



Arolygiaeth Ei Mawrhydi dros Addysg a Hyfforddiant yng Nghymru
Her Majesty's Inspectorate for Education and Training in Wales

**A report on
Gwenllian Education Centre**

Date of inspection: January 2019

by

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

About Gwenllian Education Centre

Gwenllian Education Centre is an independent day school in Kidwelly, Carmarthenshire. It offers individualised education for up to 18 pupils aged 5 to 19 years who have complex needs that include communication difficulties associated with autistic spectrum disorder (ASD).

Currently, there are 11 pupils on roll. All pupils have a statement of special education needs. All pupils live at home with their families, where English is the first language.

The school aims to provide a personalised educational experience to support the social, academic and independent development of its pupils.

The school operates in single storey premises that provide several small teaching spaces. There is additional accommodation for older pupils in an on-site mobile unit. The school has a small outdoor play area and makes extensive use of off-site local facilities, for example for swimming and horse-riding.

Gwenllian Education Centre opened in 2012. The proprietor is the school's headteacher. This is the first core inspection of the school.

Summary

In relation to their needs, nearly all pupils make exceptional progress from their starting points, in acquiring the basic skills of communication, interacting positively with staff and peers and developing co-operation and positive relationships with staff.

With support, all pupils make particularly effective progress in relation to their earlier experiences, in developing effective strategies to manage their behaviour.

The school provides a balanced and relevant curriculum that has a strong and appropriate focus on meeting pupils' therapeutic needs, developing positive attitudes towards learning and improving pupils' behaviour. It gives pupils the opportunity to develop the worthwhile skills they need as they move through the school and beyond. The strong, caring ethos places pupils at the centre of its planning, processes and practice.

The headteacher leads the school effectively, through the planning and development of a clear and unified vision. This vision focuses well on meeting the complex needs of pupils through a vibrant and personalised curriculum that provides each one with memorable experiences during their time at school.

| Inspection area | Judgement |
|--|------------------|
| Standards | Excellent |
| Wellbeing and attitudes to learning | Excellent |
| Teaching and learning experiences | Good |
| Care, support and guidance | Good |
| Leadership and management | Good |

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 2003. 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 meets the regulatory requirements for this standard.

The spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils

The school meets the regulatory requirements for this standard.

Welfare, health and safety of pupils

The school meets the regulatory requirements for this standard.

The suitability of proprietors and staff

The school meets the regulatory requirements for this standard.

Premises of and boarding accommodation at schools

The school meets the regulatory requirements for this standard.

The provision of information

The school meets the regulatory requirements for this standard.

The manner in which complaints are to be handled

The school meets the regulatory requirements for this standard.

Recommendations

- R1 Broaden curriculum opportunities for older pupils to access accredited learning that meets their needs
- R2 Ensure that all improvement priorities have clear and measurable success criteria that are reviewed and monitored effectively

What happens next

Estyn will invite the school to prepare a case study on the progress pupils make with their communication skills, for dissemination on Estyn's website.

Main findings

Standards: Excellent

During their time at school, nearly all pupils make exemplary progress in achieving their set targets.

Nearly all pupils make exceptional progress from their starting points in acquiring the basic skills of communication. Where necessary, pupils use a picture exchange system, signing and other aids to support their communication. Many have progressed to using symbols at sentence level. A few pupils read instructions using a mixture of words and symbols. As they learn to communicate more effectively, pupils ask for things and make choices such as what they would prefer to eat for lunch. For pupils who previously had very limited ability to make their needs known, these are outstanding achievements, gained in a relatively short time. As pupils improve their communication skills, they gain better access to their education.

In relation to their needs, all pupils make outstanding progress in learning to tolerate others and develop positive relationships with staff and peers. Over time, all pupils improve their social skills and enjoy the company of others. As they relax, they learn to co-operate and enjoy learning and make ongoing progress in completing individually planned tasks to achieve their personalised reward within a set time. Pupils understand the expectations to complete each task and they do their best. As they develop their self-confidence and understand that work is a worthwhile thing to do, they try out new things, such as tolerating different food textures to expand the range of healthy foods they eat, wearing a helmet and going for a cycle ride and experiencing the exhilaration of a fairground ride.

Over time, pupils for whom it is appropriate make effective use of their individual daily visual schedules. As they develop their understanding of this system, they transition from one activity to the next with confidence and independence.

The very few pupils who have progressed through the picture exchange system have made strong progress with their reading skills. They have moved on to develop secure comprehension skills, can match words and pictures, and follow instructions presented in short printed sentences. A very few pupils write extended pieces, and use punctuation and paragraphs well to put more meaning into their writing.

