



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

**A report on**  
**Craig Y Parc School**

**Date of inspection: March 2023**

**by**

**Estyn, His Majesty's Inspectorate for  
Education**

**and Training in Wales**

## About Craig Y Parc School

Name of provider	Craig Y Parc School
Proprietor	Ambito Care and Education which is a division of Saludem Healthcare
Local authority	Cardiff Council
Language of the provider	English
Type of school	Independent special
Residential provision?	Yes
Number of pupils on roll	24
Pupils of statutory school age	16
Date of previous Estyn inspection (if applicable)	01/02/2015
Start date of inspection	27/03/2023

Craig Y Parc is an independent day school for pupils from age 3 to 19 years. Currently, the age range of pupils at the school is from age 6 to 19 years. The school is situated alongside Ty Cwtch registered children's home, which provides residential care for eight young people. Currently, there are 24 pupils on roll at the school, which includes seven pupils from the children's home and 17 who are day pupils. All pupils have statements of special educational need (SEN) or education, health and care plans (EHCP). A few pupils have looked-after children status (LAC).

The school provides education for pupils with a wide range of complex physical needs and associated learning difficulties. These include cerebral palsy, dysphagia, autistic spectrum condition and epilepsy.

The school's proprietor is Ambito Care and Education operating under the parent company Saludem Healthcare, which provides services for young people and adults with complex support needs. Many pupils at the school are placed by authorities in South Wales. A few pupils are placed by authorities in England.

The current headteacher took up her post in November 2020, having previously been employed as the head of education from January 2020. The deputy headteacher joined the school in April 2021. The leadership team are supported by a team of four teachers, 15 learning support assistants and a therapy team.

The school's last core inspection was in February 2015. Its most recent monitoring visit took place in January 2022.

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](https://mylocalschool.gov.wales)

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

## Overview

Craig Y Parc provides a calm and nurturing environment that generally meets pupils' physical, medical and care needs well. Teaching and support staff build positive working relationships with pupils and, as a result, many pupils are happy and settled.

Many pupils enjoy their lessons and engage positively with their learning. In relation to their complex needs, they make appropriate progress in a range of areas that support their learning and personal development well. Teachers work closely with the school's therapy team to plan learning that takes appropriate account of pupils' specific and individual needs. This close team-working means that pupils make particularly beneficial progress in the development of their communication, physical and independence skills. However, shortcomings in teachers' planning, assessment and the quality of learning support mean that pupils do not make as much progress as they could during their time at the school.

Since the last core inspection, there have been six changes to the leadership of the school, as well as a change in the ownership of the school. These changes mean that over this period there has been significant disruption to the strategic oversight of the school and the capital investment in it.

The current leadership team has brought stability to the school and has started to implement beneficial changes to the school's curriculum, approaches to teaching and assessment, and the model of therapeutic support. Leaders have a suitable understanding of the school's strengths and its priorities for improvement. However, much of this work is at an early stage. In addition, the school has faced challenges to the recruitment and retention of suitably qualified and experienced staff. This has hindered the school's progress against its improvement priorities.

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:

- Ensure that where pupils have a statement, the education provided fulfils its requirements [1(2)(e)]
- Provide a programme of activities appropriate to the needs of pupils above statutory school age [1(2)(h)(i)]
- Ensure the curriculum provides the opportunity for all pupils to learn and make progress [1(2)(i)]
- Ensure lessons are well planned, teaching methods effective and suitable activities used; ensure class time is managed wisely [1(3)(c)]
- Ensure teachers provide education which enables all pupils within a class to make progress, including pupils with statements and those for whom Welsh or English is an additional language [1(5)]

### **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, specifically relating to Standard 1 'The Quality of Education'
- R2 Ensure that professional learning addresses the professional development needs of teachers and learning support staff
- R3 Ensure that the learning environment and resources meet pupils' complex needs
- R4 Improve relationships with parents

## What happens next

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.

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

Over time, many pupils make appropriate progress across a range of skills that support suitably their learning and personal development. Many make beneficial progress against the targets in their personal plans. However, because of shortcomings in teaching, assessment and the range of learning experiences, pupils do not make as much progress as they could during their time at the school.

Most pupils develop their physical skills well through well-planned programmes of physical activity implemented by therapists and teaching staff. They use their walkers and bicycles to make their way around the school and take part enthusiastically in rebound therapy and hydrotherapy sessions. These worthwhile programmes contribute effectively to pupils' physical well-being.

