

A report on

Ysgol Ty Coch

**Lansdale Drive
Tonteg
Pontypridd
RCT
CF38 1PG**

Date of inspection: March 2025

by

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

About Ysgol Ty Coch

Name of provider	Ysgol Ty Coch
Local authority	Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council
Language of the provider	English
School category according to Welsh-medium provision	
Type of school	Maintained Special
Religious character	*
Number of pupils on roll	242
Pupils of statutory school age	180
Number in nursery classes	*
Percentage of pupils eligible for free school meals over a three-year average (The national percentage of pupils eligible for free school meals over a three-year average in Maintained Special is 46.6%)	34.5%
Percentage of pupils identified as having additional learning needs (a) (The national percentage of pupils identified as having an additional learning need in Maintained Special is 100.0%)	100.0%
Percentage of pupils who speak Welsh at home	*
Percentage of pupils with English as an additional language	*
Date of headteacher appointment	01/09/2023
Date of previous Estyn inspection (if applicable)	01/06/2017

Start date of inspection	24/03/2025
<p>Further information</p> <p>Ysgol Tŷ Coch is a day special school maintained by Rhondda Cynon Taf local authority. The school provides education for pupils aged 3-19 with autism, multiple learning difficulties, physical and medical difficulties and sensory impairments.</p> <p>Currently, there are 242 pupils on roll, an increase of 100 pupils since the last inspection in 2017. All pupils have either a statement of special educational needs (SEN) or an individual development plan. Thirty-six per cent of pupils are eligible for free school meals. A very few pupils are looked after by the local authority. English is the main language of nearly all pupils.</p> <p>The school is based on two sites. The main school site is situated in Tonteg and provides education for primary and secondary aged pupils. The satellite site at Buarth y Capel in Ynysybwl provides specialist support for autistic pupils aged 14-19. In addition, the school has a base at the local college, where older pupils access vocational learning experiences.</p> <p>The school employs 121 staff. On average there are 10 pupils in each of the 22 classes, with a teacher pupil ratio of 1:9.</p> <p>The headteacher has been in post since September 2024.</p>	

Data reported is sourced from the latest available Pupil Level Annual School Census. These figures may be slightly different to those observed during the inspection.

Further information is available from the Welsh Government My Local School website: mylocalschool.gov.wales

- a. The term 'additional learning needs' is being used to describe those pupils on the SEN/ALN register of the school.

Summary

The school's nurturing ethos makes a strong contribution to pupils' personal development. Staff create a caring and supportive environment where nearly all pupils feel safe, valued, and well looked after. Relationships between staff and pupils are built on trust and a sound understanding of individual interests and needs.

Since 2017, the school has grown significantly, with pupil and staff numbers nearly doubling. This increase has placed pressure on the physical environment, leading to the loss of important specialist areas such as the sensory integration room and life skills kitchen, which supported pupils' wider development. Many classrooms are now cramped, restricting movement and access to learning, particularly for pupils who use wheelchairs. Limited space also reduces opportunities for pupils to regulate their sensory needs or develop independence, with few quiet or breakout areas available. This has contributed to increased anxiety and dysregulation for some pupils. Overall, the variability and limitations of the learning environment hinder the quality of teaching and learning, as well as impacting on the well-being of pupils and staff.

Leaders have established a clear vision for curriculum delivery, placing pupils at its heart through collaborative design with staff and external partners. A purposeful, broad, and balanced curriculum is developing. Pupils benefit from a broad range of learning experiences, which support their personal and social development. However, across the school, the quality of teaching is too variable and does not meet the learning needs of pupils well enough. Assessment for learning is also underdeveloped.

The majority of pupils make effective progress in key areas such as communication, numeracy, independence, and creativity. However, the inconsistent use of a total communication approach, to ensure that every child has the opportunity to understand and be understood, limits the ability of pupils to access learning, particularly in less structured environments.

Families value the school's integrated approach to support, particularly access to on-site clinics for physiotherapy and speech and language therapy. The school's investment in in-house provision and collaboration with health professionals contribute positively to pupils' care and well-being.