All pupils benefit from sessions to improve muscle tone, balance and physical skills. They make good use of their skills when horse-riding, skiing and ice-skating. A few pupils use their new skills to compete in competitions such as gymnastics, indoor athletics and golf.

Pupils generally develop their listening skills well and can follow structured instructions. As they move through the school, many pupils, especially those with spoken language, are keen to explore ideas and listen to each other's experiences.

On educational visits, nearly all pupils practise the valuable skills that prepare them well for the future. For instance, they improve their numeracy skills when handling money to buy an ice cream, use their literacy skills well to identify products in a shop, and develop better understanding of science through trips to the beach where they collect and sort different shellfish.

A very few pupils develop a keen interest in their country and aspects of its culture and language. They use their basic Welsh language skills appropriately to greet people when prompted.

A minority of pupils use information and communication technology (ICT) confidently and can locate files, store work for the next lesson and use simple editing and formatting techniques to support their work.

Many pupils enjoy music, drama and dance sessions where they learn to express their creativeness. Those that develop skills in composing music and performing are extremely proud of their work. All pupils experience performance at the school's Christmas concert and harvest festival, where they display their skills to a wider audience.

The very few pupils who leave the school go on to positive destinations to continue their learning. Before they leave, they join the school leavers 'prom' for pupils in special schools where they begin to make friends with other young people with whom they will attend college.

Wellbeing and attitudes to learning: Excellent

Pupils' wellbeing and attitudes to learning are outstanding.

Over time, all pupils respond positively to the skilled and purposeful support they receive from staff. As a result, they feel safe and secure. They settle well at the school and respond enthusiastically to the highly structured learning environment. All pupils improve their understanding of what to expect of the various lessons and activities of the school day. They use schedules effectively, with support where necessary, to manage transitions during the day. .

Pupils display increasing levels of tolerance and engagement to new experiences and activities. These include travelling on a different mini-bus, trying out new foods and wearing a range of footwear, which enables new activities such as skiing. They develop good levels of resilience and perseverance and an increasing ability to maintain their attention for sustained periods in lessons. For the pupils at Gwenllian Education Centre, this demonstrates exceptional progress in their attitudes towards learning.

With support, all pupils develop effective strategies to manage their own behaviour. Where necessary, they develop skills to self-regulate themselves quickly. As a result, behaviour across the whole school is excellent. This highlights particularly effective progress in relation to pupils' earlier experiences, and is a strength of the school.

Pupils learn to make healthy choices relating to their diet, physical activity and emotional wellbeing. Many understand the importance of regular exercise and maintaining a healthy diet. For example, they take part in a range of beneficial activities during the school day such as shopping for healthy snacks, swimming, and playing boca.

All pupils express their views effectively, in line with their abilities, using a range of skills including speech, signing and a picture exchange system. Pupils who

communicate with speech share their experiences of the school confidently and enthusiastically. Many pupils contribute well to the school council. They suggest improvements such as developing a horticulture area and changes to the school menu.

All pupils develop their independence skills well. They make sound progress after practising skilfully modelled sessions in the classroom to learn about visiting community facilities such as the hairdressers.

Most pupils support their community and local charities through worthwhile activities, such as sponsored walks. These activities raise community awareness about autism by enabling pupils to distribute high quality fact sheets and offer first-hand information. In line with their abilities, nearly all pupils are polite and courteous to each other and staff and respond positively during interactions with visitors. Many pupils display good awareness of their peers and respond appropriately to prompts, for example waiting for their turn and listening to the views of others during class discussions on their feelings.

Over time, pupils develop their awareness of their own personal safety needs. In line with their abilities, pupils develop their understanding of how to stay safe online and in the community.

Nearly all pupils attend school regularly and develop positive attitudes to their learning. This is well above prior expectations as, previously, the majority of the pupils had very poor levels of school attendance and engagement in learning. They now engage proactively with teaching, support staff during learning activities, learn, and play with enthusiasm. They clearly enjoy most activities that they encounter.

Teaching and learning experiences: Good

The school provides a broad, balanced and relevant curriculum that has a strong and appropriate focus on meeting pupils' therapeutic needs, developing positive attitudes towards learning and improving pupils' behaviour.

A recently developed curriculum map for the school ensures that pupils build their social skills, communication skills and subject knowledge progressively within and across each key stage. Teachers use the curriculum map well to develop effective, flexible learning plans that are responsive to pupils' changing needs.

The provision to develop pupils' communication skills and behaviour in particular is highly effective. It has a beneficial impact on pupils' ability to access learning, and contributes to pupils' social development well.

