

**A report on**

**Cwmtawe Community School**

**Ffordd Parc Ynysderw  
Pontardawe  
Swansea  
SA8 4EG**

**Date of inspection: March 2026**

**by**

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

## About Cwmtawe Community School

Name of provider	Cwmtawe Community School
Local authority	Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council
Language of the provider	English
School category according to Welsh-medium provision	
Type of school	Secondary
Religious character	*
Number of pupils on roll	1047
Pupils of statutory school age	1047
Number in sixth form	
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 Secondary is 20.3%)	18.7%
Percentage of pupils identified as having additional learning needs (a) (The national percentage of pupils identified as having an additional learning need in Secondary is 9.0%)	11.5%
Percentage of pupils who speak Welsh at home	5.8%
Percentage of pupils with English as an additional language	0.7%
Lead partner for Initial teacher education	No
Date of headteacher appointment	01/01/2014

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Date of previous Estyn inspection (if applicable)	01/10/2018
Start date of inspection	02/03/2026

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](http://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

Cwmtawe Community School is an inclusive and supportive community where most pupils behave well, show respect and engage positively in lessons. Many pupils make at least suitable progress due to teachers using secure subject knowledge, establishing clear routines, modelling learning effectively and providing helpful resources that support pupils to focus and understand what is expected of them. In a very few lessons, pupils make strong progress. However, while teachers do enable pupils to progress in their learning, in most lessons, teachers do not support pupils well enough to make strong progress. This is due to ineffective questioning, a lack of challenge and variable feedback.

In general, pupils develop their skills suitably over time, helped by the school's successful development of a positive reading culture. Many pupils apply effectively their advanced reading skills when analysing and synthesising texts. There are suitable opportunities for pupils to write across the curriculum. Many pupils listen attentively and many contribute verbally to lessons. Numeracy skills are generally secure, with many pupils calculating accurately, applying methods confidently and presenting their work clearly.

The curriculum is broad and reflects the school's vision for authentic learning, although pupils in Year 9 do not access the full range of experiences required by Curriculum for Wales. The school offers a wide range of extra-curricular activities and educational visits which enrich pupils' learning and contribute positively to their personal development.

The school promotes well-being effectively, creating an environment where pupils feel supported and able to participate confidently in school life. Pupils benefit from a wide range of meaningful leadership opportunities that encourage responsibility and involvement across the school community. Attendance has improved over time but remains below pre pandemic levels.

Provision for pupils with additional learning needs is a strong feature of the school's work. Interventions are well tailored, transition arrangements are effective, and partnerships with parents and external agencies are positive. As a result, most pupils, including those who attend the school's specialist resource base, make suitable progress. The culture of safeguarding is strong.

Leaders promote a clear whole-school vision that emphasises providing the best start in life for all pupils. Leadership structures are clear and leaders contribute appropriately to self-evaluation activities. However, evaluations of teaching and learning are often too generous and do not focus precisely enough on the impact of provision on pupils' progress. Professional learning is aligned to school priorities, but its impact is not evaluated well enough. Improvement planning identifies relevant priorities and leaders

have secured improvements in several important areas of the school's work. Governors provide suitable challenge and monitor the use of resources and grants appropriately.

## **Recommendations**

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

- R1 Strengthen teaching particularly around the quality of questioning and challenge to maximise all pupils' learning
- R2 Sharpen self-evaluation processes to strengthen improvement planning and support accountability
- R3 Ensure that pupils have access to the full range of learning experiences until the end of Year 9

## **What happens next**

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

## Main findings

### Teaching and Learning

Most pupils at Cwmtawe Community School are polite, respectful and courteous to one another and to visitors. They arrive punctually to lessons and settle quickly to their learning.

In lessons, many pupils, including those with additional learning needs (ALN), make at least suitable progress in developing their knowledge and understanding. In these cases, teachers demonstrate secure subject knowledge and act as positive language models, using subject-specific vocabulary effectively. They foster productive working relationships with pupils, establish clear, well-embedded routines at the start of lessons and use a range of helpful resources to stimulate pupils' engagement. As a result, many pupils engage positively in their learning. In addition, teachers in these lessons establish a suitable pace of learning.

In a very few cases where pupils make strong progress, teachers plan carefully for what they want pupils to learn and promote pupils' independence effectively. These teachers have high expectations of what pupils can achieve and challenge all pupils well. They model learning effectively and provide purposeful feedback that prompts pupils to think more deeply and strengthen their learning. They assess what pupils can do and adapt the pace and direction of lessons in real time and between lessons. However, while teachers do enable pupils to make progress, in most lessons, they do not challenge them well enough to make strong progress. They do not probe or develop pupils' understanding sufficiently. They often answer their own questions, accept brief responses, or do not allow pupils adequate thinking time to formulate responses.