Many pupils make strong progress in developing their communication skills. In lessons, they listen attentively, respond positively to instructions and guidance and use their preferred methods of communication to express their understanding. For example, pupils who use spoken language to communicate use subject specific terminology accurately to describe how to build a castle on secure foundations so that it will remain standing.

Pupils who use assistive technology such as voice output machines or eye gaze technology, successfully make choices, answer questions and communicate their needs and feelings. A few pupils use these devices to initiate and maintain conversations confidently with visitors to the school. A few pupils use signs successfully to ask the teacher to make choices in a game of boccia or to play a favourite song again. However, the inconsistent use of these approaches means that a few pupils do not make as much progress in the development of their communication skills as they could.

The progress pupils make in their communication and physical skills promotes the development of independence in ways that are directly relevant to them. They develop their independence further through the acquisition of valuable life skills, for example by improving their wheelchair driving and personal care skills, shopping for ingredients for the school's mobile kitchen and serving customers in the weekly café.

During their time at the school, pupils practise and consolidate their literacy and numeracy skills at a level that is generally appropriate to their needs and abilities. For example, they develop their understanding of common sounds and read short familiar words from the board. They write short imaginative stories using correct punctuation and a range of sentence structures. Younger pupils practise their counting skills or use their times tables to complete calculations. They consolidate their understanding of less and more, and explore the concept of time by planning and recounting the sequence of activities during the day. However, shortcomings in teachers' planning and assessment restrict the development of pupils' skills in these areas.

Many pupils enjoy participating in activities that develop their imaginative and creative skills, for example, by taking part in a reading of 'We're going on a bear hunt', joining in with songs in class or making Easter cards.

In a few sessions, pupils respond positively to opportunities for them to develop their social skills in relation to shared tasks. Generally, pupils work well alongside each other and mostly enjoy each other's company. However, there are limited opportunities for pupils to develop these skills through planned pair or group work activities.

The majority of pupils use information and communication technology (ICT) suitably to support their communication, for recreation or to help their learning, for example, by using the whiteboard to make choices. However, opportunities for pupils to practise and develop their ICT skills progressively across the curriculum are limited.

Over the last three years, a very few pupils have achieved accreditation in literacy, numeracy and science. A very few pupils have achieved the bronze award in the Duke of Edinburgh's Award Scheme. Opportunities for pupils of all abilities to achieve accreditation in relation to their learning across the curriculum are underdeveloped.

Over the last three years, nearly all pupils who have left the school have progressed to independent special college or mainstream school, or have returned to live with their family.

### **Well-being and attitudes to learning**

Many pupils at Craig Y Parc are happy and settled in the calm atmosphere, which permeates the school. They form beneficial working relationships with staff, which support their well-being effectively. They know who to turn to if they are upset or anxious and they are confident that staff will respond to their concerns appropriately.

Many pupils are respectful, behave well and treat others with courtesy in lessons and around the school. For example, they celebrate each other's achievements and support one another with their learning. They welcome visitors to the school warmly and interact well with them.

Many pupils enjoy their lessons and engage positively with their learning. They settle appropriately to work, follow instructions suitably and persevere with their learning when provided with appropriate support from staff.

In relation to their complex needs, many pupils make suitable progress in important areas such as the development of social, physical and independence skills. For example, pupils use adapted bikes to access other parts of the building, and develop opportunities for social interaction with other members of the school community. A few pupils learn to navigate their wheelchairs independently around the school. They develop these beneficial skills within the on-site "driving school."

Pupils enjoy participating in a suitable range of enrichment activities on and off site. For example, they benefit from visits to local castles and a local science discovery centre. However, overall opportunities for pupils to develop their learning in real-life contexts in the community are limited.

Pupils have meaningful and relevant opportunities to share their ideas as part of pupil voice activities. They share their ideas about what and how they would like to learn. In addition, members of the school council are enthusiastic about their leadership roles. They contribute suitably to developments at the school, including adaptations to the school environment and changes to the curriculum.