The headteacher provides methodical leadership and promotes clear values of respect, communication, and enjoyment, which are evident in the school's positive ethos and relationships. A significant staffing restructure alongside improved monitoring and evaluation has enabled leaders to gain a more accurate view of strengths and areas for development. However, leaders accept that their visibility and communication with parents need to improve and are aware of the impact the environment is having.

Recommendations

We have made 4 recommendations to help the school continue to improve:

- R1. Improve the quality and consistency of teaching and learning
- R2. Establish a consistent communication system to support all pupils' understanding, expression, and engagement
- R3. Work with the local authority to improve the quality of the learning environment to meet the needs of all pupils
- R4. Further strengthen leadership at all levels

What happens next

In accordance with the Education Act 2005, HMCI is of the opinion that this school is in need of significant improvement. The school will draw up an action plan to show how it is going to address the recommendations. Estyn will monitor the school's progress about 12 months after the publication of this report

Main evaluation

The school's nurturing ethos makes a strong contribution to pupils' personal development. Staff create a caring and supportive environment where nearly all pupils feel safe, valued, and well looked after. Relationships between staff and pupils are built on trust and a sound understanding of individual interests and needs. This positive climate supports pupils' well-being and contributes effectively to their sense of belonging. Safeguarding arrangements are robust and well understood by staff.

Impact of learning environment on teaching and learning

Since the last inspection, the school has experienced significant growth, with pupil and staff numbers nearly doubling. This expansion reflects increased demand and has placed considerable pressure on the physical environment. To accommodate more pupils, the school has lost specialist learning spaces such as the sensory integration room and the life skills kitchen, both of which previously played a vital role in supporting pupils' development.

The reduction in classroom sizes has also resulted in teaching spaces that are often cramped and overcrowded, limiting pupils' ability to move freely and reducing access to a broad and balanced curriculum. In some rooms, there is insufficient space for pupils to move between workstations safely, and furniture is not always suited to pupils' individual needs. This is particularly restrictive for pupils who use wheelchairs, impacting their independence and full participation in learning. Corridors too are cramped and act as storage areas for wheelchairs, standing frames and moulded mobility bases.

Inconsistent classroom décor across the school results in some pupils learning in environments that are cluttered and uninviting, which heighten anxiety, reduce focus, and negatively affect their sense of safety and belonging.

In addition, there are limited spaces and opportunities for pupils to regulate their sensory needs effectively or move around the classroom with increasing independence. For example, there is a lack of quiet or breakout areas where pupils can withdraw to self-regulate, contributing to increased levels of anxiety and dysregulation for some pupils.

Inconsistent teaching and learning experiences across the school

Where teaching is most effective, staff have a detailed understanding of pupils' abilities and interests and use this knowledge well to plan learning. Verbal feedback is timely, positive and supportive of pupils' efforts. This motivates pupils to persevere with their learning tasks and make effective progress over time. In these classes, the calm, nurturing and purposeful environment supports pupils' well-being and learning well and pupils

make strong progress. Routines are well established, and transitions are generally well managed. As a result, pupils understand and follow routines and expectations readily. This supports them well to participate in their learning.

However, across the school, the quality of teaching is too variable and does not meet the learning needs of pupils well enough. Teaching assistants generally support appropriately within classes. Where this is most effective, they contribute well to maintaining pupils' engagement in learning.

Where teaching is less effective:

- Expectations of pupils are not always clear, leading to variable levels of engagement and low-level dysregulation.
- The use of visual schedules to support pupils' understanding of daily routines is inconsistent.
- Teaching and support are not consistently tailored to meet individual learning needs, which means that some pupils struggle to access or fully engage in activities.
- Teaching assistants are not always fully engaged in supporting pupils' learning. This means that there are missed opportunities for pupils to consolidate important skills.
- Activities do not build effectively on pupils' prior learning and are not tailored to meet the needs and interests of individual pupils.
- Resources and teaching strategies are inconsistent, and the use of objects of reference is limited.
- Tasks are not always appropriately scaffolded, leading to some pupils being either over-supported or insufficiently challenged.

