

A report on

Ysgol Tir Morfa

**Ffordd Derwen
Rhyl
Denbighshire
LL18 2RN**

Date of inspection: January 2026

by

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

This report is also available in Welsh

About Ysgol Tir Morfa

Name of provider	Ysgol Tir Morfa
Local authority	Denbighshire County Council
Language of the provider	English
School category according to Welsh-medium provision	
Type of school	Maintained Special
Religious character	None
Number of pupils on roll	114
Pupils of statutory school age	83
Number in nursery classes	*
Percentage of pupils eligible for free school meals over a three-year average (The national percentage of pupils eligible for free school meals over a three-year average in Maintained Special is 45.8%)	43.5%
Percentage of pupils identified as having additional learning needs (a) (The national percentage of pupils identified as having an additional learning need in Maintained Special is 100.0%)	100.0%
Percentage of pupils who speak Welsh at home	*
Percentage of pupils with English as an additional language	*
Lead partner for Initial teacher education	No
Date of headteacher appointment	02/01/2025
Date of previous Estyn inspection (if applicable)	22/05/2018

Start date of inspection	19/01/2026
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Further information

Ysgol Tir Morfa is a day special school situated across two sites in Rhyl and maintained by Denbighshire local authority.

The school provides placements for pupils aged 3–19. Pupils with the most complex additional learning and medical needs are educated at the main campus, while many older pupils attend the Grange Road site, accessing the main campus for enterprise sessions.

There are currently 125 pupils on roll. Nearly all the pupils are from homes where English is the main spoken language. The school aims to provide a happy, safe learning environment to nurture pupils in lifelong communication, independence and life skills.

Most pupils have severe learning difficulties or profound and multiple learning difficulties. A significant minority, particularly in the secondary-age cohort, have moderate learning difficulties. A minority of pupils have autism spectrum condition or speech, language and communication difficulties. Few pupils present with physical and/or medical difficulties or behavioural, emotional and social difficulties, and very few pupils have sensory impairments such as visual or hearing impairment.

The school, on behalf of the local authority, provides an outreach support service to schools in the county. This service was not inspected.

The school, in partnership with local universities is a host school for initial teacher education.

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

Ysgol Tir Morfa provides a highly supportive and caring learning environment where pupils are known extremely well and helped to make meaningful progress from their individual starting points. Teaching is carefully planned to meet pupils' needs, and staff use clear routines, well-chosen resources and ongoing assessment to help pupils stay focused and understand their learning. Pupils are praised regularly and are helped to understand what they have achieved and what they will learn next. In a very few lessons, activities are not always challenging enough

Communication is a major strength of the school. Staff use a wide range of approaches, such as signing, symbols, communication devices and objects, to help pupils express choices, feelings and ideas. Reading is a key part of this work and is taught in a practical, inclusive way that helps pupils use reading skills in everyday life. Pupils also develop numeracy skills well through real-life activities like shopping, cooking and enterprise work. Creative activities and problem-solving tasks help pupils grow in confidence, independence and thinking skills.

The curriculum is designed around pupils' stages of development rather than their age. Clear learning pathways help pupils build independence and prepare for adult life. Older pupils benefit from strong work-related learning and enterprise opportunities, both in school and in the community.

Pupils' wellbeing is a significant strength. Staff build warm, trusting relationships and work closely with families and health professionals to support pupils' emotional, medical and attendance needs. Parents value the school highly and report positive changes in their children's confidence and happiness.

Leadership is strong and caring, with clear systems in place to check progress and improve the school. Overall, pupils are safe, happy and well prepared for their next steps.

Recommendations

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

- R1 Continue to share effective practices to ensure that the curriculum and teaching meets the needs of all pupils

What happens next

The school will draw up an action plan to address the recommendations from the inspection.

Main evaluation

Strong, values-driven leadership that secures stability and prepares pupils for the future

Leadership at Ysgol Tir Morfa is strong, values-driven and highly inclusive, creating a nurturing school community where pupils and staff feel supported to thrive and prepare confidently for their next steps. Leaders foster a culture of openness, respect and professional trust. Relationships across the school are strong, and most stakeholders feel listened to and valued. Staff describe leaders as approachable, considerate and confident, which contributes positively to morale and a shared sense of purpose. Parents hold the school's leadership in very high regard and value the school's inclusive, responsive approach.

The headteacher provides a clear and well-communicated strategic vision that places pupils' needs, high-quality teaching and preparation for adult life at the centre of the school's work. This vision is well understood across the school community and has been sustained effectively through a period of significant leadership change. Careful succession planning and strong collaborative working within the newly established leadership team have ensured continuity, stability and clarity of direction.

Leaders demonstrate a strong commitment to wellbeing and continuous improvement through their calm, measured responses to concerns. Arrangements for listening to learners' views are effective, and nearly all pupils feel that their opinions are taken seriously, reinforcing a culture where inclusion, trust and improvement are central to daily practice.