In a few cases where pupils make limited progress, teachers have low expectations of their pupils and do not plan well enough for learning. Often, they talk too much or provide too much structure, limiting opportunities for pupils to develop independence. Generally, where pupils make limited progress, teachers do not use formative assessment techniques effectively enough to check pupils' learning or identify misconceptions during lessons, and they accept and over-praise low-quality work.

In the best cases, teachers' written feedback provides helpful information about what pupils have done well or what they need to improve. However, the quality and impact of written feedback is too variable, and, in most cases, pupils do not respond to teacher feedback well enough.

## Skills

In general, staff provide useful opportunities for pupils to develop their literacy skills across the curriculum. Leaders track effectively pupils' progress in literacy and use this information purposefully to identify those who need additional help. They provide beneficial interventions for pupils requiring further support with reading.

Most pupils listen attentively to their teachers and peers, and many contribute verbally to lessons when prompted. A few pupils articulate clearly their ideas and offer well developed responses, drawing on ambitious vocabulary. However, in general, teachers do not consistently encourage pupils to develop their answers and too often accept brief contributions. As a result, many pupils' verbal responses in lessons are underdeveloped.

The school focuses purposefully on strengthening its culture of reading through a range of strategies that promote regular and purposeful reading. Whole school practices that celebrate reading, such as displays, book swap activities and staff sharing and promoting their own reading, help to reinforce positive attitudes towards reading. Visits to the local library, supported by a welcoming school library, enable pupils to access a wide variety of texts that interest them. The school has expanded its selection of reading materials to further support pupils to find books that match their interests.

When reading in lessons, most pupils locate and extract information accurately from suitably challenging texts. Many annotate texts effectively to identify key features. Many pupils infer meaning competently and analyse suitably the language and structure of texts. They summarise information appropriately, demonstrating a sound understanding of key points.

There are suitable opportunities for pupils to write at length in several subjects across the curriculum. Most pupils structure their work logically and show good stamina when producing extended pieces of writing. Many adapt tone and format appropriately for the intended audience and purpose. In English, many pupils use feedback from drafted work effectively to refine their final pieces. They vary sentence structures appropriately and use ambitious vocabulary. A minority of pupils write with notable sophistication. However, a minority of pupils make basic spelling and grammatical errors.

Across the curriculum, there are purposeful opportunities for pupils to practise their numeracy skills in a few relevant subjects. However, a few cross-curricular numeracy activities are contrived and do not deepen pupils' understanding of the subject matter sufficiently.

Overall, many pupils develop suitably their mathematical and numeracy skills. Most pupils work confidently with algebra, for example collecting like terms accurately in Year 7 or when devising formal rules for working with angles and parallel lines in Year 8. Older pupils

apply the four rules of number accurately when calculating the component parts of utility bills and they solve contextual problems linked to dart boards capably in Year 11. Many pupils present their working clearly, which enables them to identify errors and supports teachers in diagnosing misconceptions effectively. When given the opportunity across the curriculum, pupils apply their mathematical skills appropriately, for example when evaluating the energy efficiency of electrical equipment in science. In addition, a majority of pupils construct bar charts and line graphs competently, selecting suitable scales and plotting data accurately, although a minority make basic errors, such as omitting labels and titles or connecting points inaccurately.

Many pupils develop their digital skills suitably in subjects across the curriculum. For example, pupils use digital packages in their science lessons to study biomes and ecosystems and in their geography lessons, they represent data from spreadsheets in 3D charts on maps. The digital coordinator is working suitably with departments to quality assure tasks and to ensure progression over time.

In general, pupils have a positive attitude towards the Welsh language. Many pupils listen well to instructions, pronounce words correctly and translate sentences successfully from English to Welsh. A few pupils can express their ideas clearly and vary sentence patterns effectively using idioms and connectives. A minority converse independently without depending too much on sentence builders to help them. However, pupils in general lack confidence to speak spontaneously and rely too much on vocabulary lists and structure patterns.

Pupils in Year 11, who learn Welsh as a first language, generally make adequate progress in the language. However, some pupils in Years 7 to 10 do not always study a course that matches their language ability.

The school provides suitable opportunities for pupils to further develop their knowledge of the Welsh language and culture outside of Welsh lessons, for example through the school, local and Urdd eisteddfodau. In addition, Year 7 have produced Welsh heritage displays that have been shared in the local arts centre. The language and culture of Wales is further celebrated through the work of the 'Cryw Cymraeg' during 'Diwrnod Shw'mae, Su'mae' and 'Dydd Miwsig Cymru' celebrations.

