

A report on

Gwenllian Education Centre

**Hillfield Villas
Kidwelly
Carmarthenshire
SA17 4UL**

Date of inspection: June 2025

by

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

About Gwenllian Education Centre

Name of provider	Gwenllian Education Centre
Proprietor status	Reflect Education Ltd
Language of the provider	English
Type of school	Independent special
Residential provision?	No
Number of pupils on roll	22
Pupils of statutory school age	14
Date of previous Estyn inspection (if applicable)	14/01/2019
Start date of inspection	04/06/2025

School context:

Gwenllian Education Centre is an independent day school in Kidwelly, Carmarthenshire. It offers individualised education for up to 22 pupils aged 5 to 19 years who have complex needs that include communication difficulties associated with autistic spectrum condition (ASC).

Currently, there are 22 pupils on roll and most pupils have an individual development plan (IDP). The school operates in premises that provide several small teaching spaces in addition to two large classrooms. The school has several outdoor play areas and provides a welcoming learning environment.

The school aims to provide a personalised educational experience to develop pupil skills and increase their independence.

The acting headteacher, who is closely supported by the proprietor, has been in post since September 2024.

Summary

Gwenllian Education Centre is a highly welcoming, calm and nurturing environment which provides a bespoke and personalised curriculum for every pupil.

The well-being and care for pupils and staff is a significant strength of the school.

Teaching at Gwenllian Education Centre is characterised by well-paced, structured sessions that prioritise individual engagement and progress. Nearly all staff demonstrate high levels of expertise in using bespoke communication strategies. This is a significant strength of the school.

Leaders effectively deploy staff to meet the additional learning needs (ALN) of nearly all pupils. Nearly all staff know the needs of pupils extremely well. As a result, pupils make strong progress from their individual starting points.

The school has well-embedded assessment processes. These are used highly effectively to inform planning and next steps. Nearly all staff use a wide range of feedback well, including a blend of verbal, visual, signed and symbol-based to support pupils' understanding and reinforce their learning.

The school has a strong and embedded culture of safeguarding. However, whilst the school's safeguarding culture is highly effective in practice aspects of safer recruitment documentation do not allow leaders to easily determine whether all required pre-employment checks have been completed successfully.

The school's behaviour team are successfully integrated into the life of the school and are highly effective. The behaviour team are highly analytical in their approach which aids in early identification of pupil behaviours and enables responsive support.

Most pupils display strongly positive attitudes to learning. Staff foster a calm, consistent environment with the skilful use of prompts, praise, and patience. Pupils' understanding of expectations is evident through their ability to sustain attention and transition smoothly between activities.

Pupils' attendance at Gwenllian Education Centre is significantly above the national average.

Opportunities for developing leadership skills and personal responsibility are woven into daily routines and personalised learning activities. Pupils are supported to share their

views and have an appropriate understanding of responsibility. Pupils feel that their opinions are valued at the school.

While the school promotes the principles of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), due to the complex needs of the pupils, explicit references to the convention are limited. As a result, pupils' awareness of the UNCRC itself is underdeveloped.

The school offers exceptional support to parents and carers through training programmes, tailored behaviour support and detailed and regular communication. This is a notable strength of the school.

Leaders foster a collaborative culture across the school. Nearly all staff highly value the support offered by leaders.

The proprietors are highly committed and have sound strategic foresight in guiding the school's direction. Their involvement in wider initiatives, such as a day centre and restaurant, demonstrates their holistic approach to education and positively impacts on the opportunities for pupils.

Main evaluation

Gwenllian Education Centre is a calm, nurturing and supportive environment which provides a bespoke and personalised curriculum for every pupil. Leaders have created a strong culture of care for pupils and staff. Nearly all staff know pupils' needs and how to support them extremely well. As a result, pupils make strong progress from their initial starting points and their needs are met highly effectively.

Leaders at Gwenllian Education Centre prioritise the well-being of staff and pupils and ensure that their needs are well supported. A collaborative ethos further fosters a positive sense of belonging and acceptance.

Culture and ethos

There is a well-established culture of care, respect and ambition that permeates the school. Leaders foster an inclusive ethos where all pupils are valued, supported and understood. Leaders ensure that the emotional, social and academic needs of pupils are central to decision-making, and that staff consistently model the school's values in

everyday interactions. This ethos is particularly evident in the way pupils are supported to develop independence, self-regulation and resilience over time.

There is a strong culture of collaboration and reflection across the staff team. Leaders are approachable, visible and model high expectations in their own practice. They encourage open communication and reflective dialogue, which supports a climate of continuous improvement. Nearly all staff feel empowered to contribute to school development and to take ownership of initiatives that benefit pupil progress and well-being.