### **Teaching and learning experiences**

Since the appointment of the new headteacher, the school has reviewed its approach to the curriculum, teaching and assessment. Working closely with the school's therapeutic team, teachers develop appropriate individual learning frameworks for each pupil. From these plans, teachers create personalised targets that aim to capture pupils' small steps of progress. These 'my next steps' form the basis of lessons and learning experiences for each pupil. However, this work is at an early stage and there is too much variability in the quality of teachers' target setting.

Overall, the recently established curriculum for pupils aged 6-14 meets pupils' needs and abilities appropriately. However, the curriculum for pupils aged 14-19 is at an early stage of development. The limited choice of learning experiences available to these pupils, including the provision for careers and work-based learning, restricts opportunities for pupils to build on their prior learning and to develop important skills that will support them with the next stage of their lives.

Overall, teachers and therapists use assistive technology and communication strategies well to support pupils' learning. For example, a few pupils use person-assisted scanning to construct an email home to parents. In many classes, there is adequate provision for individual communication development. However, these resources are not consistently available for pupils throughout the school. In addition, although a few staff use signing suitably to reinforce verbal communication, signing is not utilised consistently across the school. As a result of these shortcomings, a few pupils do not make as much progress in their learning as they could.

The provision for off-site experiences, including the use of the wider school grounds, to support teaching and learning, is limited. For example, the school garden and allotments are not accessible due to the uneven surface leading to these areas. As a result, pupils do not have sufficient opportunities to extend and consolidate their learning outside the classroom.

The school is developing arrangements to assess and to review pupils' progress. Staff are beginning to collect a range of worthwhile information to track learners' progress, including data on the achievement of their small steps of learning. However, this work is at an early stage of development and arrangements for the assessment of pupils' progress are too variable.

Teachers have a strong understanding of the needs and interests of the pupils they support. They develop positive and caring relationships with pupils and provide enthusiastic, positive praise throughout learning activities. Small class sizes allow staff to develop a sound understanding of pupils' likes and interests, and promote a calm and caring learning environment. Teaching staff establish beneficial routines and manage pupils' transitions skilfully using schedules and visual cues.



The majority of lessons include engaging activities; however, teachers' planning does not sustain pupils' engagement consistently across the duration of these lessons. In addition, the quality of teaching across the school is too variable. On a few occasions, activities lack purpose and do not include suitable opportunities for pupils to develop their skills progressively in authentic contexts.

Learning support assistants build caring working relationships with pupils. They support pupils' personal and medical needs well. However, these staff do not have a clear understanding of their role in leading learning in lessons. As a result, pupils are not always engaged, and opportunities to consolidate and extend learning are missed.

In a few lessons, teachers' verbal feedback develops pupils' thinking skills and learning successfully. In these lessons, teachers use open questions skilfully, for example to build on prior learning from a previous lesson about castles. However, verbal feedback does not consistently identify what pupils need to do next to improve their learning.

These shortcomings mean that the school does not comply with a number of the regulations under Standard 1: The quality of education provided by the school.

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

The school provides a calm and nurturing environment that promotes successfully the development of pupils' confidence and self-esteem. Teaching and learning support staff understand pupils' additional needs well. They develop trusting working relationships with them.

Teaching staff are supported effectively by a team of therapists, including speech and language and physiotherapy. They work together in classes to support the development of important skills, for example, pupils' communication and physical skills. This effective collaboration leads to consistent approaches across the school which support pupils' needs well. In addition, the school works with external specialists and therapists to develop aspects of its provision. For example, the school has worked with the visual impairment team from the local authority to improve the quality of school displays.

Pupils' personal profiles and plans are helpful documents. The education and therapy teams work collaboratively to produce these plans. They include useful approaches to promote pupils' learning and well-being as well as beneficial targets which are reviewed regularly. This person-centred planning suitably involves pupils, staff, and parents and carers. The plans are shared effectively with teaching staff and teachers generally use this information appropriately in their teaching and planning. However, pupils' 'my next steps' are often too generic and do not focus sharply enough on pupils' small steps of progress.

The school is developing a culture where pupils participate actively in the life of the school. For example, pupils have contributed to changes in the school's curriculum and in the school's canteen.

The school has developed worthwhile practice in promoting pupils' moral, social and cultural development. The school successfully celebrates different cultures and religions. For example, pupils make attractive Menorah candle handprints to celebrate the festival of Hannukah. In addition, as part of their learning, most pupils develop an understanding of the heritage and culture of Wales. For example, pupils create paper daffodils and prepare cawl to celebrate St. David's Day.