Pupils develop their creative, physical and thinking skills well across the curriculum. For example, in music, most pupils compose suitably their own individual melodies. Many apply successfully their thinking skills in art, using observation, reflection and refinement to develop the quality of their sketches. In physical education, many pupils demonstrate sound physical skills when combining gymnastic techniques, such as tuck and rotation, to create and perform short sequences that include both basic and more advanced rolls.

## Curriculum

The school has established a clear vision for its curriculum, based on its core principle of providing authentic learning experiences and developing a culture for lifelong learning. Year 7 and Year 8 pupils have valuable opportunities to engage in a full range of learning opportunities within all six Areas of Learning Experiences. However, Year 9 pupils do not have access to the full range of learning experiences required by Curriculum for Wales.

The school offers a broad range of option choices in Year 10 and Year 11 that consider pupils' needs and interests well. Pupils benefit from helpful information to inform their option choices and leaders consider pupils' views well to ensure that nearly all pupils are able to study their chosen courses. Pupils receive beneficial advice and guidance to prepare for their next steps in life after school. The school works well with external agencies to support pupils to feel confident in making these decisions.

The provision for personal and social education (PSE) promotes effectively pupils' personal development and helps most of them develop their spiritual, moral, social and cultural awareness well. This provision covers a range of relevant themes relating to health, well-being, relationships and safety. A wide range of external agencies further enhance these programmes, including youth organisations, young carers support, and a local bank which supports financial education.

In lessons, assemblies and enrichment days, pupils benefit from a suitable range of opportunities to develop their understanding of equality, diversity and relationships. For example, in religious education, Year 7 pupils explore "what it means to belong and where do I belong."

The school provides a rich programme of extra-curricular opportunities for pupils which contributes positively to their physical and creative skills. For example, pupils participate in a wide range of music and sports activities, and well-being and creative clubs such as school productions, Coding Club, 'Ink' Creative Writing Club, and Diversity Support Club. These opportunities are highly appreciated by pupils and parents.

The school provides a wide variety of educational visits and enrichment activities which supports the curriculum well and provides opportunities relevant to pupils' interests and pastimes. This programme includes a Wellbeing Fun Run, charity days, and local and international visits such as to The Hay Festival and Amsterdam.

## **Well-being, care, support and guidance**

Cwmtawe Community School nurtures a highly inclusive culture where pupils' well-being is promoted consistently, which supports them to engage positively in their learning. The well-being team provides effective support that helps pupils develop their emotional literacy and regulate their feelings, enabling them to participate successfully in school life. The pastoral team ensures that pupils access appropriate support swiftly, as required, through a range of well-being interventions that help pupils overcome barriers to learning. The school's broad extra-curricular programme provides valuable opportunities for pupils to develop resilience, independence and social confidence, for example sporting clubs, friendship club and forest school activities.

The school provides a wide range of opportunities for pupils, including those with additional learning needs, to develop leadership skills and contribute to decision-making, for example, roles such as school council representatives, sports ambassadors and senior prefects. Year 10 pupils receive training to act as peer mentors and work with Year 7 pupils, providing helpful, regular academic and well-being support. Pupils value this support as they settle into school life. The school council meets regularly and plays an active role in school improvement. For example, pupils have contributed to decisions relating to the refurbishment of school toilets and to food choices in the school canteen. Council members communicate their work suitably through assemblies and year group representatives. As a result, many pupils feel that their views are listened to and that the school takes account of their ideas.

The school has a clear and proactive anti-bullying approach, and staff respond promptly and consistently to concerns. Leaders have established clear systems for recording and following up incidents. Preventative work is embedded across the curriculum, including through health and well-being lessons, assemblies and form time. As a result, pupils demonstrate a clear understanding of what constitutes bullying and know how to report concerns.

Staff manage behaviour effectively through well-established systems that are well understood by pupils. Leaders monitor patterns of behaviour, identify emerging concerns and maintain timely communication with parents. The pastoral team work closely with families to support behaviour improvement through partnership working including the 'Cwmtawe Inclusion Panel'. This supports early identification and intervention for pupils who may be at risk of exclusion.

The additional learning needs (ALN) team demonstrate a strong commitment to supporting the development and progress of pupils with ALN and those requiring additional support. They ensure positive communication with parents and external agencies. In addition, they deliver effective tailored support for pupils' needs through a

comprehensive and bespoke offer such as ‘Sensory Circuits’ and ‘All About Me’ sessions. The school provides effective transition arrangements from primary schools for pupils with ALN, including pupil centred review meetings and additional transition opportunities, which support early identification of need and continuity of support. In addition, the school offers bespoke and sensitive transition arrangements that help support pupils as they move into post-16 education.

