

A report on
Y Cwmpawd Gilfach

William Street
Gilfach
CF81 8ND

Date of inspection: June 2025

by

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

This report is also available in Welsh

About Y Cwmpawd Gilfach

Name of provider	Y Cwmpawd Gilfach
Local authority	Caerphilly County Borough Council
Language of the provider	English
Multi-site provision?	Yes
Number of pupils on roll	96
Pupils of statutory school age	96
Date of previous Estyn inspection (if applicable)	
Start date of inspection	23/06/2025
<p>Further information</p> <p>Caerphilly local authority has recently reorganised the management of education other than at school (EOTAS) provision. Y Cwmpawd Gilfach is a portfolio pupil referral unit (PRU), which has moved from inclusion services and is now part of the school improvement service. This is beginning to strengthen accountability and collaboration.</p> <p>Since its registration in June 2023, the PRU has undergone significant restructuring. This has created instability in leadership, most notably at the Ty Gilfach site, which has negatively impacted the provision for and outcomes of pupils. In April 2025, the local authority appointed a new EOTAS lead who has oversight across all provisions in the portfolio. Due to their planned leave of absence, the local authority has seconded the teacher in charge from Glanynant PRU to serve as acting head of EOTAS for the remainder of the summer term, this role is based on the Ty Gilfach site. Each of the provisions across the portfolio PRU has its own leader, with responsibility for that provision, who is a member of the wider senior leadership team.</p> <p>Y Cwmpawd Gilfach provides education for pupils aged 7 to 16 years. The portfolio PRU, has delegated responsibilities to arrange and oversee all the education other than at school (EOTAS) provision for the local authority. Many pupils have social, emotional, behavioural and mental health needs. Many pupils have missed a considerable amount of time out of education and have significant gaps in their learning.</p>	

There are three provisions over four sites. Ty Gilfach is a PRU for pupils aged 11 to 16. Innovate is a joint Youth Service and education provision for pupils aged 13 to 16. The Hive provides community-based tuition for pupils with emotionally based school avoidance (EBSA) and those in need of individual tuition.

There are 96 pupils on roll across all provisions. Nearly all pupils on roll have additional learning needs (ALN), with most having a local authority individual development plan (IDP).

Just under 40% of pupils are eligible for free school meals. Very few pupils speak English as a second language or come from an ethnic minority background. Very few pupils speak Welsh. Very few pupils are currently looked after by the local authority, although many have experience of living in care.

Data reported is sourced from the latest available Pupil Level Annual School Census. These figures may be slightly different to those observed during the inspection.

Further information is available from the Welsh Government My Local School website: mylocalschool.gov.wales

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

Summary

Leaders at Y Cwmpawd Gilfach portfolio Pupil Referral Unit (PRU) are working collaboratively to develop a clear vision, which underpins the work of the PRU. They are beginning to establish a shared vision based on inclusive values to, 'belong, aspire, achieve'. Leaders are developing a culture of high expectations for all pupils. Leaders have a keen sense of teamwork, and joint working across the provisions is developing well. This contributes well to improved consistency in a few areas, such as behaviour and well-being. Leaders have introduced clearer accountability structures and a beneficial professional learning offer. However, strategic planning and self-evaluation processes are not robust enough to drive improvement.

Across the three provisions of Y Cwmpawd Gilfach, staff establish calm, purposeful learning environments, underpinned by respectful relationships between staff and pupils. Most staff manage pupil behaviour well and create inclusive, supportive environments where pupils feel safe and valued. Behaviour is generally settled across the PRU, and staff manage pupils' social and emotional needs effectively. Targeted professional learning and the recent introduction of the 'Ready to Learn' policy promotes a consistent approach to behaviour across the provisions.

Partnership working with a beneficial range of key partners is a notable strength. This makes an important contribution to improving the well-being of pupils and supports them successfully to engage in learning.

The quality and coherence of the curriculum varies significantly across the provisions. Innovate and The Hive offer effective, well-structured curricula that meet pupils' individual needs and support positive outcomes. However, the curriculum at Ty Gilfach is underdeveloped, which hinders pupils' progress.

Pupils generally benefit from engaging learning experiences. Most pupils make appropriate progress in oracy and writing and apply their numeracy skills suitably in real life contexts. The development of pupils' digital and Welsh skills is underdeveloped. Overall, the lack of assessment processes and limited tracking of pupils' progress hinders staff's ability to plan learning experiences that develop pupils' skills progressively.