The school's mental health first aiders provide beneficial support to all staff and provide activities to promote positive well-being, for example through wellness walks, a school book club and the "act of kindness wall". Further, sessions on managing anxiety and understanding menopause are made available to all staff.

Curriculum and teaching

Teaching at Gwenllian Education Centre is characterised by well-paced, structured sessions that prioritise individual engagement and progress. This is a significant strength of the school.

Nearly all staff demonstrate high levels of expertise in using bespoke communication strategies, for example communication aids, symbols, verbal prompts and physical guidance. As a result, most pupils understand expectations of them and can access individualised learning effectively.

A few staff are trained in oral motor development and apply these strategies effectively to support pupils with feeding and speech articulation, reinforcing the school's commitment to meeting complex needs.

Nearly all staff demonstrate high expectations for all pupils. They tailor support thoughtfully, incorporating health and care needs sensitively within the learning environment. Purposeful adult interactions and strong team co-ordination help maintain momentum and ensure that learning remains pupil-centred.

The curriculum is broad and balanced. The school delivers a highly personalised and flexible curriculum that is well matched to pupils' individual needs, including those with ALN and those experiencing disadvantage. Curriculum planning is informed by thorough baseline assessment and is regularly reviewed.

Most pupils benefit from opportunities to develop digital competence or engage creatively through subjects such as textiles. Further, they participate in real-world learning including swimming, learning to ride a bike and work experience in line with their abilities. These experiences are well aligned to pupils' personal interests and long-term outcomes, supporting both academic and wider life skill development.

Leaders deploy staff effectively and ensure that resources are well matched to pupil needs. Investment in appropriate staffing, technology, and personalised resources ensures that nearly all pupils, including those with complex profiles, can access their learning pathway meaningfully. Where required, external partnerships and tutoring provision are commissioned to enhance academic opportunity, particularly for more able pupils.

Assessment and progression

Nearly all staff know their pupils and their individual needs extremely well. As a result, nearly all pupils' needs are well met and they make strong progress in the acquisition of skills from their starting points. This is a notable strength of the school.

Assessment processes are fully integrated across the school and used highly effectively to inform planning and next steps. Nearly all staff use an extensive blend of verbal, visual, signed and symbol-based feedback to support pupils' understanding and reinforce their learning.

Nearly all staff respond skilfully and consistently to pupils, fostering reciprocal communication and gradually building expressive skills. Visual routines and symbol-supported structures encourage autonomy in communication and enable pupils to make choices confidently. Where appropriate, nearly all pupils develop their communication skills well. For example, a few pupils develop their use of spoken language, such as counting aloud in numeracy tasks, developing oracy skills in real contexts and confidently engaging in meaningful conversations with peers, staff and visitors. A few pupils communicate non-verbally, using gestures, eye contact and sustained attention.

Keeping safe

The school has a strong and embedded culture of safeguarding, underpinned by well-established routines, vigilant staff and a clear understanding of pupils' needs and vulnerabilities. Staff at all levels demonstrate a high level of awareness and commitment to keeping pupils safe and safeguarding is clearly prioritised across the school's work.

Pupils feel secure and well supported, and parents express confidence in the school's ability to protect and care for their children. Robust systems are in place for identifying and responding to concerns and leaders ensure that appropriate training and regular updates keep safeguarding practice current and effective.

While the school's safeguarding culture is highly effective in practice, administrative arrangements for aspects of safer recruitment documentation do not allow leaders to easily determine whether all required pre-employment checks have been completed successfully.

Nearly all pupils demonstrate strong progression in the development of their independent skills and understanding of how to keep themselves safe, for example understanding road safety awareness, staying safe online and the importance of healthy relationships.

Pupils' therapeutic targets are embedded into daily practice through close collaboration with external professionals. The school's holistic focus on well-being is evident in routines such as daily tooth-brushing and support for pupils in managing medical procedures.

Behaviour and well-being

Nearly all staff build strong and trusting relationships with pupils, which underpin successful learning. High expectations, combined with consistent use of praise, patience and emotional regulation strategies, enable pupils to feel safe, valued and motivated.

The school's behaviour team are well integrated into the life of the school and are highly effective. They adopt a proactive and responsive approach, offering flexible and timely interventions tailored closely to individual pupil needs. Staff are confident in seeking their support and guidance. The behaviour team make effective use of detailed case studies and data to monitor frequency, severity and duration of behaviours. This analytical approach supports early identification and responsive support. As a result, most pupils develop positive attitudes to learning, demonstrate pride in their achievements, and show increasing resilience.

Pupils' attendance at Gwenllian Education Centre is significantly above the national average.

Rights, responsibilities and relationships

Pupils have an appropriate understanding of responsibility and are supported to express their views. They demonstrate a clear sense of right and wrong and feel that their opinions are valued.