Consequently, a minority of pupils are not fully engaged and do not make the progress of which they are capable. Additionally, assessment for learning, where staff use what they see and hear to check pupils' understanding and provide feedback, is under-developed.

Strategic direction and strengthened leadership

Since the headteacher's appointment, leadership has become more stable and strategic following a period of insecurity and limited distribution of responsibilities. A significant restructure affected almost half the staff with 45 permanent appointments and 20 new staff members, including two senior leaders. This restructure, alongside improved monitoring and evaluation, has enabled leaders to gain a more accurate view of strengths and areas for development.

The headteacher appropriately sought the advice and guidance of the school improvement partner in evaluating the work of the school and in helping to determine its improvement priorities. As a result, the school has introduced more effective assessment and tracking systems at whole-school, departmental and individual levels. These have helped reduce teacher workload while sharpening the focus on pupil progress. The recent introduction of termly strategic forums and clearer leadership roles are further supporting school-wide improvement.

The headteacher provides methodical leadership and promotes clear values of respect, communication and enjoyment, which are evident in the school's positive ethos and relationships. Recent leadership changes, including the appointment of permanent assistant headteachers, are beginning to strengthen strategic oversight, especially in teaching, learning, and curriculum development. Leaders' use of planning and monitoring systems is becoming more consistent, helping staff to develop a clearer understanding of pupil progress. Leaders have also fostered a growing culture of shared responsibility for improvement, supported by external reviews.

Developing a pupil-centred curriculum to support well-being, and pupil progress

The school fosters strong, trusting relationships between staff and pupils, creating a nurturing environment that supports pupils' well-being and encourages positive attitudes to learning. Leaders have established a clear vision for curriculum delivery, placing pupils at its heart through collaborative design with staff and external partners. A purposeful, broad and balanced curriculum is developing, underpinned by a comprehensive relationships and sexuality education programme that supports understanding of healthy relationships at all levels. Enrichment activities, such as trips and visitors, enhance learning meaningfully across the curriculum. While useful curriculum plans are in place, the explicit integration of literacy, numeracy, and digital competence is still emerging.

Pupils benefit from a broad range of learning experiences, which support their personal and social development. These include opportunities to explore real-life issues in a safe and meaningful way. Pupils are encouraged to take on responsibility through leadership roles, such as participation in the school Senedd and involvement in staff recruitment processes. The curriculum supports the development of independence and provides pupils with purposeful vocational and work-related opportunities to help them prepare for adult life.

The majority of pupils make effective progress in key areas such as communication, numeracy, independence, and creativity. For example, many pupils use a range of verbal and non-verbal methods confidently to engage in learning and express their needs. However, the inconsistent use of a total communication approaches, that ensure that every child has the opportunity to understand and be understood, limits pupils' ability to access learning consistently, particularly in less structured environments.

In numeracy, pupils engage well with practical and multisensory activities. Where strategies are well implemented, pupils demonstrate a developing understanding of early number concepts, sequencing, and simple problem-solving. However, pupils generally struggle to transfer these skills into more formal tasks or unfamiliar contexts.

Promoting independence and preparing pupils for life beyond school

Most pupils, where appropriate and with support, show increasing independence through purposeful, real-life experiences. They participate meaningfully in tasks such as preparing food, managing simple transactions, and accessing community-based activities. Where appropriate, pupils develop the skills needed to apply their independence across a wider range of settings and become less reliant on adult support.

The school supports older pupils to develop independent living and work-related skills, achieving meaningful accreditation, such as the Duke of Edinburgh Award. Nearly all school leavers transition successfully to destinations well matched to their needs, including further education and specialist provision.

Creative and problem-solving tasks promote strong engagement and collaboration. Pupils respond positively to Welsh language activities, especially in routine-based settings. Progress in reading and writing remains limited for many, with fewer pupils developing the skills needed for more formal literacy tasks. Health and well-being improve steadily, with some pupils making notable gains in confidence and emotional regulation.