Provision for pupils with additional learning needs (ALN) is effective at Innovate and The Hive, where support is tailored and tracked well. At Ty Gilfach, however, systems to identify and support ALN are less well developed, and pupils' needs are not always met.

Attendance is a key area for improvement. While attendance is suitable at Innovate and The Hive, it remains too low at Ty Gilfach, where pupils access part-time placements.

Processes to monitor and review attendance arrangements are underdeveloped, affecting the equity of the curriculum offer.

The management committee offers growing strategic oversight and contributes effectively to areas such as recruitment and safeguarding. They know the PRU well, identifying accurately its strengths and areas for development. However, it has not ensured that leaders have addressed key priorities swiftly enough.

Recommendations

We have made four recommendations to help the PRU continue to improve:

- R1 Strengthen leadership at all levels to improve the rigour and effectiveness of self-evaluation and improvement planning, with a clear focus on improving the outcomes for all pupils
- R2 Improve attendance, including access to full-time education for all pupils
- R3 Develop strategic leadership of the curriculum to ensure coherent planning, progression and equity of provision, particularly at Ty Gilfach
- R4 Establish robust systems for assessment and progression tracking at Ty Gilfach to monitor pupil outcomes and inform planning

What happens next

In accordance with the Education Act 2005, HMCI is of the opinion that this PRU is in need of significant improvement. The PRU will draw up an action plan to show how it is going to address the recommendations. Estyn will monitor the PRU's progress about 12 months after the publication of this report.

Main findings

Leadership

Senior leaders work collaboratively to develop a clear vision, which underpins the work of the PRU based on 'belong, aspire, achieve'. Leaders are beginning to establish a culture of high expectations for all pupils as they join the PRU. As a result, those pupils who attend regularly, make progress in managing their behaviour and engage successfully in their learning. However, too few pupils have the opportunity to attend regularly. This significantly impacts the progress they can make in important areas of their learning.

Since the restructure, there are increasing opportunities for senior leaders across the provision to work more effectively together. As a result, they have a keen sense of teamwork, and collaboration across the provisions is developing well. Leaders have established clear accountability structures, including, for example, weekly senior management team meetings and regular line management meetings. This is beginning to strengthen the quality of strategic direction at Y Cwmpawd Gilfach and is leading to improvements in a few areas. For example, in the consistent approaches to supporting pupils' well-being and behaviour. However, opportunities for collaboration between the wider staff team are limited.

Leaders are beginning to capture a suitable range of information to help them evaluate the quality of provision and inform strategic planning. However, improvement plans do not clearly identify the outcomes of agreed actions or timescales well enough. While leaders evaluate the progress that they are making, there is a lack of focus on the impact of actions taken. Overall, self-evaluation and strategic planning remain underdeveloped. This means that, over time, improvements in important areas such as the variability of curriculum, assessment, and attendance across the provisions have not been addressed and remain important ongoing priorities.

Staff benefit from a broad range of professional learning opportunities. There are suitable systems for staff to express an interest in further professional development. However, the strategic planning for and, evaluation of professional learning, on teaching and its impact on pupil progress, is at an early stage of development.

Management committee members bring a broad range of expertise and contribute meaningfully to key areas such as recruitment, human resources and strategic planning. They provide a developing level of strategic oversight across the provisions, with growing awareness of the strengths and areas for development at the PRU. For example, they accurately identify the improving engagement and behaviour of pupils but also the variability in the curriculum offer and the progress pupils make. However, the

management committee has not ensured that leaders have implemented actions to address these areas for improvement swiftly enough.

The management committee receives timely and detailed information from leaders at the PRU, which enables it to provide greater challenge and effective support. A few members have engaged in learning walks and pupil voice activities. However, their role in self-evaluation is at an early stage of development.

End of year reports provide beneficial information to parents and carers for pupils at Innovate and The Hive provisions. However, at the time of the inspection, these reports are not yet in place at the Ty Gilfach provision.

Grant funding is used appropriately to improve the range of opportunities available to pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds. Currently there is not a robust process in place to effectively identify the impact of funding on pupil outcomes.

Partnership working is a notable strength, with extensive links across education, health, and social services supporting the holistic needs of pupils well.

