

A report on

Dwr-Y-Felin Comprehensive School

**Dwr Y Felin Road
Neath Port Talbot
SA10 7RE**

Date of inspection: May 2026

by

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

About Dwr-Y-Felin Comprehensive School

Name of provider	Dwr-Y-Felin Comprehensive School
Local authority	Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council
Language of the provider	English
School category according to Welsh-medium provision	
Type of school	Secondary
Religious character	*
Number of pupils on roll	1097
Pupils of statutory school age	1096
Number in sixth form	*
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 Secondary is 20.3%)	17.1%
Percentage of pupils identified as having additional learning needs (a) (The national percentage of pupils identified as having an additional learning need in Secondary is 9.0%)	5.7%
Percentage of pupils who speak Welsh at home	0.5%
Percentage of pupils with English as an additional language	1.2%
Lead partner for Initial teacher education	Yes
Date of headteacher appointment	01/09/2024

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Date of previous Estyn inspection (if applicable)	01/03/2017
Start date of inspection	11/05/2026

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

Dŵr y Felin Comprehensive School is a caring and supportive community where staff know pupils and their families well. This strong understanding enables staff to provide effective support for pupils' well-being and personal development. Many pupils feel safe in school and value the help they receive from the pastoral team. A suitable range of opportunities, including extra-curricular activities, trips and leadership roles, helps pupils build confidence and feel part of the school community.

In the majority of lessons, there are clear routines, and pupils settle quickly, behave well and engage positively with their work. In a few lessons, effective teaching enables pupils to make strong progress. Teachers in these lessons use thoughtful questioning and give helpful and constructive feedback to deepen pupils' understanding. However, in a minority of cases, pupils make limited progress because questioning does not challenge their thinking enough and activities do not focus clearly on what pupils need to learn. Furthermore, the behaviour of a minority of pupils, especially boys, disrupts learning. Feedback also varies too much and does not always help pupils improve their work effectively.

The school provides effective support for pupils with additional learning needs (ALN) through, for example, the support hubs and ALN transition programme for Year 6 pupils. The learning support centre (LSC) provides a caring environment. Staff are successful in supporting pupils to make strong progress from their starting points, particularly in relation to their social and communication skills.

The school is working hard to improve attendance through targeted support and clear monitoring systems. This has led to some improvements in recent years. However, despite these efforts, improvements are held back by the persistent absence of a few pupils.

Leaders have established a clear vision and strengthened leadership structures. They have appropriate systems for accountability, self-evaluation and professional learning, and manage the school's finances effectively. Leaders pay appropriate attention to several key national priorities such as the development of pupils' numeracy and Welsh language skills.

However, there remains significant work to be done to see the required impact on aspects such as the progressive development of pupils' literacy skills and the quality of teaching. In addition, whilst self-evaluation and improvement processes provide opportunities for leaders to gather first-hand evidence, this is not done with sufficient focus and precision in relation to teaching. As a result, leaders do not always plan appropriately to make improvement in certain aspects of teaching.

Recommendations

We have made five recommendation to help the school continue to improve:

- R1 Improve the quality of teaching
- R2 Strengthen the coordination, provision and delivery of opportunities for pupils to develop their literacy skills progressively
- R3 Improve the behaviour and attitudes to learning of a minority of pupils and the approaches used by all staff to support pupils' behaviour
- R4 Improve attendance
- R5 Ensure that self-evaluation and improvement processes focus more precisely on improving teaching and its impact on pupils' progress and their attitudes to learning

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 which shows 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 findings

Teaching and learning

Teaching, assessment and attitudes to learning

In general, teachers at Dŵr y Felin Comprehensive School demonstrate sound subject knowledge and foster positive relationships with pupils. In the majority of lessons, teachers plan a range of activities that build on prior learning and use helpful resources to support pupils' progress. As a result, pupils in these lessons, including those with additional learning needs (ALN) make the progress expected in their learning. In these lessons, teachers:

- establish clear, well-embedded routines where pupils settle quickly, engage positively in their learning and behave well
- provide clear explanations and exemplification
- provide an appropriate level of challenge
- question pupils suitably to check understanding before moving the learning on

In a few lessons where teaching is particularly effective, pupils make strong progress. Careful planning ensures that pupils develop the skills they need to respond to high levels of challenge. Teachers use probing questions to deepen pupils' knowledge and understanding and allow them sufficient time for thoughtful responses. They also provide pupils with timely, purposeful feedback that supports them to make further progress.

In a minority of lessons, pupils make limited progress because of important shortcomings in teaching. Teachers' questioning is not effective enough to develop pupils' thinking. They do not allow pupils adequate thinking time to formulate responses or probe their understanding and too readily accept brief, underdeveloped answers. In addition, pupil progress is limited by teachers planning what they want pupils to do rather than what they want them to learn.