The school enriches its provision well to provide pupils with valuable opportunities to practice their skills in the community. For example, pupils benefit from taking part in regional gymnastic competitions, attending a ski centre, and from visits to local shops and places of interest.

The curriculum supports the needs and interests of most pupils well. The school has recently introduced work at GCSE and entry level in mathematics and English for a very few pupils for whom it is suitable. Generally, however, the provision for older pupils currently does not provide enough choice for pupils over what they learn and has limited opportunities for accreditation.

Staff know the needs and abilities of their pupils extremely well and respond respectfully and sensitively to pupils' needs. The positive working relationship between staff and pupils impacts positively on pupils' progress, motivation and wellbeing.

Teachers, teaching assistants and therapists work together effectively to provide a high level of support for pupils' care and learning needs. They create highly personalised, well-resourced learning spaces that provide each pupil with a safe and consistent environment in which to work. This helps pupils to settle quickly to tasks and most make full use of the learning opportunities presented to them. Staff prepare pupils well, to take on new experiences, through practising skills in the classroom and language modelling before introducing new activities.

Staff use the results of assessment well to tailor learning experiences closely to individual pupils' identified needs and abilities. They produce individualised timetables for pupils, with work broken down into short manageable learning sessions. These provide an appropriate balance of activities to address pupils' therapeutic needs, care needs and subject learning. Staff provide a high level of feedback to pupils throughout each lesson to reinforce appropriate behaviours and motivate them in their learning.

Across the school, staff apply the school's procedures for behaviour management consistently. This enables pupils to make important improvements in their ability to regulate their behaviour and gives nearly all pupils the skills they need to engage consistently well in learning activities and access learning in the local community.

In many lessons, staff deliver a range of interesting activities that engage pupils well and match their needs and abilities suitably. Generally, staff use a wide range of teaching styles and resources to move pupils' learning forward at an appropriate pace. They use questioning effectively to revisit prior learning and to assess and challenge pupils' understanding.

Staff are good language role models and use the school's communication systems highly effectively to promote pupils' communication skills. For example, staff use clear verbal instructions, a picture exchange system and signing as appropriate to pupils' needs.

Care, support and guidance: Good

The school provides an extremely caring ethos that places pupils at the centre of its planning, processes and practice. It is highly effective in meeting its aims to enable pupils to make progress and reach their potential in life. The school has a happy and productive learning environment, which is both safe and welcoming. It gives pupils the opportunity to develop the worthwhile skills they need as they move through the school and beyond. Staff consistently demonstrate supportive and nurturing characteristics that positively influence pupils' wellbeing and outcomes. They know their pupils extremely well and develop highly effective and trusting relationships with them.

Strong, productive relationships exist between the school and parents, facilitated through very effective home-school communication. The school uses a range of

methods to keep parents informed about pupil welfare and achievements. These include detailed home-school books, telephone calls and face-to-face consultations. Staff encourage an open-door policy and parents express their satisfaction regarding access to and support from leaders, teachers and support staff. Parents have beneficial opportunities to visit the school and take part in training events such as the use of a picture exchange system and a recent coffee morning. The school provides parents with useful information on their child's progress through parents' interviews, annual reviews and an annual report.

The school has formed useful partnerships with important specialist services such as occupational therapists, speech and language therapists, educational psychologists and behaviour analysis practitioners to support the assessment and provision for pupils. This advice and consultancy supports both school and families beneficially to maintain a consistent approach. The careers service offers older pupils suitable support and advice on future destinations and pathways.

Teachers set effective targets across the curriculum that develop skills and subject content well. The school collects a valuable range of assessment data on pupil attainment and outcomes, which staff use well to plan for pupil progress. Staff work together purposefully to analyse and monitor progress regularly against starting points. This agile approach enables staff to react promptly and creatively and modify tasks and planning as necessary to meet the needs of pupils.

In physical education sessions, staff promote group work to support pupils' physical health and wellbeing. They encourage pupils to warm up and cool down, stretch and raise heart rate and appreciate the effects on their bodies. At snack time and for rewards, staff direct pupils to make healthy choices in the food and drink they choose. They plan motivating off-site activities, such as horse-riding, bike-ability, archery and swimming, that help pupils to build strength and confidence.

The school regularly provides interesting opportunities for pupils to take part in performances and develop their creative skills. For example, in the weekly whole school assembly, staff promote and encourage singing, dance, public speaking and musical instrument performance. They make effective use of a range of interesting themes including 'our bodies' and 'people in the community who help us'.