Well-being, safeguarding and attendance

Across the PRU staff develop positive and trusting working relationships with pupils who regularly attend the provisions. Nearly all staff know their pupils well and manage their emotional needs effectively. As a result, pupils generally feel safe and well supported.

There is a well-embedded culture of safeguarding across the PRU. The secure site arrangements contribute effectively to this safe environment. Staff have a sound understanding of their roles and responsibilities. Similarly, the management committee have developed an effective understanding of their role and ensure that safeguarding is a high priority. The very recent introduction of a digital platform across all provisions is beginning to provide a consistent approach for reporting safeguarding concerns.

As part of the staffing restructure, strategic leadership of attendance at the PRU is improving and is a priority area for improvement. Attendance processes across Innovate and The Hive provisions are well established. At Ty Gilfach processes are beginning to be implemented more consistently.

Overall, attendance across each provision is too variable. The attendance of pupils at Ty Gilfach is too low. In addition, at Ty Gilfach most pupils access education either for morning or afternoon sessions during the week and do not benefit from full-time education. As a result, this significantly impacts the progress these pupils make during their time at the PRU.

Tracking and monitoring processes for pupil attendance are inconsistent. For those pupils who access education part time, processes to review these arrangements are underdeveloped. As a result, this significantly impacts the equity of the curriculum offer. Overall, a minority of pupils improve their attendance from their initial starting points during their time at the PRU.

Leaders have recently introduced a change in the management of pupil behaviour to provide a consistent approach across all the provisions. Through the 'Ready to Learn' policy there is a recognised need to address the lack of engagement and attendance from groups of pupils. This is underpinned by approaches to ensure pupils feel safe, secure, and ready to learn.

Overall, across the provisions, pupil behaviour is settled. Where provisions are more established, staff have developed highly effective strategies to engage and manage the social, emotional and behavioural needs of their pupils well.

Most pupils with ALN receive effective support, particularly at The Hive and Innovate provisions. Support is carefully tailored to meet individual needs through well-informed planning and targeted interventions.

Innovate and The Hive provisions demonstrate well-embedded systems for using individual development plans (IDPs) and tracking progress. This personalised support leads to strong engagement and positive post-16 outcomes. However, at Ty Gilfach, access to interventions is limited. The lack of processes to identify pupils' academic needs impacts staff's ability to target interventions appropriately. As a result, interventions are inconsistently planned and not robustly evaluated for impact.

Overall, while there is a strong commitment to meeting the needs of pupils with ALN, the variability in planning, practice and the evaluation of impact across the provisions limits the consistency of pupils' experiences. Leaders are aware of these shortcomings and are beginning to take steps to build staff capacity and develop a more strategic approach to meeting pupils' needs.

Across provisions there is variability in opportunities for pupils to develop their pupil voice and leadership skills. In the most effective practice, pupils have opportunities to design a behaviour and reward system, which supports pupils to take ownership of their behaviours. Currently there is no school council across the provisions, which limits opportunities for pupils to influence the life of the PRU.

Support for pupils in Year 11 at risk of becoming not engaged in education, training or employment (NEET) is particularly strong at Innovate and The Hive where numbers have been consistently low over time. The Inspire team provides useful guidance and transition arrangements, which helps pupils to have high aspirations about their future destinations.

At Ty Gilfach, this work for Year 11 pupils is significantly underdeveloped. As a result, too many pupils in this provision are at risk of becoming NEET.

Teaching, learning and pupil progress

Teaching across the three provisions of Y Cwmpawd Gilfach is characterised by calm, purposeful environments underpinned by strong relationships between staff and pupils. Nearly all staff model respectful communication and set clear expectations for behaviour, contributing to a culture of mutual respect and care.

Across the PRU, there is no overarching leadership or monitoring of the curriculum. This means that not all pupils have a broad, balanced and equitable education offer. The quality of the curriculum varies considerably across the three provisions. While Innovate and The Hive have established an effective curriculum, at Ty Gilfach it is significantly underdeveloped. At Ty Gilfach, teaching does not build progressively toward clearly defined outcomes. Staff at this provision work with commitment and enthusiasm, but with limited strategic direction or leadership support, resulting in fragmented planning and inconsistent delivery. The absence of baseline assessments and tracking systems significantly hinders staff's ability to plan learning that develops pupils' skills progressively over time.

