

**A report on**  
**Bridgend Youth Support Service**

**Civic Offices  
Angel Street  
Bridgend  
CF31 4WB**

**Date of inspection: February 2026**

**by**

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

**This report is available in Welsh**

## Context of provision

This inspection of youth work was carried out a few weeks before the inspection of local government education services in the authority. This enables the messages and evaluations from the youth work inspection to inform the inspection of wider local government education services, where relevant.

Bridgend County Council is situated in south Wales and has a population of about 147,539, including about 12,870 young people aged 10-17. Inspectors take account of a wide range of information about the local population when evaluating youth services. According to the provider, 1.5% of Bridgend's population are from an ethnic minority group. They have 8% of learners with additional learning needs (ALN), which is below the Welsh average and 24.6% eligible for free school meals, which is above the Welsh average. Bridgend Youth Support Service is part of the local authority's Education, Early Years and Young People directorate.

The service has several teams who offer a range of targeted projects for young people:

- Inspire2Achieve
- Inspire2Work
- Youth emotional health
- Youth homelessness
- Health and well-being
- Young people's rights and participation
- Digital outreach, and
- Youth outreach

In addition to this, the youth support service offers open access provision in centres and on the street across the local authority.

At the time of the inspection, the youth service has 52.5 full-time equivalent staff. The youth service in 2025-2026 has an annual budget of about £2.18 million, over 83% of which comes from grant funding.

## Overview

Across Bridgend, the Youth Support Service has a positive impact on the personal development, well-being and prospects of many young people, particularly those who are vulnerable or disengaged from formal education. Through high-quality informal and non-formal learning, young people develop resilience, improve behaviour and attendance, gain accreditation and acquire practical life and employability skills. Targeted groups, such as LGBTQ+ young people, those with additional learning needs (ALN) and young people at risk of homelessness or not in education, employment or training (NEET) benefit from tailored interventions that strengthen their confidence, independence and self-understanding.

Participation and youth voice are strong features of the service. Young people contribute meaningfully to decision-making through the Youth Council, peer education projects and the Young Inspectors initiative. They develop leadership, democratic understanding and communication skills, and influence local policy and service improvement. Inclusive practice is embedded well. Provision such as Club Dawel and flexible outreach approaches ensure that young people with complex needs engage safely and confidently alongside their peers. However, there are limited opportunities for young people to increase their knowledge of Welsh culture and develop and use their Welsh language skills.

The quality of youth work is consistently strong. Staff build trusting, respectful relationships and apply a well-embedded trauma-informed approach. Purposeful planning, effective multi-agency collaboration and intelligence-led outreach ensure timely and proportionate support. Preventative education, including work on healthy relationships, anti-racism and community safety, responds effectively to local need. Measurable outcomes include improved engagement in education, employment and training, completion of accredited awards and a reduction in anti-social behaviour linked to targeted diversion programmes. However, there is an increasing complexity of need presented by young people which is placing pressure on staff.

Leaders are committed to delivering corporate priorities. Governance arrangements provide appropriate challenge and oversight, and partnership working across statutory and third-sector agencies is highly effective. Performance information is used appropriately to monitor impact for sustained positive NEET outcomes compared with national averages. However, self-evaluation processes focus too heavily on describing activity and do not consistently analyse longer-term impact.

Overall, the service provides broad, inclusive and increasingly impactful youth work. It makes a strong contribution to young people's health and well-being, learning and progression, and to community cohesion across Bridgend.

What young people can expect from Bridgend Youth Support Service:

- A safe, welcoming space where you are treated with respect
- Youth workers who listen to you, take you seriously and keep things confidential (unless they are worried about your safety)
- Support with things that matter to you – including school, college, work, training or job applications
- Help to build your confidence, independence and life skills (like budgeting, cooking, travel training or managing emotions)
- Opportunities to gain accreditation and recognised qualifications
- Activities you can enjoy – including sport, art, music, digital media, cooking and group projects
- Support with your emotional health and well-being
- Advice and guidance about healthy relationships, staying safe, online safety and substance awareness
- Help to access other services if you need them (for example housing, mental health or employment support)
- Chances to have your say, influence decisions and get involved in projects like Youth Council or Young Inspectors
- An inclusive environment where everyone is welcome and differences are respected.

What you may not get at Bridgend Youth Support Service:

- Opportunities to regularly use and develop your Welsh language skills or learn about Welsh culture.

## Recommendations

We have made two recommendations to help the service continue to improve:

- R1      Increase the visibility of Welsh language and culture and embed opportunities for young people to use their Welsh language skills
- R2      Sharpen the service’s self-evaluation processes to focus more clearly on impact and areas for development

## What happens next

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

## Main evaluation

### **How does youth work help young people achieve their potential?**

Many young people across Bridgend develop in a variety of ways through interaction with the Youth Support Service. Often, these young people are the most vulnerable in their communities who may not succeed in conventional education settings. Through informal education, they discover new interests and skills, develop resilience, and improve their general health and well-being.

