



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

**A report on**

**Mynydd Haf**

**Ty Ysgol  
Newport Road  
Trethomas  
Caerphilly  
CF83 8BY**

**Date of inspection: December 2024**

**by**

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

## About Mynydd Haf

Name of provider	Mynydd Haf
Proprietor status	The school is owned by the Keys group, part of the portfolio of 3G investments.
Language of the provider	English
Type of school	Independent special
Residential provision?	No
Number of pupils on roll	23
Pupils of statutory school age	23
Date of previous Estyn inspection (if applicable)	16/05/2022
Start date of inspection	02/12/2024

### School context:

Mynydd Haf is an independent ALN specialist school situated in Trethomas near Caerphilly. The school opened in March 2016 and is part of the Keys group.

The school provides full-time education for up to 24 pupils with social emotional and mental health difficulties (SEMH). Currently, the school has 23 pupils on roll aged between 11 and 17.

Nearly all pupils have an individual development plan (IDP) or education, health and care plan (EHCP). A minority of pupils are looked after by local authorities in England and Wales, although none are currently resident in the organisational children's homes.

The headteacher has been in post since October 2017.

## Summary

Most staff at the school have high expectations and build respectful relationships with pupils over time, understanding their additional learning needs (ALN) well. They support pupils appropriately to manage their behaviour and provide clear learning intentions, feedback, and praise, which helps keep pupils engaged in their learning.

The curriculum is broad and balanced, with activities that build knowledge and skills progressively well. The school also enriches the curriculum with beneficial educational trips. For example, the school recently provided Year 11 pupils with a valuable residential outdoor education experience.

The health and well-being curriculum, focusing on physical and mental health, is a strength. It covers valuable topics like decision-making, social influences, and healthy relationships. Pupils engage well and make sound progress in understanding how to stay safe and healthy. Additionally, valuable aspects of the school, such as the animal care provision, positively support pupils in gaining an understanding of taking on responsibilities.

The vocational education curriculum is in the early stages of development, with a minority of pupils taking accredited courses in hair and beauty. Nearly all older pupils participate in work experience placements, which positively impact their post-school destinations.

Effective careers provision and strong links with post-16 providers support individualised progression planning and positive transitions to pupils' next steps. Visiting speakers and workshops further strengthen the work in this area.

Many pupils make appropriate progress in their learning, developing literacy, numeracy, social, communication, physical, and digital skills. Staff support helps pupils reflect on their learning and engage in discussions to consolidate their understanding. However, most pupils need high levels of support for extended writing tasks, and the majority of pupils still struggle with negative communication or the use of appropriate language.

The school has effective strategies to reduce challenging behaviour, including behaviour plans developed in collaboration between pupils and staff. While this has reduced severe behaviours, low-level disruptions and absences continue to impact learning and the well-being of pupils. Comprehensive individual education plans help staff plan and monitor progress.

Pupils feel listened to and can influence school changes through the school council. Leaders work with pupils, parents, and local authorities to support engagement, although the low overall attendance of pupils limits the progress they make. The school has a secure safeguarding culture, with staff clearly understanding their role in keeping pupils safe.

Leaders have responded appropriately to previous inspection recommendations, improving leadership, governance, and teaching. They have high expectations, are

visible, and engage with pupils and staff. Performance management and a distributed leadership model have helped create a motivated and committed staff team.

Leaders use quality assurance processes to evaluate teaching and learning, providing clear summaries and action plans. Professional development for staff is a strength, with a positive ethos of mutual support. Leaders understand the school's strengths and areas for development well. However, information management systems limit the accessibility of information and do not support leaders in effectively evaluating whole-school practice.

Support from the wider organisation, including regional leads and governors, helps the school improve and access resources. Leaders collaborate well with partners such as parents, local authorities, and social workers. However, the use of electronic tools to support communication with parents and carers is not well established and limits parental engagement.

## **Main evaluation**

Pupils at Mynydd Haf School respond well to the nurturing and supportive environment it provides. Relationships between staff and pupils are strong and are built on trust, care and understanding of the pupils' needs.

### **Curriculum, teaching and learning**

In most lessons, teachers have high expectations of pupils and develop respectful and trusting relationships. Teaching staff have a sound understanding of individual pupils' additional learning needs (ALN) and the personalised approaches that will benefit them. The school has a strong focus on supporting learners to manage their own behaviour to enable them to actively engage in learning activities. This is an integral approach to teaching and learning across the school. Staff ensure that pupils understand learning intentions and provide useful verbal feedback and praise.

