

**A report on**

**Tarren School**

**Eastern Avenue  
Croeserw  
Cymmer  
Neath  
SA13 3PB**

**Date of focused visit: March 2026**

**by**

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

## About Tarren school

Name of provider	Tarren school
Proprietor status	Val's Community, a private limited company
Language of the provider	English
Type of school	Independent
Residential provision?	Yes
Number of pupils on roll	5
Pupils of statutory school age	4
Date of previous Estyn inspection (if applicable)	07/07/2025
Start date of visit	16/03/2026
Type of event	Announced

### School context:

Tarren School is an independent school for up to 20 pupils aged 8 to 18 years who have a diagnosis of autistic spectrum condition (ASC). The school is administered by Val's Community, a private limited company specialising in children's services, which operates two other independent schools in England.

The school operates across two sites in semi-rural areas: one in Neath, Port Talbot and the other on the outskirts of Swansea. Currently, there are five pupils on roll, with two based at the Tarren School site and three at the Mill Haven site. Since the core inspection, the Welsh Government has restricted admissions to the school. There is a linked children's home on the Tarren School site, although the school can also accept day pupils. All pupils are in the care of their local authority, with a minority placed by local authorities in Wales. All pupils have either an individual development plan (IDP) or an education, health and care plan (EHCP).

At the core inspection in March 2024, the school did not comply with the Independent School Standards (Wales) Regulations 2024. Across the 2024/25 academic year, Estyn supported the school through the follow-up process.

Following the core inspection, a new director of education was appointed in September 2024 to strengthen leadership capacity and provide additional support to the headteacher.

In July 2025, His Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) visited the school at the end of this process and found no evidence that the school did not meet the requirements of the Independent School Standards (Wales) Regulations 2024. Although, many of the improvements underpinning this evaluation were fragile and at a very early stage of development.

In August 2025, Welsh Government requested that Estyn undertake a focused visit in Spring 2026 to evaluate the progress the school in embedding and sustaining these improvements and to report on the extent to which the school meets Standard 1 of the Independent School Standards (Wales) Regulations 2024.

## Main findings

The headteacher has continued to develop a cohesive staff team who collaborate effectively in the best interests of their pupils. He has a clear vision, which staff understand and support. As a result, staff feel valued. Furthermore, the director of education is highly visible, providing regular support and challenge to the on-site leadership and teaching teams.

Leaders have continued to build upon approaches and systems that were newly established at Estyn's last visit. For example, approaches to lesson planning are structured and applied consistently across the school and pupils benefit from a consistent daily structure of activities and regulation time.

The wider organisation has recently invested significantly in the school premises and staffing. Developments to both school sites have led to an improved learning environment and a stronger sense of calm throughout the school. Leaders continue to invest in staff, for example by providing regular access to speech and language therapists, occupational therapists and a counsellor. These arrangements support staff to ensure suitable strategies are used to enable pupils to access education effectively.

Nearly all classrooms provide calm, supportive environments that are conducive to learning. Strong, nurturing professional relationships have been established between nearly all staff and pupils. Further, staff have consistent and appropriate expectations of pupils, who benefit from established classroom routines and whole-school approaches, such as those to help support emotional regulation. The curriculum is suitably adapted to meet the individual needs of pupils, with an appropriate balance between academic learning and the development of communication, social and life skills. As a result, pupils feel safe and are ready to learn. Throughout the day many pupils regulate themselves successfully and sustain engagement with learning activities for their duration.

Where appropriate, pupils are welcoming and communicate successfully with visitors. Their responses to questions are relevant, demonstrating effective listening, thinking and oracy skills. Where appropriate, pupils demonstrate their reading skills in lessons, either directly through reading suitable texts aloud, or via extracting information from worksheets or presentations on digital devices. In a few instances, pupils apply their numeracy and digital skills appropriately, for example when using digital platforms to complete tasks or interpret basic information. Planning for the development of these skills systematically across the curriculum is an ongoing school improvement priority.

In the best lessons, teachers model language effectively and use praise appropriately to encourage pupils to persevere. Through gentle and open questioning, teachers nudge

pupils in the right direction and give them time to think for themselves and respond when they are ready. For example, during a reading tasks teachers ask questions which encourage pupils to think about the context of the story, the characters depicted and the events being described.

Assessment information, both in the short term and over time, is used appropriately to inform planning and measure pupil progress. Staff collaborate regularly, including through daily team meetings, to review progress and adapt provision. However, some aspects of the school's assessment tools limit leaders' ability to demonstrate the progress that pupils have made. At the time of inspection, leaders were beginning to introduce formal accreditation opportunities for pupils.

Leaders continue to provide staff with access to a broad range of professional development opportunities to ensure that statutory requirements are met and to develop staff's understanding of a range of additional learning needs. However, the link between professional learning aligned to school improvement priorities and the development of staff's understanding of pedagogy remains in the early stages of development.

## **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**

On the basis of this inspection, there is no evidence that the school does not comply with this Standard.

### **The spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils**

On this visit, Estyn did not inspect this standard.

### **Welfare, health and safety of pupils**

On this visit, Estyn did not inspect this standard.

### **The suitability of proprietors and staff**

On this visit, Estyn did not inspect this standard.

### **Premises of and boarding accommodation at schools**

On this visit, Estyn did not inspect this standard.

### **The provision of information**

On this visit, Estyn did not inspect this standard.

### **The manner in which complaints are to be handled**

On this visit, Estyn did not inspect this standard.

## **Recommendation regarding registration**

On the basis of this visit, there is no evidence to indicate that the school does not meet the requirements of the Independent School Standards (Wales) Regulations 2024. Inspectors' judgements on this limited inspection should not prejudice the findings of a future full Section 163 inspection.

## Evidence base of the report

During an inspection, inspectors normally:

- 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:

Publications Section

Estyn

Anchor Court, Keen Road

Cardiff

CF24 5JW or by email to [publications@estyn.gov.wales](mailto:publications@estyn.gov.wales)

This and other Estyn publications are available on our website: <http://www.estyn.gov.wales/>

© Crown Copyright 2026: This report may be re used free of charge: (a) in any format or medium; and (b) may be translated by or on behalf of an education and/or training provider in respect of which this report relates into any language, in each case provided that it is re used and/or translated accurately and not used in a misleading context. The material must, in each case (including in the case of a translation) be acknowledged as Crown copyright and the title of the report specified.

Publication date: 21/05/2026