The Innovate provision offers a particularly well-structured, engaging and individualised curriculum. It links the Curriculum for Wales effectively with the Youth Service framework. The curriculum includes a range of academic, vocational and personal development qualifications alongside rich learning experiences tailored to pupils' needs. Nearly all pupils take part in purposeful community projects and environmental work, such as developing the community garden. This helps to foster a strong sense of belonging. Welsh is well embedded through daily routines and curriculum content, promoting confidence and understanding of Welsh language, heritage and culture. For example, pupils produce an engaging and entertaining video about Wales as an entry for the monthly Youth Service competition.

At The Hive provision, teachers skilfully adapt clear, age-related learning outcomes to produce a worthwhile curriculum suitable for their limited contact hours. This focuses very well on pupils' individual needs and interests.

Most teachers plan relevant and engaging learning experiences that build on pupils' interests and needs well. In many cases, lessons are well structured with clear expectations and staff use questioning effectively to deepen understanding and encourage participation. In the most effective examples, creative approaches such as themed days at Ty Gilfach and real-life problem-solving projects at Innovate motivate pupils and bring learning to life. At Innovate and The Hive, teaching is supported by

beneficial medium-term curriculum plans, which provide a secure framework for learning. Staff at these provisions adapt planning skilfully in response to pupils' progress, their interests and topical events, helping to ensure that learning remains relevant and meaningful.

Planning for important curriculum areas such as personal and social education (PSE), relationships and sexuality education (RSE) and religion and values education (RVE) is underdeveloped, with no coherent approach across the provisions. As a result, the curriculum does not support pupils well enough to develop the skills and confidence they need to make important life choices.

The staff team provides inclusive environments across all provisions where nearly all pupils feel safe and valued. Overall, pupils who attend the PRU regularly engage enthusiastically with their learning and show positive attitudes. They respond well to structure and routine, and behaviour is consistently respectful and settled. Many collaborate effectively and show resilience in learning. Where promoted, creative tasks, community projects and social activities enhance pupils' independence, confidence and enjoyment.

Where practice is strong, many staff use verbal feedback and self and peer assessment consistently to help pupils understand how to improve and support them to revisit and refine their work. However, in a minority of cases, written feedback lacks precision and the progress pupils are making in lessons is not tracked consistently enough.

Overall, where pupils attend regularly, they generally make suitable progress in developing important skills. However, due to the absence of schemes of work and the limited use of assessment information, staff do not build on prior learning or develop pupils' skills progressively. As a result, too few pupils achieve the outcomes of which they are capable.

Additional information

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

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

The PRU has appropriate arrangements for promoting healthy eating and drinking.

Leaders and management committee manage the PRU's finances appropriately, including the use of the pupil development grant.

Evidence base of the report

Before an inspection, inspectors:

- analyse the outcomes from the parent/carers and pupil questionnaires and consider the views of teachers and the management committee through their questionnaire responses

During an inspection, inspectors normally:

- hold a meeting with parents/carers to hear their views on the PRU and its effectiveness
- meet the headteacher, management committee, senior and middle leaders (where appropriate) and individual teachers to evaluate the impact of the PRU's work
- meet pupils to discuss their work, to listen to them read and to gain their views about various aspects of their PRU
- meet groups of pupils in leadership roles, such as representatives from the PRU council and eco-committee
- visit a broad sample of classes, including learning support groups and undertake a variety of learning walks to observe pupils learning and to see staff teaching in a range of settings, including classrooms, support groups and in outdoor areas
- where appropriate, visit the specialist resource base within the PRU to see pupils' learning
- observe and speak to pupils at lunch and break times and at a sample of after-school clubs, where appropriate
- attend assemblies and daily acts of collective worship
- look closely at the PRU's self-evaluation processes
- consider the PRU's improvement plan and look at evidence to show how well the PRU has taken forward planned improvements
- scrutinise a range of PRU documents, including information on pupil assessment and progress, records of meetings of staff and the management committee, 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 (www.estyn.gov.wales)

The report was produced in accordance with Section 28 of the Education Act 2005.

Every possible care has been taken to ensure that the information in this document is accurate at the time of publication. Any enquiries or comments regarding this document/publication should be addressed to:

Publications Section

Estyn

Anchor Court, Keen Road

Cardiff

CF24 5JW or by email to publications@estyn.gov.wales

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