The school provides a broad and balanced curriculum which includes beneficial learning activities that effectively build pupils' knowledge and skills. Topics within schemes of work are wide-ranging and appropriately challenging. They provide a balance between topics of direct relevance to pupils, such as the dangers of vaping, alongside project-based learning that draws on different subject areas. This approach supports pupils to develop positive attitudes to learning. However, poor attendance impacts engagement with the school curriculum and limits pupil progress.

In the most effective lessons, teachers adapt schemes of work effectively to engage pupils in their learning. For example, cross curricular work such as 'crime and punishment' which gives pupils opportunities to work on activities such as taking part in a mock trial and creating their own island with its own set of ideals and rules. Further, teachers plan useful topics such as, 'how do energy drinks affect our health?' Pupils engage well in these topics which are meaningful and relevant to their own lives.

During their time at school, many pupils make appropriate progress in their learning. Staff encourage pupils well to reflect on their own learning, which supports them to consolidate their understanding across the curriculum.

Many pupils develop suitable literacy skills over time. A minority of pupils are able to respond verbally to questions, with support from staff. For example, pupils engage appropriately in discussions, such as 'I have the right to good healthcare'. In the best cases, pupils are able to listen and respond appropriately with brief thoughts and opinions supported by the teacher.

Many pupils improve their writing suitably, for example, through activities based around 'adventure writing'. Pupils create their own stories from mind maps having learnt about the structure and features of stories such as 'Harry Potter'. Pupils successfully prepare written arguments for a mock trial. However, most learners require high levels of staff support to complete extended writing tasks.

Many pupils make sound progress in developing their social and communication skills at school. For example, in PHSE lessons they learn about communication in relationships and the impact of hate speech. As a result, pupils are learning about the importance of positive and appropriate communication styles. Despite this, the majority of pupils continue to engage in negative communication or use inappropriate language.

Many pupils develop suitable mathematical skills over time. They begin by securing basic number skills and then progress to more complex areas such as increasing or decreasing percentages of a number or converting amounts of different currencies.

Many pupils make secure progress in developing their physical skills at school. For example, through individual swimming sessions pupils develop their water confidence. Further, the majority of pupils develop their coordination and teamwork through football lessons.

Many pupils develop appropriate digital skills in lessons. For example, using technology to research the topic of the day. However, progressive planning for the development of these skills is underdeveloped.

Over time, the school has increased the number of pupils entered for qualifications and accreditation. The school have further broadened the qualification offer available for pupils. Over the last three years, the majority of pupils have left school with entry level or GCSE qualifications in maths, English and science.

### **Enrichment opportunities**

The school supplements its curriculum offer with educational trips and visits. Examples include visits to a local mine as part of the humanities curriculum and comparing jobs from past to present. Other trips include visits to local castles, places of historical interest and sporting facilities.

The school benefits from a small area designated to animal care. This space functions as a calming space for pupils who need time to process and regulate. Further, it provides pupils with the opportunity to take on responsibilities, for example feeding, cleaning and looking after the animals over the school holidays.

## **Residential opportunities for learning**

The school supports pupils very well to prepare for adult life, for example through trips that encourage and foster skills including independence, resilience and organisational skills.

A recent residential trip gave Year 11 pupils the opportunity to engage in a wide range of exciting activities such as axe throwing, mountain biking and canoeing. These team building challenges support pupils to develop as healthy, confident individuals, develop valuable life skills and prepare well for independence outside school.

School leaders ensured that funding was in place to provide all pupils the opportunity to take part in this residential placement. The school takes great care to produce a detailed plan for each pupil that successfully balances the possible risks linked to their needs whilst not inhibiting their full participation in a wide range of learning experiences.

Pupils have also recently helped to plan, prepare and raise money for a Kilimanjaro charity climb undertaken by a staff member. This included helping to cost out equipment and clothing as well as planning the route. These opportunities give pupils a beneficial understanding of helping others and developing their own independence skills.

### **Preparation for future life**

The health and well-being curriculum, which is separated into physical health and mental health, is a strength of the school. This provides pupils the opportunity to engage in an extensive range of meaningful topics. Topics include decision-making, social influences and healthy relationships. Pupils engage well in these sessions and make sound progress in developing their knowledge and understanding of how to stay safe and healthy.

The school has established strong links with post-16 providers including regional further education colleges and vocational education and training providers. This enables individualised post-school progression planning and positive transitions. Many pupils are clear about their post-school aspirations and believe that the school helps them to make decisions about their next steps.

