



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

**A report on**

**Birribi**

**Date of inspection: May 2022**

**by**

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

## About Birribi

Name of provider	Birribi
Proprietor	Dr, Deborah Judge
Local authority	Pembrokeshire County Council
Language of the provider	English
Type of school	Independent Special
Residential provision?	No
Number of pupils on roll	6
Pupils of statutory school age	6
Date of previous Estyn inspection (if applicable)	
Start date of inspection	23/05/2022

Birribi is an independent special school. It opened in April 2016 as part of a wider organisation that also provides residential care and a care farm used by pupils at the school.

The school operates from two classrooms attached to two of the company's children's homes in Pembrokeshire and Carmarthenshire.

The company aims to provide an integrated therapeutic approach which promotes pupils' well-being and helps them to improve their life chances and become confident, independent members of the community.

The school provides education for up to ten pupils aged seven to eighteen years resident in the company's children's homes who are not able to access mainstream education. The school provides full-time education for pupils who have social, emotional, behavioural, and mental health difficulties, autistic spectrum condition and associated learning difficulties. Most have a statement of educational needs or education, health and care plan (EHCP).

Currently there are six pupils on the school roll. All of the pupils are looked after by the local authority and are placed by local authorities in Wales and England. A very few pupils are from Welsh-speaking backgrounds.

Since the last monitoring visit in May 2019, a part-time lead teacher was appointed in November 2021. He is supported by three full-time teachers and two learning support assistants. This is the school's first core inspection since its registration. At the monitoring visit in 2019, the school did not meet Standard 6 of the Independent School Standards (Wales) Regulations 2003. This inspection looked at progress in

meeting Standard 6 as well as compliance with all the Independent Schools Standards.

On this visit, inspectors did not report on learning or well-being and attitudes to learning. This is because the number of pupils was too few to report on without identifying individual pupils.

- a. The term 'additional learning needs' is being used to describe those pupils on the SEN/ALN register of the school.

## Overview

During the last three years, staff and pupils at the school have experienced significant challenges. These have included changes to the school's leadership and having to respond to the effects of the pandemic. Staff have shown considerable commitment and have worked tirelessly throughout the COVID-19 pandemic to offer face-to-face teaching and to ensure that pupils continued to learn.

The company's vision to provide an integrated therapeutic approach when supporting pupils is clearly understood by many staff. These core values underpin practice across the school.

The school provides a safe and nurturing environment for its pupils. The company's therapeutic approach and the school's supportive ethos ensures that pupils are happy and attend regularly. Staff have a beneficial understanding of pupils' interests and needs, and their well-being lies at the heart of the school's work. Staff have positive working relationships with pupils. They provide assured support for pupils' social, emotional, and behavioural needs.

Staff provide appropriate and meaningful activities for pupils. This includes valuable opportunities for pupils to develop important skills at the company's care farm. Staff use assessment information appropriately to plan support and develop suitable individual education targets for pupils. However, planning and assessment do not determine how pupils' learning will develop progressively over time or in relation to pupils' future destinations. The school provides a limited range of accreditation for pupils.

Recent challenges in the school's leadership have restricted its ability to sustain the strategic direction of the school as well as providing appropriate operational approaches. Self-evaluation activities and improvement planning processes at the school are underdeveloped. Directors provide suitable governance for the school. However, they do not have an appropriate understanding of the requirements for the registration and operation of independent schools.

The school does not comply fully with the Independent School Standards (Wales) Regulations 2003.

## **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 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 2003 the school should:

- Have a curriculum policy set out in writing and supported by appropriate plans and schemes of work and should implement it effectively [1(2)]
- Ensure the curriculum provides the opportunity for all pupils to learn and make progress [1(2)(i)]
- Provide well planned lessons, effective teaching methods and suitable activities [1(3)(c)]
- Provide a framework to assess pupils' work regularly and thoroughly and utilise information from such assessment to plan teaching so that pupils can make progress [1(3)(g)]

### **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 Comply fully with the Independent School Standards (Wales) Regulations 2003
- R2 Strengthen leadership by improving self-evaluation and improvement planning processes at the school
- R3 Identify and implement suitable accreditation pathways

## **What happens next**

Since the school does not meet the standards required for registration, the Welsh Parliament 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.

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.