Staff plan worthwhile opportunities for pupils to express their preferences and choices within tasks. They adapt their teaching well to maximise learning opportunities for all pupils. A newly established school council with pupil representatives meets monthly and contributes appropriately to discussions on school improvement. These include topics such as homework and acquiring a vending machine adapted to provide suitable rewards for pupils' achievement.

Arrangements for child protection at the school meet requirements and are not a cause for concern.

Leadership and management: Good

The headteacher ensures that the school is led effectively through the planning and development of a clear and unified vision. This vision focuses well on meeting the complex needs of pupils through a vibrant and personalised curriculum that provides

each one with memorable experiences during their time at school. The headteacher has high expectations for the staff and pupils. He works diligently to develop a dedicated and conscientious workforce that promotes an inclusive and caring ethos where everyone is valued.

The headteacher is supported well by the recently formed senior management team. They respond positively to the school's priorities by challenging staff performance and raising standards. Their specific responsibilities are clearly defined and they have a sound understanding of the school's strengths and most areas that need improvement. They undertake their roles conscientiously to support the work of the headteacher. This provides them with valuable leadership experiences for the future as they manage staff and whole-school initiatives skilfully. A particular example is the introduction of a whole school approach to managing pupils' behaviour, which has a very positive impact on creating a calm and tranquil learning environment.

The school's self-evaluation arrangements, although very much in a formative stage, are based on open discussions following a suitable monitoring programme of lesson observation and learning walks. All staff analyse pupil performance data in detail and discuss the outcomes at weekly meetings to set future targets and identify trends of underachievement. This leads to agreed actions that are beginning to address the areas for development effectively. The self-evaluation report provides an honest and accurate account of the work of the school. It includes clear judgements on pupils' standards of achievement, identifying the areas where improvement is needed. For example, the school has responded positively to the outcomes of their evaluation of pupils' communication skills by developing worthwhile strategies that use visual prompting and reinforcement to support pupils with various communication challenges.

There is an appropriate link between the majority of the self-evaluation outcomes and the priorities in the development plan. Instances include the need to improve accredited learning provision and that for independent living skills. The plan is costed carefully, and identifies staff's responsibilities and appropriate time considerations for completing them. However, the improvement priorities do not always include clear and measurable success criteria. This limits the leader's ability to monitor and evaluate progress towards achieving these targets effectively so that they can plan their next steps more strategically.

Leaders provide regular opportunities for staff to give their views on the life and work of the school. This contributes well to their understanding of the effectiveness of teaching and learning. The school also engages with parents regularly and their views are well respected by senior leaders, who act quickly on suggestions such as the recent introduction of regular, personalised homework for the pupils.

The school has a comprehensive programme for performance management and staff training. These arrangements respond appropriately to the needs of the school and include robust opportunities to enable teachers and assistants to challenge their performance and to develop professionally. For example, recent training on developing positive relationships with individuals in distress, for both staff and parents, has had a very positive effect on pupils' attitudes to learning. This also ensures common approaches between school and the home.

The headteacher organises and deploys learning resources well. Facilities such as the school hall, music room, the communal eating area and purposeful one-to-one support rooms provide effective opportunities for learning and social interaction. The school makes very good use of the local community to enhance the curriculum and offer valuable life experiences for the pupils. A particularly worthwhile activity was a pupils' information sharing stall at the local supermarket where they distributed information on autism. This provided pupils with excellent opportunities to communicate with others, share ideas and gain the support of the community.

The school has an extensive outside area used purposefully to develop pupils' physical skills as well as providing opportunities for them to explore their natural environment by planting and growing seeds.

Leaders have developed a strong culture of teamwork and, as a result, the school is developing as a successful learning community. The school's experienced and very well qualified staff are deployed effectively to ensure outstanding support for the pupils. This ensures that, in relation to their needs, pupils make exceptional progress.

Copies of the report

Copies of this report are available from the school and from the Estyn website (www.estyn.gov.wales)

Under the Independent School Standards (Wales) Regulations 2003, the school must provide copies of the report to all parents of the school. Where a pupil is subject to placement by a local authority, a copy of the report should be sent by the school to each relevant authority.

Estyn evaluates a provider's effectiveness using a four-point judgement scale:

| | |
|--|--|
| Excellent | Strong, sustained performance and practice |
| Good | Strong features, although minor aspects may require improvement |
| Adequate and needs improvement | Strengths outweigh weaknesses, but important aspects require improvement |
| Unsatisfactory and needs urgent improvement | Important weaknesses outweigh strengths |

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 Regulations 2003. 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:

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