

A report on

Tarren School

**Eastern Avenue
Croeserw
Cymmer
Neath
SA13 3PB**

Date of inspection: July 2025

by

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

About Tarren school

Name of provider	Tarren School
Proprietor status	Val's Community, a private limited company
Language of the provider	English
Type of school	Independent ALN specialist
Residential provision?	Yes
Number of pupils on roll	5
Pupils of statutory school age	5
Date of previous Estyn visit	11/03/2024
Start date of visit	07/07/2025

School context:

Tarren School is an independent school for up to 20 pupils aged 8 to 18 years who have a diagnosis of autistic spectrum condition (ASC). The school is administered by Val's Community, a private limited company specialising in children's services, which operates two other independent schools in England.

The school operates across two sites in semi-rural areas: one in Neath, Port Talbot and the other on the outskirts of Swansea. Currently, there are five pupils on roll, with three based at the Tarren School site and two at the Mill Haven site. Since the core inspection, the Welsh Government has restricted admissions to the school. There is a linked children's home on the Tarren School site, although the school also accepts day pupils. All pupils are in the care of their local authority, with a minority placed by local authorities in Wales. All pupils have either an individual development plan (IDP) or an education, health and care plan (EHCP).

At the core inspection in March 2024, the school did not comply with the Independent School Standards (Wales) Regulations 2024. Following this inspection, a new education director was appointed in September 2024 to support the headteacher.

The Welsh Government required the school to produce a post-inspection action plan (PIAP) to address the areas of non-compliance. To comply fully with these requirements, the school was required to address the following issues under each standard:

Standard 1: The Quality of Education Provided

- The proprietor ensures a written curriculum policy, supported by appropriate plans and schemes of work, is drawn up and implemented effectively [2(1)(a)].
- The policy, plans and schemes of work:
 - take into account the ages, aptitudes and needs of all pupils, including those with an IDP or a statement,
 - do not undermine fundamental values of democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty, and mutual respect and tolerance of those with different faiths and beliefs,
 - take into account the principles in Part 1 of the Convention [2(1)(b)].
- Pupils receiving secondary education have access to accurate, up-to-date, impartial careers guidance that enables informed choices and encourages them to fulfil their potential [2(2)(e)].
- Teaching enables pupils to acquire new knowledge and make good progress according to their ability, increasing their understanding and developing their skills [2(3)(a)].
- Teaching fosters intellectual, physical or creative effort, interest in work and the ability to think and learn independently [2(3)(b)].
- Teaching involves well-planned lessons, effective methods, suitable activities and wise management of learning time [2(3)(c)].
- Teaching demonstrates a good understanding of pupils' aptitudes, needs and prior attainments, which are taken into account in lesson planning [2(3)(d)].
- A framework is in place to assess pupils' work regularly and thoroughly, using this information to plan teaching so that pupils can progress [2(3)(g)].

Standard 3: The Welfare, Health and Safety of Pupils

- The proprietor ensures that:
 - arrangements are in place to safeguard and promote the welfare of pupils,
 - a written safeguarding policy is drawn up and effectively implemented,
 - these arrangements and policy have regard to relevant guidance issued by Welsh Ministers [6].
- Relevant health and safety laws are complied with through the effective implementation of a written health and safety policy, including consideration of off-site activities [13].
- Compliance with the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005 is ensured [14].

- First aid is administered competently and promptly through the effective implementation of a written first aid policy [15].

Standard 5: The Suitability of the Premises

- The school buildings provide reasonable resistance to rain, snow, wind and moisture [27(f)].
- There is sufficient access to enable safe emergency evacuation for all pupils, including those with special requirements [27(g)].
- Access to the school allows all pupils, including those with special requirements, to enter and leave safely and comfortably [27(h)].
- Classrooms and other parts of the school are maintained in a tidy, clean and hygienic state [27(n)].
- Lighting, heating and ventilation in classrooms and other parts of the school are satisfactory [27(p)].
- There are appropriate arrangements for outside play space for all pupils, including those with special requirements [27(t)].

Standard 6: The Provision of Information

- Where a pupil with an IDP or statement is registered at the school, the school must provide the local authority with such information as reasonably required for statutory reviews [28(8)].

In October 2024, a team of inspectors held a virtual meeting with the school to support leaders in strengthening their initial versions of the PIAP. Inspectors then visited the school later in October 2024 and in January 2025 to discuss progress against the revised PIAP. Subsequently, HMI visited the school in June 2025 to evaluate compliance with the previously non-compliant standards.