A curriculum driven by developmental stage, not age, to secure independence and future readiness

The school has developed a well-considered and evolving curriculum, underpinned by a strong shared understanding of progression rooted in pupils' developmental needs rather than age-related expectations. Distinct and inclusive learning pathways *Exploration, Discovery and Pioneering* enable pupils to follow flexible learning routes that respond effectively to their changing needs. Curriculum planning is broad and well sequenced, with a clear emphasis on functional learning, developing independence and preparing pupils for their next steps in learning through meaningful, real-life experiences.

Provision across the 14–19 phase is coherent and progressive, extending pupils' learning through well-matched accreditation, enterprise and work-related experiences. On-site enterprises such as the pupil run café, florist and gift and recycling shop provide authentic

contexts for pupils to apply skills, develop confidence and gain a growing understanding of the world of work.

Parents are actively involved through effective communication and individual development plan (IDP) processes, supporting shared understanding of pupils' progress. Pupils express strong enjoyment of learning, especially where activities are practical and relevant, and demonstrate clear links between engagement, progress, growing independence and readiness for life beyond school.

Leaders have strengthened curriculum leadership through 'areas of learning and experience' teams, which promote shared responsibility and increasing staff ownership of curriculum development. As a result, arrangements for digital competence, literacy and numeracy are becoming more consistent across pathways, supporting greater coherence in pupils' learning experiences.

Highly personalised teaching and assessment that secure engagement and meaningful progress

Teaching across the school is mostly well planned, purposeful and closely matched to pupils' individual needs. Staff know pupils very well and use this understanding to provide sensitive, skilled support that promotes high levels of engagement, particularly in communication, sensory and experiential learning. Learning is underpinned by well-chosen resources, clear routines. Staff adapt prompts, resources and task complexity responsively in line with pupils' signals, ensuring learning remains accessible and meaningful. These skilled approaches help sustain pupils focus. . Pupils' progress is broken down into small, achievable steps that link securely to their personal learning goals and IDP targets. Ongoing assessment is used well by staff in tracking the progress that pupils make. Verbal praise and clear guidance on next steps help pupils understand their achievements and what to do next. In a very few lessons, pace and challenge are less well matched to individual pupil needs, which limits engagement for a very few pupils.

Spotlight - Nurturing independence and preparing pupils confidently for life beyond school

Work-related learning is a particularly strong feature of the school's provision. Pupils benefit from carefully structured, practical experiences that prepare them well for adulthood. Through the school's on-site enterprise provision, *Brews, Blooms and Bargains*, pupils develop real-life skills such as handling money, preparing food, serving customers and communicating confidently with the public. Staff provide sensitive support and reduce assistance over time, enabling pupils to develop independence and pride in their achievements.

Community-based learning further strengthens preparation for next steps. Pupils practise travel skills, shop independently and engage in work-related activities both on-site and in the local community. These experiences help pupils apply skills in real-life contexts and develop confidence, resilience and self-regulation. Where appropriate, pupils achieve a well-matched range of external accreditations that recognise their progress and support successful transitions.

Practical, communication-rich learning that builds confidence, independence and real-life skills

Nearly all pupils show enthusiasm and enjoyment in learning, particularly in practical and real-life activities. Communication skills are a particular strength, supported by a consistent whole-school total communication approach. Staff use signing, symbols, devices, switches and objects of reference skilfully to help pupils make choices, express preferences and follow instructions. As a result, pupils' oracy and functional communication are well developed. While pupils, where appropriate, engage positively in activities such as diary writing and labelling, handwriting and extended writing remain less secure for a few pupils.

The school develops pupils' numeracy skills particularly well through frequent, practical and purposeful activities. Pupils apply number, measure and data-handling skills confidently in real-life contexts such as shopping, cooking, outdoor learning and enterprise activities. Staff adapt tasks carefully using concrete resources, visual supports and repetition to meet pupils' individual needs. This enables pupils to make steady progress in counting, comparing quantities and recognising patterns. Digital skills complement numeracy learning effectively, with pupils using tablets and electronic platforms to record data, label graphs and practise calculations at an appropriate level. Where appropriate, pupils use digital tools independently to support accredited learning and develop employability-related skills.

Creative learning is a strong feature of the school. Pupils engage in a wide range of expressive and exploratory activities, including art, sculpture and collaborative projects

with external artists. Practical problem-solving tasks, such as preparing food safely or using equipment during outdoor learning, help pupils develop independence, confidence and critical thinking skills.

The school supports pupils' social, independence and physical development very effectively. Pupils develop fine and gross motor skills through well-planned activities such as indoor and outdoor gym sessions, cycling and outdoor learning spaces such as the gardens, fields and wooded area.

Welsh language is embedded naturally across the school through daily routines, songs and practical use. Staff model Welsh consistently and initiatives such as Criw Cymraeg help pupils develop confidence and awareness of Welsh language and culture.

Reading through a total communication approach

At Tir Morfa, reading is a central component of the school's total communication approach and makes a strong contribution to pupils' communication, independence and well-being. Leaders and staff share a clear and inclusive understanding of reading that extends beyond print to include symbols, signing, objects of reference, gesture and digital icons. This shared understanding underpins consistent and effective practice across the school.