A minority of pupils exhibit passive behaviour, are not fully engaged and on occasions, late to lessons. A minority, boys in particular, display negative attitudes towards learning. They talk over the teacher, do not listen respectfully or conduct themselves appropriately.

Overall, the quality and impact of written feedback is too variable. In most cases, feedback is not helpful enough to enable pupils to make purposeful improvements to their work.

Literacy skills

The strategic planning and coordination of the provision for the progressive development of pupils' literacy skills is underdeveloped. Leaders recognise this but have not done enough to strengthen this aspect of their work because they do not evaluate the impact of it well enough.

The school recognises the importance of reading skills, and tries to promote them through the school library, a staff-pupil book exchange and teachers sharing their own reading choices. Many pupils read for information successfully and in the best cases teachers link this well with planned written tasks such as comparing earthquakes in different countries, and discursive pieces on the holocaust and on historical events in Neath. Similarly, a minority of pupils make good use of inference and deduction to comment effectively on data from the 1854 cholera outbreak in London and to recognise writers' intent in both literary and non-literary texts. However, pupils spend a disproportionate amount of time on basic information retrieval, and the majority do not develop more advanced reading skills such as synthesis and summary well enough. This is because teachers do not plan sufficient worthwhile opportunities for them to do so and in a few instances do not teach pupils how to apply these skills effectively.

In general, teachers' acceptance of limited pupil response and engagement does not provide sufficient challenge or opportunity for pupils to develop their listening skills. A minority of pupils do not listen with sufficient attention. As a result, they miss information and instructions that would support their learning.

A few pupils provide articulate verbal responses that are well-considered and structured when, for example, sharing their opinions and evaluations of their own and other's performance in music lessons. Frequently, a majority of pupils rely on a limited spoken vocabulary, with teachers focusing only on what they say rather than also considering how they say it.

Many pupils benefit from suitable opportunities to write for various purposes and audiences. Around half of them produce writing that is technically secure and structured suitably though a similar proportion continue to make basic spelling errors, confuse tenses or do not write in full sentences. These pupils often also lack a clear sense of audience, so they make incorrect language choices, and their writing has the wrong tone. A minority of pupils demonstrate ambition in their written vocabulary, and a few produce a range of engaging pieces. These pupils benefit from teachers in different subjects who explicitly support them to improve their writing by guiding them in the use of a wider vocabulary and with the structuring of their writing.

Cymraeg

The majority of pupils communicate suitably in Welsh in class discussions and translate basic words from Welsh to English accurately with generally suitable pronunciation. A few pupils can vary sentence patterns effectively using idioms and connectives. The majority of pupils use appropriate retrieval strategies to locate facts from Welsh video clips and poems and when writing, they structure basic sentences effectively. However, pupils often rely too heavily on scaffolds and structures and lack confidence to speak or write in Welsh independently.

The school provides pupils with appropriate opportunities to develop their appreciation of Welsh heritage and culture. For example, pupils learn about the history of Neath and visit local attractions. They also take part in school, local and Urdd eisteddfodau and the 'Criw Cymraeg' organise various activities. In addition, Year 9 pupils have presented in Welsh to Careers Wales and the local authority's tourism department, highlighting the strengths of the area as a tourist destination.

Numeracy and digital skills

Leaders have begun to strengthen provision for numeracy through improved planning and refinements to the mathematics schemes of learning, with a suitable emphasis on securing pupils' basic skills before applying them across subjects. Pupils are provided with opportunities to use numeracy in relevant areas of the curriculum. However, these opportunities do not always build progressively enough to increase the level of challenge over time.

Many pupils demonstrate sound basic number skills and apply the four operations effectively when working with fractions, percentages and ratios. The majority have secure algebraic skills, for example when expanding brackets and simplifying expressions. A minority also demonstrate the ability to rearrange mathematical formulae successfully, for example when applying Newton's Law in science. More able pupils apply algebraic reasoning effectively when calculating and interpreting annual equivalent rate. The majority of pupils apply shape and measure skills suitably, including calculating area and circumference accurately.

Across relevant subjects, many pupils construct and interpret graphs appropriately and use data to draw suitable conclusions. The majority plot graphs accurately, using appropriate axes and scales, and support their ability to make predictions or answer questions. These pupils show their workings clearly, allowing them to check errors and deepen their understanding.

A few pupils have weak basic numeracy skills and do not have a secure grasp of fundamental number concepts. As a result, they struggle to solve more complex and worded numerical problems independently. Leaders have adapted provision appropriately through additional timetabled lessons and targeted interventions to support the development of these pupils' basic skills.