Main findings

Following the core inspection in March 2024, Tarren School has made progress in addressing previous areas of non-compliance. Since the spring term 2025, many promising improvements have been introduced. While it is still early to fully assess their long-term impact or sustainability, initial signs are encouraging.

Leaders have introduced assessment systems to track pupils' progress, using up-to-date baseline information to inform statutory and personalised plans. Teaching staff have improved lesson planning, and there is now a structured approach to managing behaviour and supporting self-regulation across both sites. Staff use a range of appropriate strategies, such as movement breaks, music and visual supports, which help pupils to access learning more consistently. Teachers are beginning to explore how assessment information can more effectively inform their planning.

There are clear indications that pupils are making progress in their learning and engagement, and pupils now sustain participation in activities and maintain regulation for longer periods. However, while the school collects useful data on pupils' behaviour, attendance and engagement, it does not track or analyse this information systematically to demonstrate the progress pupils are making over time. Although the school has gathered appropriate assessment information, in most cases this has only happened once due to the limited time since systems were introduced.

All staff hold professional qualifications relevant to teaching and learning, with most being qualified teachers. Staff have completed mandatory training and almost all have undertaken further online training to support their roles. As a result, staff are suitably trained and qualified to support pupils with complex needs.

Teaching across the school supports pupils appropriately, and planning aligns well with pupils' individual plans and additional learning needs. Staff build positive, professional relationships with pupils, which help them to engage in learning and develop confidence and independence. Staff also provide pupils with valuable opportunities to learn outside the classroom, for example through shopping tasks and QR code treasure hunts, to support engagement and develop skills for their future.

The school has established a formalised approach to providing pupils with support to access future careers, including access to external specialist advisors. However, this programme is of short duration and is specific to pupils transitioning away from the school. Pupils at the school are not currently accessing this programme due to their age

and individual needs. However, they are supported to identify and progress towards future ambitions through the curriculum and daily learning activities.

Communication between the home and school has been strengthened, and roles and responsibilities are understood clearly. The school day is now more structured, with a stronger focus on learning.

Safeguarding procedures are well understood and embedded. All staff receive regular training, and the use of electronic systems has strengthened the recording and analysis of safeguarding concerns. Teaching staff build positive, professional relationships with pupils and encourage appropriate behaviour, for example by involving pupils in creating class charters and by praising effort. There are suitable systems for recording and reporting any instances of challenging behaviour, although the school does not yet use this information effectively to evaluate its work or demonstrate progress in this area.

Leadership changes have provided a clearer direction and strengthened support across the school. The director of education and newly appointed lead teachers provide appropriate support to the headteacher. Enhanced training and support have strengthened the skillset of staff and increased their confidence in delivering education and supporting pupils with complex needs. Although it is too early to evaluate the full impact of recent change, there are encouraging early signs. As leadership roles continue to develop, leaders have identified the need to refine the balance between support and challenge to promote and secure sustained improvement.

The school is now compliant with the Independent School Standards (Wales) Regulations. However, these improvements are very recent and leaders have not yet fully embedded systems or used data effectively to evaluate the impact of their work. As a result, there is not yet clear evidence of sustained improvement in pupils' learning and progress.

The Welsh Government may wish to consider limiting the maximum number of pupils who can attend Tarren School until systems and processes are embedded and there is sustained evidence of their impact.

Compliance with the standards 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 visit, there is no evidence to indicate that the school does not meet the regulatory requirements for this standard.

The spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils

Not considered on this visit.

Welfare, health and safety of pupils

On the basis of this visit, there is no evidence to indicate that the school does not meet the regulatory requirements for this standard.

The suitability of proprietors and staff

Not considered on this visit.

Premises of and boarding accommodation at schools

On the basis of this visit, there is no evidence to indicate that the school does not meet the regulatory requirements for this standard.

The provision of information

On the basis of this visit, there is no evidence to indicate that the school does not meet the regulatory requirements for this standard.

The manner in which complaints are to be handled

Not considered on this visit.

Recommendation regarding continued registration

There is no evidence that the school does not comply fully with the Independent School Standards (Wales) Regulations 2024.

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 Act 1998.

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:

Publication Section

Estyn

Anchor Court, Keen Road

Cardiff

CF24 5JW or by email to publications@estyn.gov.wales

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