## Main findings

### Learning

On this visit, inspectors did not report on learning. This is because the number of pupils was too few to report on without identifying individuals.

### Well-being and attitudes to learning

On this visit, inspectors did not report on well-being and attitudes to learning. This is because the number of pupils was too few to report on without identifying individual pupils.

### Teaching and learning experiences

Overall, the curriculum is broad and balanced and covers all required areas of learning. In particular, the school plans well for pupils to access a range of worthwhile creative and physical activities including art, boxing and water-based activities. However, a shared vision for the development of a curriculum that is coordinated around the long-term destinations of each pupil is underdeveloped. For this reason, the school does not comply with a number of the regulations under Standard 1: The quality of education provided by the school.

In many cases, teachers plan interesting and engaging learning experiences which support pupils effectively to develop their interests and wider skills. For example, teachers deliver stimulating lessons around dinosaurs, making clay fossils and writing atmospheric horror stories.

Teachers plan suitably in the short-term and medium-term. In design technology for example, they plan for pupils to make a pallet chair. They research and write a design brief, complete risk assessments and understand the dangers of using tools. However, overall, the quality of teachers' planning across the school is variable. Planning does not demonstrate how pupils' learning will develop progressively over time in meaningful ways that link to pupils' destinations goals. In addition, there are insufficient resources for pupils to develop their skills in information and communication technology (ICT). This limits the progress pupils make in this area.

Pupils at the school access the care farm which is part of the wider company's provision. This valuable resource provides meaningful opportunities for pupils to develop beneficial practical and independent skills, for example measuring feed, looking after the animals, and practising money management. However, teachers do not plan these activities well enough to ensure pupil progression. There are missed opportunities to include the rich areas of learning offered by the farm and the school's external environment within the curriculum vision.

The school makes suitable provision for personal, social and health education (PSHE). Aspects of the PSHE curriculum, including sex and relationships, substance misuse and internet safety, are taught at appropriate times in pupils' development. The school benefits from the input of a community police officer and a nurse to support these sessions. Pupils are encouraged to engage in activities within the

community to develop a sense of belonging and through projects such as working with the National Parks and Keep Wales Tidy. However, a few aspects of this provision are underdeveloped, for example learning about radicalisation and exploitation.

The school provides a range of exciting sporting and recreational activities including swimming, horse riding, boxing, animal care and gardening. These activities enhance pupils' experiences at school.

Teachers and learning support staff have strong working relationships with pupils. They understand the pupils' additional learning needs and respond to their emotional needs well. All staff are kind, patient and committed to helping pupils manage their emotions and behaviour. For example, they monitor pupils' emotional well-being through the course of the lesson and adjust their plans accordingly. They provide encouraging verbal feedback specific to the task and where appropriate remind pupils of their expectations for behaviour and what they have achieved in the lesson. Rewards are used consistently well and in a manner that is appropriate to pupils' age and preference.

The school provides valuable reports on pupils' progress to parents and social workers. Teachers and residential staff meet regularly to discuss progress and adjust the provision for pupils. However, the school does not have a sufficiently robust and coherent approach to establishing pupils' starting points across the curriculum and measuring progress that they make over time.

There are limited opportunities for pupils to achieve accreditation across a range of subjects at appropriate levels.

### **Care, support and guidance**

The school provides a nurturing environment where teaching staff deliver an effective level of personal support for pupils and understand their interests well. This caring ethos ensures that pupils attend regularly and feel happy at school. Working relationships between staff and pupils are positive and conducive to pupils' well-being and learning.

Teaching staff understand and support pupils' needs well. Appropriate initial assessments of pupils' additional learning and care needs are completed on arrival at the school. These assessments support pupils' progression to the school from their previous settings suitably. However, the school does not have sufficient oversight for the strategic coordination of these assessments. Pupils' individual profiles are helpful documents which highlight important information for staff. Individual targets are relevant and provide clear advice and guidance on supporting pupils effectively. The school reviews progress against these targets on a regular basis.

The school's overarching therapeutic approach supports pupils' well-being successfully. In addition, the school makes suitable use of an appropriate range of external professional support including health staff, educational psychologists, and mental health services. This specialist assistance supports pupils in their learning and personal development.

The school provides effective support for pupils' moral, social and cultural development, through the curriculum, educational visits and an appropriate range of extracurricular activities and special events. This includes visits to local castles and valuable opportunities to contribute to the school's enterprise events.