There is an appropriate culture of safeguarding at the school. All staff undertake regular beneficial training to keep pupils and themselves safe. Leaders provide clear direction to staff about their duties and responsibilities in dealing with safeguarding issues and monitor this carefully. For example, leaders share weekly safeguarding scenarios with staff for them to consider and to respond to. As a result, staff develop their understanding of their roles and responsibilities in responding to any safeguarding concerns promptly. The school has sound safer recruitment procedures.

### **Leadership and management**

Since the previous core inspection in 2014, there have been six changes to the senior leadership and a change to the ownership of the school. Inevitably, this has meant that there has been disruption to the strategic oversight for the school over this period of time and, as a result, to capital investment in the building, grounds and resources of the school. During this period, the number of pupils on roll at the school has also declined from around 40 to 24.

The current headteacher joined the school shortly before the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in January 2020. Since taking on her current role in November 2020, the headteacher has focused appropriately on reviewing the school's vision, and ensuring staff have a clear understanding of their roles, responsibilities and of what constitutes good practice in this field of special education. For example, she has reviewed the curriculum, the model of therapeutic support, and approaches to teaching and assessment to ensure the school has a clear focus on promoting pupils' educational outcomes alongside their care and well-being.

Crucially, the headteacher and deputy headteacher have provided much needed stability for the school following this period of disrupted leadership, including managing the school through the challenges of the pandemic. During this time, these leaders have developed a sound understanding of the school's strengths and priorities for development. They have ensured that self-evaluation and quality assurance processes are robust and suitably self-critical. These processes link well to the school's improvement planning, and identify relevant and ambitious priorities for development.

Leaders have high expectations of staff and there are suitable arrangements to ensure effective communication across the school, for example through daily briefings and regular team meetings. Overall, staff work together cohesively to provide a welcoming and caring environment that generally meets pupils' needs well. Leaders plan carefully to manage staff's well-being on a day-to-day basis. However, there are limited opportunities for staff and other stakeholders to contribute to the school's self-evaluation processes.

The current leadership team consists of the headteacher, deputy headteacher and business manager. These leaders monitor carefully the school's progress against its priorities for improvement. However, much of this work remains at a relatively early stage. This is partly because the distribution of responsibilities within the leadership team restricts their capacity to drive through desired improvements at the necessary pace.

The school has experienced significant challenges in recruiting and retaining suitably qualified staff. One of the reasons for this is that the school's terms and conditions of employment are not attractive enough compared to similar providers. These staffing challenges have slowed the pace of change, and have hindered arrangements to distribute leadership responsibilities across the wider staff team. In addition, they have impacted on the quality and consistency of teaching that the school has been able to provide over time.

Leaders make suitable use of the budget allocated to the school to ensure pupils' day to day needs are met. Since the last monitoring visit, the school has taken appropriate steps to redecorate internal and external areas of the school. However, around the school building, paving stones are in a poor state of repair, which restricts pupils' access to the learning and recreational facilities provided by the school's extensive and attractive grounds. In addition, a few of the school's specialist facilities, including for example its hydro pool and sensory room, are tired and require more significant capital investment to meet the increasingly complex needs of pupils.

The school receives helpful challenge from the parent company through its arrangements for quality assurance and monitoring. This includes regular meetings with members of the company's quality team. These partners share the school's own analysis of its strengths and areas for development.

The school has suitable arrangements to communicate with parents and carers through the use of home-school books and a messaging app. However, these processes are not consistent across the school, due in part to periods of staff absence. In addition, changes to the school's curriculum model and therapeutic approach introduced by the current leadership team have meant that relationships with a small group of parents have deteriorated. As a result, this group do not feel their concerns have been heard by the school.

Generally, there are worthwhile opportunities for staff to develop their understanding of practice in relation to a wide range of pupils' physical, medical and care needs. However, partly because of the impact of the pandemic, there are limited opportunities for staff to visit similar schools or settings to extend their knowledge and understanding of teaching and learning. In addition, the strategic planning to promote learning support assistants' and teachers' understanding of teaching and learning is underdeveloped.

The school meets most of the Independent School Standards (Wales) 2003 required to maintain their registration as an independent school.

## 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 publication. Any enquiries or comments regarding this document/publication should be addressed to:

Publications 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](#)