Provision for early reading is a significant strength. Staff use well-established visual, symbolic and object-based approaches that enable pupils at the earliest stages of development, including those with complex communication needs, to engage meaningfully with texts and symbols. Teaching of reading is systematic, carefully structured and personalised, informed by consistent use of assessment information that is shared effectively across staff to ensure appropriate challenge and support. Leaders ensure continuity of provision, including where pupils are awaiting specialist input.

Where appropriate, pupils develop phonological awareness, decoding and early comprehension through well-paced daily sessions and consistent routines. Staff make purposeful links between reading, writing and real-life contexts, enabling pupils to apply skills meaningfully. Reading is embedded effectively across the curriculum through practical and engaging activities that promote enjoyment, confidence and independence.

Leadership of reading is strong and strategically focused. Leaders monitor impact rigorously and provide clear direction for improvement. As a result, most pupils make very strong progress from their starting points, with some achieving accelerated gains, and increasingly use reading to support everyday communication, participation and independence.

Strong multi-agency partnerships that remove barriers to learning and wellbeing

Multi-agency working, particularly with health services, is a strong and well-established feature of Ysgol Tir Morfa's provision. Staff work closely with a range of health professionals, social services and external agencies, who contribute regularly to multi-disciplinary meetings and IDP reviews. This ensures a shared understanding of pupils' complex needs and enables timely, well-matched support.

Health colleagues provide valuable guidance to staff and parents, supporting the sensitive and consistent management of pupils' medical and emotional needs through clear, personalised healthcare plans. Well-considered strategies to support regulation and sensory needs help pupils to access learning with minimal disruption and improve overall wellbeing.

Strong partnership working also underpins effective attendance management. Early identification of concerns and personalised support, including phased reintegration where appropriate, reduce barriers to attendance. As a result, pupils' attendance compares favourably with similar specialist schools and continues to improve, supporting sustained engagement in learning.

Support for pupils' wellbeing, guidance and preparation for adulthood at Ysgol Tir Morfa is a significant strength. Staff build highly positive, trusting relationships with pupils and know them exceptionally well. They respond with warmth, patience and consistency, creating calm, nurturing and inclusive environments where pupils feel safe, valued and develop a strong sense of belonging. Well-established routines across the school help pupils feel secure and increasingly confident to engage in learning, social interaction, work-related activities and community experiences.

Listening to pupils and families to strengthen wellbeing, inclusion and engagement

Parents that engaged with the inspection process value the school's strong focus on pupils' wellbeing and report clear improvements in pupils' happiness, confidence and emotional security, particularly following transition from previous settings. Staff support pupils' emotional needs skilfully through targeted interventions, trusted spaces and effective strategies that help pupils regulate their emotions and seek support with increasing confidence. Attendance is managed through a supportive, pupil-centred approach, underpinned by strong partnership working with families and external agencies, resulting in attendance that continues to improve. Staff actively promote pupil voice and inclusion, providing well-supported opportunities for all pupils to express views and make choices, which strengthens pupils' sense of belonging and pride in their school.

An inclusive leadership culture that values voices and builds capacity for improvement

Ysgol Tir Morfa has strong, well-embedded whole-school systems that enable leaders and governors to evaluate provision accurately and plan improvement effectively. Robust assessment and tracking arrangements capture small but meaningful steps in pupils' progress and are reviewed regularly through structured pupil progress meetings. These processes allow leaders to identify trends, respond promptly to emerging needs and adapt provision in line with evidence.

Leaders triangulate progress data with monitoring activities such as learning walks, lesson observations and professional dialogue, strengthening the accuracy of self-evaluation. Improvement priorities arise directly from this analysis and are translated into clear actions, for example refining literacy provision or increasing sensory regulation opportunities.

Senior leaders provide governors with comprehensive data and evaluative reports, supporting informed challenge and strategic oversight. Recent leadership restructuring and the growing contribution of areas of learning experience teams are strengthening accountability and consistency in evaluation. Overall, the school's systems ensure that self-evaluation is purposeful and that improvement planning is coherent, responsive and firmly focused on improving outcomes for pupils.

Leadership capacity is strengthening as roles are increasingly distributed and accountability is clearer. Emerging leaders, including 'areas of learning experience' teams, are beginning to contribute usefully to evaluation and whole-school improvement, although this work remains at an early stage.

Governance is well organised and has supported strategic continuity effectively, particularly during recent leadership changes. Governors bring a broad and relevant range of skills and receive comprehensive, well-structured reports that enable informed oversight. They provide appropriate and increasingly confident challenge to leaders, although their understanding of pupil progress and attendance is at an early stage and not yet consistently secure.

Additional information

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

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

The school has appropriate arrangements for promoting healthy eating and drinking

Leaders and governors manage the school'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/carer and pupil questionnaires and consider the views of teachers and the governing body 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, senior and middle leaders (where appropriate) and individual teachers to evaluate the impact of the school's work
- meet pupils to discuss their work, to listen to them read 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 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 school 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 school's self-evaluation processes
- consider the school's improvement plan and look at evidence to show how well the school has 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, 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:

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