In a minority of subjects, pupils use digital tools purposefully in a range of contexts. For example, they use digital software creatively to develop designs, such as when producing logos in graphic design. In digital technology lessons, they use spreadsheets competently, applying a range of functions and producing suitable charts. Overall, however, provision for the development of pupils' digital skills lacks strategic coordination.

Learning Support Centre (LSC)

The school hosts a learning resource centre for pupils with Autism Spectrum Condition. Overall, it provides an effective and nurturing environment that supports pupils' academic, social and emotional development well. This is achieved through a carefully adapted, bespoke curriculum and clear progression pathways. Pupils engage positively in their learning and make appropriate progress. They are supported effectively to regulate their emotions, develop social communication skills and transition successfully into the wider school community.

Curriculum

The school has established a clear vision for its Curriculum for Wales, focused on developing confident, ambitious and lifelong learners. Leaders make worthwhile use of local and national contexts within learning experiences. For example, in science, pupils learn about the local steel industry. In history, pupils work with relevant national heritage organisations to enrich pupils' understanding of Welsh history and the local area.

The school provides a suitable balance of academic and vocational courses for pupils in Year 10 and 11. Leaders review the options offer carefully, ensuring pupils have access to relevant courses, including computer science, hospitality and sports coaching through local partnerships. Many pupils are supported well to make informed choices through individual guidance and parents' evenings. In addition, targeted learning pathways for pupils at risk of exclusion include valuable external vocational opportunities, such as the junior apprenticeship programme and the local 'Tackle' project. Through partnerships with the local college, more able pupils are given opportunities to have beneficial experiences, such as masterclasses in law and psychology and additional maths at GCSE.

The school's personal and social education (PSE) programme is well co-ordinated and provides valuable learning experiences for pupils. The programme is strengthened by valuable input from a range of local partners, such as the police, fire service and NHS nurses. Leaders draw appropriately on data, pupil questionnaires and local intelligence to plan suitably for the development of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and emotional development. The school has used pupil survey data appropriately to identify important aspects of personal development such as a positive mindset and self-esteem. It has designed its Relationship and Sexuality Education (RSE) provision carefully. Pupils in all year groups benefit from suitable opportunities to develop their understanding of the importance of healthy eating and drinking through registration sessions and physical education, well-being and food technology lessons.

Pupils benefit from a suitable range of opportunities to develop their understanding of diversity, including learning about gender equality and the experiences of Black, Asian and minority ethnic people and the LGBTQ+ community. For example, they explore multiculturalism in the local area and consider global differences in development, such as variations in GDP and birth rates in geography.

There are beneficial extra-curricular experiences available, including sporting activities and educational visits. For example, pupils have worthwhile opportunities to take part in the school's musical productions, school choir and the popular Duke of Edinburgh award.

Well-being, care, support and guidance

Dŵr y Felin Comprehensive School has a caring and supportive ethos. Staff know pupils and their families well, which helps them to support pupils' well-being effectively. Many pupils feel safe in school and understand the school's safeguarding procedures. The school has a highly committed pastoral team that has comprehensive knowledge of pupils and demonstrates a strong understanding of their individual needs. They work well in partnership with a range of external providers and organisations to provide a valuable range of specialist support. In general, the school has appropriate processes for dealing with any instances of bullying and the majority of pupils say they do not experience bullying at school. However, a few pupils feel that actions staff take do not always prevent certain negative behaviours and attitudes from recurring.

Pupils value the wide range of extra-curricular opportunities, including sports activities, school musical performances and a school choir. They also benefit from the opportunity to participate in a variety of enrichment trips and visits, for example trips to theatres, Neath Abbey, Caerphilly Castle, Cardiff and trips to Canada to explore bilingualism.

Pupils profit from meaningful opportunities to lead and to contribute to the life of the school, including groups such as 'Criw Cymraeg' and 'Sports Leaders', and also through a well-established 'School Senedd'. These offers develop pupils' confidence, communication and leadership skills while enabling them to influence the life of the school. For example, the Senedd introduced a positive points reward shop and raised money for further outside bench areas for dining.

The school supports transition effectively through a well-planned programme of engagement with external post-16 providers, Careers Wales and further education partners. This includes visits, interviews, careers events, work experience and Year 10 college transition days. These arrangements are strengthened by effective information sharing between the pastoral team, which supports appropriate placement and clear progression pathways. In addition, there is a valuable transition programme for pupils transferring from primary school, including headteacher roadshows, enrichment clubs and transition days. These activities, supported by collaboration with primary partners and visits from leaders, help pupils to feel confident, safe and well prepared for secondary education.

