.

## **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**

The school meets the regulatory requirements for this standard

### **The spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils**

The school meets the regulatory requirements for this standard.

### **Welfare, health and safety of pupils**

The school meets the regulatory requirements for this standard.

### **The suitability of proprietors and staff**

The school meets the regulatory requirements for this standard.

### **Premises of and boarding accommodation at schools**

The school meets the regulatory requirements for this standard.

### **The provision of information**

The school meets the regulatory requirements for this standard.

### **The manner in which complaints are to be handled**

The school meets 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. Reduce the variability in the quality of teaching across the school
- R2. Improve the use of signing across the school

## **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/carers 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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