The school provides helpful guidance and advice to pupils relating to future educational pathways and career choices. This guidance includes valuable opportunities for pupils to attend work experience placements and open days with staff support at the local college.

The school takes care to listen to pupils' views. Teaching staff provide valuable opportunities for pupils to contribute to decision making such as sharing ideas about what they want to learn in their lessons.

Staff work carefully to promote a positive safeguarding culture. They understand that safeguarding is everyone's responsibility and know who to speak to if they have a safeguarding concern about a pupil. All staff receive beneficial training to keep themselves and pupils safe and they are clear about the school's arrangements for safeguarding pupils. The school responds to safeguarding concerns promptly and makes referrals to outside agencies when appropriate.

### **Leadership and management**

The school is part of a wider organisation that provides residential care and a care farm, which is used by pupils at the school. The company aims to provide an integrated therapeutic approach which promotes pupils' well-being and in turn helps them to improve their life chances and become confident, independent members of the community. This clearly expressed vision is shared by many staff and guides practice across the organisation. As a result, the school provides a safe and nurturing environment that has helped many pupils who have left the school at the end of their education in recent years to make a successful transition to purposeful destinations.

The school has faced many challenges over the last two years. Staff at the school worked closely with their colleagues in the residential homes throughout the COVID-19 pandemic to continue to provide teaching and learning experiences. They showed resourcefulness and great personal commitment to adjust their teaching and to ensure pupils were able to make a safe return to face-to-face learning as soon as possible.

In addition to the challenges caused by the pandemic, the school has also faced considerable disruption to the stability of its leadership over recent months. Following a short period without a lead teacher, the current lead teacher was appointed initially on a part-time basis in November 2021 and is not due to take on his role full-time until September 2022. This disruption has limited the capacity of the school to maintain its quality assurance and improvement planning processes, as well as manage the usual operational demands of running the school on a day-to-day basis. Partly due to the recent period of time without a leader, self-evaluation processes are no longer reliable. The lead teacher is beginning to develop an appropriate understanding of the school's strengths and areas for development. However, this is at an early stage and is not based on sufficiently robust sources of first-hand

evidence. In particular, quality assurance processes do not take sufficient account of the views and contributions of pupils or teaching staff.

The organisation's directors provide suitable governance for the school and seek to promote a coordinated approach to governance across both the residential and education settings. Directors have a broad understanding of the challenges the school faces on a national level and have identified suitable areas for development for the longer-term strategic development of the school. However, they do not have a suitable level of understanding of the requirements for the registration and operation of independent schools. Overall, arrangements for the governance of the school do not monitor the school's compliance with the Independent School Standards (Wales) Regulations 2003 closely enough, particularly with regards to standards of learning and the curriculum. As a result, the school has made slow progress against the recommendations from the previous monitoring visit. In addition, the school does not comply with important aspects of these regulations.

Similarly, the school's arrangements to improve the quality of its provision are not robust. The school's improvement plan is out of date and does not include areas for improvement identified verbally by leaders and teaching staff on this visit. These priorities include the need to improve joint working between the care and education teams. These shortcomings mean that the school has not been able to take suitable actions to improve important aspects of its provision.

The school's professional learning programme focuses too much on generic training. These units are mainly relevant to staff supporting in residential settings but do not support well enough the professional development of teaching and learning support staff in the specific context of the school, for example in relation to curriculum development, particularly in the area of outdoor learning, and assessment. Staff do not have opportunities to observe high quality teaching for pupils with social, emotional and mental health needs in other similar settings or even across the school.

Leaders promote successfully a strong safeguarding culture at the school. Teaching staff understand and implement well the company's processes for safeguarding pupils. However, interruptions to the school's performance and line management processes mean that teachers' concerns about their own well-being and safety have not been addressed effectively enough.

## Evidence base of the report

Before an inspection, inspectors:

- analyse the outcomes from parent/carer 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

## Copies of the report

Copies of this report are available from the school and from the Estyn website ([Estyn Website](#))

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:

Publication Section  
Estyn  
Anchor Court, Keen Road  
Cardiff  
CF24 5JW or by email to [publications@estyn.gov.wales](mailto:publications@estyn.gov.wales)

This and other Estyn publications are available on our website: [Estyn Website](#)