Developing consistency in provision, behaviour support and target setting

The school's approach to behaviour is supported by strong relationships and a commitment to understanding pupils' emotional needs. Behaviour support for pupils with more complex needs is timely and effective, with clear systems in place for referral, intervention, and review. Staff are engaging positively with ongoing training in this area. However, the response to low-level behaviours and sensory dysregulation is not applied consistently across the school. As a result, this leads to increased pupil anxiety and impacts negatively on engagement. The development of purposeful environments that support regulation and engagement is an emerging focus at the school.

Strong partnerships with families and external professionals help staff to develop a holistic understanding of pupils' needs. Families value the school's integrated approach to support, particularly access to on-site clinics for physiotherapy and speech and language therapy. The school's investment in in-house provision and collaboration with health professionals contribute positively to pupils' care and well-being.

Despite these strengths, the learning environment does not consistently meet the complex needs of all pupils. In several classrooms, physical layouts and available resources do not support sensory regulation or independent movement well. The use of structured tools such as individual schedules, defined classroom areas, and workstations varies across the school. As a result, provision for pupils with sensory processing difficulties lacks consistency.

Target setting is of variable quality. In the most effective examples, it is informed by external professionals and involves collaboration with families, leading to clearly defined, achievable goals. However, a minority of targets are not sufficiently tailored to pupils' individual needs. Leaders have recently introduced a new cycle for monitoring Individual Development Plans (IDPs) and are working with the local authority to improve alignment between targets and pupils' long-term pathways. Staff understanding of the annual review process and the integration of IDPs with classroom planning is not yet fully embedded.

The governing body

The governing body brings a broad range of relevant expertise and demonstrates a strong commitment to supporting the school. Governors are well informed about structural changes and contribute to key aspects of school life, such as staffing and safeguarding. While they receive regular reports on the school's performance, their understanding of the quality of teaching and pupil progress is limited. As a result, they are not fully able to act as a critical friend to school leaders. Governors are ably supported in having a secure understanding of school finance and make appropriate decisions.

Financial pressures and strategic planning within a strong leadership framework

The local authority places pupils at the school based on an assessment of their additional learning needs. Following placement, the school must determine how it can best meet these needs and submit further evidence to secure appropriate funding. This process places financial strain on the school and limits leaders' ability to respond promptly to pupils' needs.

The school now maintains a modest surplus and demonstrates improved budget oversight. However, funding remains unpredictable. Administrative delays, particularly for pupils admitted mid-year, and retrospective adjustments continue to disrupt income stability, making financial planning challenging for leaders.

Leaders have made appropriate and targeted use of grants, for example in supporting pupils' attendance, improving staff understanding of trauma informed practices and securing additional provision from allied health professionals.

Overall, the school benefits from strong and developing leadership, a positive ethos, and committed governance. However, challenges remain in improving the quality of the learning environment, teaching and ensuring robust strategic and financial planning and evaluation systems across the school.

Additional information

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

The school's arrangements for site management give cause for concern and have been brought to the attention of the local authority

The school has appropriate arrangements for promoting healthy eating and drinking

Leaders and governors manage the school's finances appropriately, including the use of the pupil development grant.

Evidence base of the report

Before an inspection, inspectors:

- analyse the outcomes from the parent/carers and pupil questionnaires and consider the views of teachers and the governing body 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, senior and middle leaders (where appropriate) and individual teachers to evaluate the impact of the school's work
- meet pupils to discuss their work, to listen to them read 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 a broad sample of classes, including learning support groups and undertake a variety of learning walks to observe pupils learning and to see staff teaching in a range of settings, including classrooms, support groups and in outdoor areas
- where appropriate, visit the specialist resource base within the school to see pupils' learning
- observe and speak to pupils at lunch and break times and at a sample of after-school clubs, where appropriate
- 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' 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 (www.estyn.gov.wales)

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 publication. Any enquiries or comments regarding this document/publication should be addressed to:

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