The school has identified attendance as a strategic priority and leaders have taken appropriate steps to raise its profile across the school community. Between 2022-2023 and 2024-2025, overall attendance rates have improved. Although rates of persistent absence have reduced over the last three years, they remain higher than those of similar schools. The school benefits from a highly committed pastoral team who make suitable use of attendance data for individual pupils and groups to identify trends and provide targeted support. School systems for monitoring attendance are appropriate and support leaders to identify pupils requiring additional intervention. Leaders work suitably with external agencies, including the Education Welfare Officer, to implement targeted strategies to reduce persistent absence. Attendance rates for pupils eligible for free school meals compare favourably with similar schools. Despite these positive trends overall, attendance remains below pre-pandemic levels.

The school has developed a suitable set of shared values for pupils and staff that underpin its ethos. Staff have contributed to the development of the school's core vision and motto, 'Nid da lle gellir gwell'. However, these values are not applied consistently across the school. The pastoral team use behaviour data appropriately to identify trends and implement targeted interventions. However, this has limited impact as the school's 'Respect for Learning' policy is not fully understood by pupils and staff and not consistently applied. As a result, the behaviour of a minority of pupils, particularly boys, too often disrupts learning in lessons and around the school. In addition, weaknesses in the consistency of recording behaviour do not enable senior leaders to have a sufficiently secure understanding of behaviour issues across the school.

The school promotes an inclusive ethos where pupils with ALN are treated respectfully and supported sensitively. Effective transition processes for these pupils, that begin early in Year 5, ensure that they settle well when transferring from primary school to Dŵr y Felin. Transition planning in Years 10 and 11 is thorough and includes suitable careers advice. Alternative curriculum opportunities, including vocational and well-being-focused provision, help pupils remain engaged in learning and prepare appropriately for their next steps.

Individual Development Plans (IDPs) contain helpful strategies to support pupils' needs. The school works effectively with a wide range of external agencies to provide valuable additional support for pupils experiencing attendance or emotional well-being difficulties. Pupils, staff, parents and professionals contribute meaningfully to person-centred reviews. Staff review progress against IDP targets regularly and adapt provision appropriately where pupils are not making expected progress. One-page profiles contain relevant information about pupils and provide helpful classroom strategies.

There are suitable arrangements to safeguard pupils and these are understood well by staff. Regular training is provided to staff and governors. Many pupils feel safe at school and are aware of what to do if they have concerns.

Leading and improving

The headteacher has established a clear and purposeful vision that aims to support and inspire all pupils to become confident, ambitious and lifelong learners. Since her appointment, she has prioritised strengthening leadership capacity and has reallocated roles and responsibilities so that they are clearer and more equitable.

Senior leaders demonstrate a strong commitment to supporting the headteacher in driving improvements. Overall, leaders have addressed several national priorities appropriately, although they have not had sufficient impact on teaching or pupils' literacy skills.

Leaders have developed suitable systems to hold staff to account. Line management arrangements are clear and include regular meetings with appropriate agendas focused on important aspects of the school's work. However, leaders do not consistently provide robust enough challenge to ensure that underperformance is addressed effectively. Performance development review arrangements have been updated appropriately to align with national leadership standards. Nevertheless, targets are not always sharply focused on improving teaching.

Leaders have established appropriate arrangements for self-evaluation. Senior and middle leaders undertake suitable quality assurance activities together, such as learning walks, work scrutiny and gathering pupil views to evaluate what pupils know and can do. They generally identify suitable strengths and areas for development and use this information to highlight relevant improvement priorities. However, there is too much variation in the ability of leaders to identify precisely the specific aspects of teaching that require improvement. In addition, they do not evaluate sufficiently well the impact of leadership and professional learning on teaching. As a result, improvement planning does not consistently include precise or robust enough actions to secure impact.

Leaders provide staff with a wide range of professional learning opportunities that are generally aligned with whole-school priorities. However, they do not evaluate the impact of this provision rigorously enough or ensure that strategies from training are embedded consistently in classroom practice. The school is a lead school for Initial Teacher Education and has used this to support the professional development of staff.

The school communicates regularly with parents through a variety of channels, including surveys and newsletters. While this provides useful opportunities for engagement, a minority of parents feel that communication is not always clear or timely.

Leaders use the pupil development grant appropriately to support vulnerable pupils and evaluate its use suitably, considering its impact on pupils' attainment and attendance. The attendance rates for pupils eligible for free school meals compare favourably with similar schools. However, the performance of pupils eligible for free school meals at the end of Year 11 is below that of similar schools.

Governors are committed and passionate members of the school community. They undertake relevant training and receive detailed information from senior leaders. As a result, they have a sound understanding of certain aspects of the school's work, particularly finances.

The headteacher, business manager and governors maintain secure oversight of the school's financial position. They manage the budget carefully and have robust systems in place to monitor spending. Leaders have taken decisive and appropriate actions to address the budget deficit.

Additional information

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

The school's arrangements for site management do not give any cause for concern.

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 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 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 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, where appropriate
- visit a broad sample of lessons, 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
(<http://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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