The ALN team carry out a range of baseline assessments for all pupils in Year 7 to inform planning and develop a broad range of tiered interventions, including literacy, numeracy and emotional wellbeing support. Teaching staff have access to key information, including the ALN register, individual development plans and one-page profiles. Whole-school training has supported staff well to develop their understanding of ALN needs. However, the monitoring of teaching and learning for pupils with ALN is at an early stage.

The attendance policy is clear and implemented consistently across the school. Rewards are used to reinforce a positive culture around attendance. Overall attendance has increased over the last three years, although it remains below pre-pandemic levels. Attendance for pupils eligible for free school meals has also improved and the school has reduced persistent absenteeism.

The school hosts a specialist resource base for pupils with autism spectrum disorder. In general, these pupils engage well in learning and make suitable progress. They are supported well to regulate their emotions and develop social communication skills. These pupils develop suitable resilience in managing a busy school environment.

The school promotes a strong safeguarding culture. Staff respond appropriately and in a timely manner to any concerns raised by pupils, and leaders maintain detailed electronic records that enable them to build a clear picture of pupils’ needs. Leaders provide regular and tailored safeguarding training to support staff in recognising and responding to safeguarding issues. They work effectively with a range of external agencies to support pupils’ safety and well-being. Pupils are supported to develop their understanding of how to stay safe, including through learning about e-safety and healthy relationships. Most pupils report that they feel safe in school and know who to turn to if they have any concerns.

### **Leading and improving**

The headteacher provides thoughtful and well-considered leadership, underpinned by a clear vision to provide the best start in life for all pupils. The school’s motto ‘We can and will succeed by working together and giving our best’ permeates all aspects of school life. He is supported well by the senior leadership team and together they place the pupils’ interests at the centre of their work.

Senior leaders support staff well and are developing positively an open culture of collaboration and self-reflection across the school. The senior and middle leadership group meets monthly to discuss important priorities for school improvement. Line management arrangements are clear and provide suitable support for middle leaders. However, leaders do not always challenge staff and hold them to account well enough on the impact of their work.

Professional learning aligns suitably with whole-school improvement priorities as well as staff professional development reviews. Staff value the professional learning opportunities provided, including training on specific aspects of teaching and learning and participation in subject networks. However, leaders do not evaluate well enough the impact professional learning has on pupils' progress.

The school has well-established and clearly understood quality assurance processes. Self-evaluation activities draw on a broad evidence base, including detailed analysis of examination data, scrutiny of pupils' work, and discussions with pupils. In addition, leaders conduct lesson observations collaboratively with teachers. However, generally their evaluations of teaching and learning are overly generous. Following a recent review, senior leaders have refined these procedures to place a sharper focus on pupil progress and the impact of teaching on learning. As a result, leaders at all levels are being supported to develop greater precision in their evaluations to better inform improvement planning. However, this work remains at an early stage.

Middle leaders are clearly committed to the school and contribute positively to self-evaluation activities. Leaders at all levels demonstrate a secure understanding of end of key stage outcomes and other data. However, their ability to triangulate performance data with first-hand evidence from pupils' work and classroom practice is less well developed. As a result, their understanding of the specific strengths and areas for improvement is not precise enough.

The school improvement plan focuses appropriately on local and national priorities. Leaders have demonstrated improvements in a number of important areas, for example pupils' well-being, numeracy and the culture of reading. The school has made sound progress against the recommendations from the last inspection.

Governors are experienced, self-reflective and keen supporters of the school. They provide suitable challenge to leaders on certain aspects of their work such as pupil outcomes, attendance and finance. They are beginning to consider self-evaluation findings on teaching and learning to further their effectiveness as critical friends.

The headteacher, school business manager and governors monitor the school budget carefully, ensuring that school priorities are funded suitably. The school prioritises and

evaluates well the impact of grants, such as the pupil development grant, to support the progress and well-being of pupils from low-income households.

The school places a strong focus on reducing barriers to learning for those pupils eligible for free school meals and those from low-income households. This has had a positive impact on the attendance of these pupils and their outcomes at the end of Year 11 were above or broadly in line with similar schools over the last three years. The school works closely with a variety of local businesses and charities to ensure equitable access to school equipment and off-site activities.

### **Additional information**

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

A site management concern was raised during the inspection, and the local authority has been notified.

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 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 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 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, where appropriate
- visit a broad sample of lessons, 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 (<http://www.estyn.gov.wales/>)

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

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