

Report summary for parents and carers on Birchwood School

Date of inspection: October 2025

Summary

Birchwood School is welcoming and nurturing, where nearly all staff work closely together to help nearly all pupils develop their social and emotional skills appropriately. The school's peaceful setting and extensive grounds provide calm, reflective spaces that help nearly all pupils manage their emotions and build positive relationships with staff and peers.

Nearly all parents value the school's strong communication, smooth transition processes, and personalised support.

Most pupils benefit from a wide range of enrichment activities such as horse riding, swimming, and community visits. Further, a majority of pupils benefit from vocational learning opportunities, such as the podcast studio and hair salon, which help them to prepare for life beyond school.

Nearly all staff build strong, positive relationships with pupils and model respectful behaviour. This creates a calm, polite atmosphere where nearly all pupils feel safe and happy. Most pupils say they enjoy school and those in the school council feel that their opinions are listened to.

Specialist staff, including therapists and behaviour practitioners, work alongside teaching staff to ensure that pupils' needs are met.

The school supports families in practical ways, for example by providing uniforms, meals, and access to the 'Birchwood Bargains' shop, where pupils can buy or receive essential items such as toiletries and clothing.

Before pupils join Birchwood School, leaders carefully assess each child's needs and plan tailored support. Staff meet regularly to review strategies and ensure that support is adapted when pupils face personal difficulties. This approach helps most pupils settle quickly, improve attendance, and regulate their emotions more effectively.

Nearly all teachers know their pupils well and plan lessons that reflect their interests. However, while staff identify key skills for pupils to develop, the long-term planning of learning pathways and progression remains underdeveloped. As a result, staff are not able to clearly determine whether each pupil is working at an appropriate level of challenge.

Where teaching is most effective, staff make purposeful use of learning time. Lessons move at an appropriate pace, and activities are well matched to pupils' abilities, enabling them to remain fully engaged. Where teaching is less effective, an overreliance on short activities and frequent breaks limits pupils' opportunities to consolidate their learning. As a result, pupils do not always sustain focus or develop their skills in sufficient depth.

School leaders are highly committed and know each pupil well. They have created a strong collaborative culture where most staff feel valued and supported. Leaders encourage professional development, offering training and qualifications to develop staff expertise.

Governance provides appropriate oversight and works with leaders to share best practice across the wider organisation. However, at the time of the inspection, inspectors identified issues relating to record keeping and underlying administrative systems that were raised with the school leadership team.

The school does not meet all of the Independent School Standards (Wales) Regulations 2024.

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 does not meet the regulatory requirements for this standard.

Although the school meets most of the regulatory requirements for this standard, in order to comply fully with the Independent School Standards (Wales) Regulations 2024 the school should:

- Ensure that a written policy on the independent school's curriculum, supported by appropriate plans and schemes of work, which provides for the matters specified in sub-paragraph (2) is drawn up and implemented effectively [2(1)(a)]
- Ensure there are opportunities for all pupils to learn and make progress, including providing differentiated opportunities where appropriate, and effective preparation of pupils for the opportunities, responsibilities and experiences of adult life [2(2)(h)]
- Enable pupils to acquire new knowledge and make good progress according to their ability so that they increase their understanding and develop their skills in the subjects taught [2(3)(a)]
- Ensure well planned lessons, effective teaching methods, suitable activities and wise management of learning time [2(3)(c)]

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

The school does not meet the regulatory requirements for this standard.

Although the school meets almost all of the regulatory requirements for this standard, in order to comply fully with the Independent School Standards (Wales) Regulations 2024 the school should:

- Ensure that admission and attendance registers are maintained in accordance with regulations made under section 434 of the 1996 Act(1). [17]

The suitability of proprietors and staff

The school does not meet the regulatory requirements for this standard.

Although the school meets almost all of the regulatory requirements for this standard, in order to comply fully with the Independent School Standards (Wales) Regulations 2024 the school should:

- Ensure the checks referred to in sub-paragraph (2) (except where sub-paragraph (4) applies) are completed before a person's appointment. [20(3)]

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.

Recommendations and next steps

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

- R1. Comply fully with the Independent School Standards (Wales) Regulations 2024
- R2. Refine and embed systems and processes to evaluate and ensure the effectiveness of the work of the school
- R3. Develop and embed appropriate learning pathways to meet the full range of pupils' additional learning needs
- R4. Ensure that learning activities enable pupils to make the progress of which they are capable

Since the school does not meet the standards required for registration, the Welsh Government will require the proprietor to submit an action plan within a specified period of time. This plan will set out the steps that the school will take to meet the standards, and the timescale within which it will complete each step. The Welsh Government may then request Estyn to support the school through an improvement process.

Full Report

If you would like to read more about Estyn's evaluation of the school, please follow this link to the [full report](#)

© Crown Copyright 2025: This report may be re used free of charge: (a) in any format or medium; and (b) may be translated by or on behalf of an education and/or training provider in respect of which this report relates into any language, in each case provided that it is re used and/or translated accurately and not used in a misleading context. The material must, in each case (including in the case of a translation) be acknowledged as Crown copyright and the title of the report specified.

Publication date: 16/12/2025