Pupils benefit from effective advice and guidance about their next steps, for example through regular visits from Careers Wales advisers providing opportunities for pupils to discuss possible career pathways. The school plans regular visits to career fayres. These visits are open to all Key Stage 4 pupils, but also to pupils in Key Stage 3 where appropriate. The school regularly organises a good variety of visiting speakers and workshops. For example, pupils took part in workshops with the local fire service, which ended with the pupils becoming fire fighters for the day.

A vocational education curriculum is in its early stages of development. Currently a minority of older pupils are following an accredited course in hair and beauty. The school is developing a purpose-built salon allowing pupils to immerse themselves in the life of a working salon.

Work experience is a valuable aspect of the pupils' preparation for adulthood. Nearly all older pupils benefit from attending a wide variety of work placements and training providers. Many pupils move on from the school to positive destinations including other education placements, further education and training or employment.

### **Meeting the needs of pupils**

**The school has successfully developed a range of strategies to reduce incidences of challenging behaviour. Pupils have developed behaviour plans in collaboration with staff to support a consistent approach to supporting them. This approach has been successful in reducing the most challenging behaviours and the use of physical intervention. However, low-level disruptive behaviours and pupil absence, including through exclusions, continue to negatively impact on pupil learning and well-being.**

The school has developed comprehensive individual education plans that incorporate behaviour management and learning goals. These plans are developed alongside pupils, with clear responsibilities for form and subject teachers. Staff use these documents effectively to plan for, and monitor, pupil progress at an individual level.

Many pupils feel listened to and able to influence change at the school. A few pupils take on positions of responsibility through the school council, for example helping pick the school menu or requesting the addition of new vocational areas of the curriculum.

Leaders work with pupils, parents and local authorities to support pupils to engage in education, for example, through home visits. However, overall, pupils do not attend school well enough.

**As a result of the sound safeguarding culture across the school, staff have a strong understanding of the importance of their role in keeping pupils safe.**

### **Leading and improving**

Leaders have worked diligently to respond to the recommendations from the last core inspection. As a result, they have made secure improvements in important areas including leadership, governance and teaching and learning.

Leaders have high expectations of staff and are highly visible around the school, actively engaging with pupils and staff.

Staff benefit from focused performance management, which provides them with clear support and expectations. Since the time of the core inspection, the school has developed a distributed leadership model and shared valued roles across the staff team. As a result, leaders have developed a secure team of motivated and committed staff. This is a strength of the school.

Leaders collect a beneficial range of first-hand information to inform their evaluation of the school. Leaders' quality assurance processes are suitably evaluative and focus well on the impact of teaching on learning. They then provide a clear and helpful summary of findings and allocate individual actions to the staff team. As a result, leaders develop a secure understanding of the strengths and areas for development

of teaching and learning. These findings also inform the planned quality assurance activities for the next term.

Support for the continuing professional development of teaching and support staff is a strength of the school. For example, all teachers are undertaking professional learning relevant to their roles and subject responsibility. A positive ethos of mutual support encourages knowledge exchange during daily afternoon briefing meetings. As a result, teachers and support staff are able to identify and implement consistent approaches to pupil support.

Leaders have a secure understanding of the strengths and areas for development at the school. The school is at an early stage of bringing together a range of approaches to information management. However, in a few areas systems and ongoing changes do not support leaders to readily access and easily evaluate practice at a whole-school level.

Leaders benefit from support and challenge from the wider organisation including through a regional lead, responsible individual and board of governors. They are successful in supporting the school to make improvements. Further, they have strengthened the range of resources available to the school including online platforms and supporting a recent residential trip for Year 11 pupils.

Leaders work with a range of partners to meet the needs of pupils. For example, parents and carers, local authority representatives and social workers. The school uses electronic systems to share information, which includes the use of an app. However, engagement and understanding of this is variable and, as a result, communication with stakeholders is restricted.

## **Compliance with the regulations for registration**

Independent school inspections are governed by the Education Act 2002 and related regulations: the Independent School Standards (Wales) Regulations 2024. These regulations require an independent school to meet an appropriate standard in the following areas:

### **The quality of education provided by the school**

The school 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.

## **Safeguarding**

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

## **Recommendations**

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

R1 Improve attendance

R2 Strengthen communication with parents

R3 Consolidate changes to systems to support leaders' evaluation of practice at the school

## **What happens next**

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.

## Evidence base of the report

Before an inspection, inspectors:

- analyse the outcomes from parent/carers 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

## 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 163 of the Education Act 2002. The main purpose of inspection under this section is to report on compliance with the Independent Schools Standards (Wales) Regulations 2024. In schools that provide non-maintained nursery education, this report also satisfies the requirements of Schedule 26 of the School Standards and Framework

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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