Opportunities for developing leadership skills and personal responsibility are woven into daily routines and personalised learning activities. Many pupils, where appropriate, take increasing responsibility for aspects of their learning and personal routines.

While the school promotes the principles of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), due to the complex needs of the pupils, explicit references to the convention are limited. As a result, pupils' awareness of the UNCRC itself is underdeveloped.

Careers and work experience

The school has developed a flexible and inclusive careers programme that reflects the wide range of pupil needs, including support from Careers Wales. The school also organises purposeful work experience placements, which have clearly identified goals of supporting pupils to become more independent. Placements are closely matched to the interests and needs of pupils with constant reviewing of activities and planned targets. For example, pupils who show an interest in hospitality visit a local restaurant in Burry Port.

Parental partnerships

The school provides exceptional support to parents and carers, fostering a strong, collaborative ethos that extends well beyond the classroom. Families describe the school as “like a second family” and speak of a deep sense of trust in the staff, who are seen as genuinely caring for both pupils and their wider support networks.

A standout feature is the comprehensive training programme for parents and carers, which covers areas such as behaviour, communication, and self-help. These well-attended sessions are highly effective in ensuring consistency between home and school, enabling families to confidently use the same strategies and tools as staff. For example, the behaviour team has successfully guided a few parents and carers in moving from symbol-based communication to digital communication tools, helping to ensure that pupils' communication remains relevant, functional and accessible in everyday life. The school also empowers families through tailored behaviour support and communication training, equipping them to reinforce learning and positive behaviours at home.

Regular, detailed written updates about each pupil's progress further strengthen this partnership. They enable parents to meaningfully engage with their child's experiences, including for pupils with limited communication skills. The school's inclusive approach also extends to involving external support workers in on-site training, promoting a

consistent and unified approach across all aspects of the child's life. This proactive and open communication is a key strength of the school's work.

Leadership and strategic vision

The school demonstrates a clear strategic vision, underpinned by inclusive planning and effective communication. The school improvement plan is co-constructed with staff and the school's vision, strengths and areas for development are well understood by nearly all staff.

Leadership transitions have been managed very carefully. The appointment of the acting headteacher has enabled the proprietor to focus on broader business responsibilities. However, the proprietor remains a consistent presence, ensuring that the school's strategic direction is sustained.

Leaders foster a collaborative culture across the school. Quality assurance processes are well structured, and the leadership team adopts a responsive approach to supporting staff well-being and professional learning. Nearly all staff highly value the support offered by leaders.

The school provides a well-structured and wide-ranging professional learning programme. This covers relevant topics such as teaching strategies, operational matters and communication tools, ensuring that all staff benefit from regular, purposeful development. In addition, staff are supported to attend external professional development relevant to their role. Leaders routinely evaluate the impact of these sessions on practice. Staff also make effective use of opportunities to visit other providers to learn from best practice.

Oversight and governance

The proprietors show a high level of commitment and strategic foresight in guiding the school's direction. Their involvement in wider initiatives, such as a day centre and restaurant, reinforces their holistic approach to education and positively impacts on the opportunities for pupils.

Governance arrangements include regular engagement through weekly formal meetings and daily informal contact between the proprietor and school leaders. Meetings follow a structured agenda, covering key areas such as safeguarding. While records of meetings are primarily list-based rather than evaluative, proprietors remain well informed due to their ongoing involvement and continuous dialogue with leaders.

Financial management is effective. The proprietor leads on budgetary oversight and demonstrates a clear understanding of expenditure. Relationships with placing authorities are positive. However, historic funding arrangements have not always accounted fully for the cost of specialist services, including supervision levels and occupational therapy or speech and language provision. This presents a potential challenge to the school's long-term financial sustainability.

Compliance with the regulations for registration

Independent school inspections are governed by the Education Act 2002 and related regulations: the Independent School Standards (Wales) Regulations 2024. These regulations require an independent school to meet an appropriate standard in the following areas:

The quality of education provided by the school

On the basis of this inspection, there is no evidence that the school does not comply with this standard.

The spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils

On the basis of this inspection, there is no evidence that the school does not comply with this standard.

Welfare, health and safety of pupils

On the basis of this inspection, there is no evidence that the school does not comply with this standard.

The suitability of proprietors and staff

On the basis of this inspection, there is no evidence that the school does not comply with this standard.

Premises of and boarding accommodation at schools

On the basis of this inspection, there is no evidence that the school does not comply with this standard.

The provision of information

On the basis of this inspection, there is no evidence that the school does not comply with this standard.

The manner in which complaints are to be handled

On the basis of this inspection, there is no evidence that the school does not comply with 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 Strengthen record keeping, particularly in relation to safer recruitment checks and strategic leadership in this area
- R2 Fully embed the United Nations Convention Rights of the Child (UNCRC) into the curriculum

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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