#### **Educative**

Young people improve their sense of self-worth, behaviour and school attendance through one-to-one personalised support. Others prepare for work, learn to live independently or develop better relationships with their families and other adults. They learn essential skills such as how to control anger and manage difficult situations.

Young people learn useful skills such as cooking, budgeting, hairdressing and barbering. This academic year, to date, 154 young people have gained a range of accreditation units for their work, covering both practical and personal development courses at entry level 3 to level 1.

A wide range of young people, learn about sexual health and healthy relationships. Both young women and young men increase their understanding of how to interact with one another and to recognise signs of coercion and abuse. As a result of the period dignity project, young women learn not to be ashamed of their bodies and young men and boys gain an understanding of period products which are freely available in all community venues, many schools, and by subscription.

LGBTQ+ young people attending the Young People of Pride (YPOP) group improve their self-esteem, understand themselves within the wider community and become proud of who they are. They learn about the Pride movement and through a history-focused mural project they learn about the miner's strike. They explore how gay and lesbian groups stood in solidarity with the miners and their families and became understood, respected, and integrated into traditional Welsh mining communities.

The young editors group develop their digital skills to benefit themselves and other young people. They help to shape the Youth Support Services' website and social media content. They share their ideas, increase their confidence and their chances of gaining employment in the creative industries. Through a photography project, 'Love where you live', they demonstrate their artistic and technical skills whilst also celebrating their surroundings and their communities. They widen their horizons, increase their knowledge and develop

their digital talents by visiting a similar project in Cardiff. Their contributions have a real impact on the online presence of the Youth Support Service in Bridgend and, as a consequence, on a wider range of young people across the county.

Young people from the youth council, develop their understanding of the democratic process and of national and local government. They learn team building skills and about children and young people's rights. They have developed a range of useful educational materials, including a sophisticated democracy board game, Votopia, which they use in visits to schools and youth provision across the county to help educate other young people about democracy and civic governance.

Through the peer-to-peer education project, 'Your Voice; Your Vote', they learn how the policies of political parties will affect young people and how to encourage others to make their voices heard through voting.

A new cohort of young people are currently developing their skills in these areas and hope to build on the success of previous projects.

### **Expressive**

Many young people take part in expressive activities in open access centres, such as art and photography projects. At catwalk evenings, they promote awareness of sustainability through modelling clothes made using recycled materials.

Other young people channel their physical energy through outdoor activities such as surfing, paddle boarding, assault courses or joining in tag rugby sessions during the Tackle after Dark sessions. In tag rugby sessions, young people challenge their own perceptions of adults in authority by playing with community police officers.

Young people with complex needs express themselves through building blocks therapy whilst also building teamwork and social skills. Others enjoy singing and art craft therapy as a way of releasing tensions and expressing emotions. These young people express their feelings and their personal situations in conversations with the youth workers.

Most importantly, very vulnerable and marginalised young people gain confidence and begin to understand who they are. Through interaction with their youth workers, they begin to negotiate the process of managing their emotions, fears and difficult situations they may find themselves in.

## **Participative**

Young people who take part in youth council activities contribute to the work of Bridgend council. They represent the views of other young people. They analyse issues raised in the Your Voice consultation and take these concerns to council members and officers.

Bridgend council has acted on many of these issues and fed back what they have done to young people. Young people begin to understand the difficulties of making decisions at council level and why officers and councillors often have to make hard choices. A few aspire to become involved in politics themselves.

Young people in the youth council also instigate a variety of fund-raising activities, raising money for charities such as youth homelessness. During a very successful back to school event they initiated, they set up a stall to recycle school uniforms.

Young people attending the Pencoed open access youth centre, take part in a litter pick, following incidents of anti-social behaviour in the area. They publicly demonstrate how they contribute to the community and are rewarded by a cash donation from the local Mayor to buy equipment for the centre.

Young people in the young inspectors' project learn how to inspect youth services. They develop a framework and methodology and demonstrate extremely high-level skills, including communication and judgement when carrying out the work. Together with the lead worker they produce an incisive report that goes right to the core of important issues for the service. This report has been valued and acted upon by both statutory and voluntary providers of youth services in the county. The young inspectors have carried out a valuable service to benefit other young people.

## **Inclusive**

Young people are friendly and welcoming and there is a tolerant atmosphere within spaces and activities. Young people from different groups and projects often mingle together in open access youth provision. In the Evergreen Hall youth centre in Bridgend, young people from different groups, including older young people taking part in job seeking activities, mix easily with one another in a casual and welcoming atmosphere. Young people from Clwb Dawel, who generally prefer to be in quiet places, can mix with other groups of young people using the centre. Young people show high levels of understanding of the needs of others and sensitivity to their rights and needs.

The youth council is inclusive and open to young people with a range of backgrounds and abilities who can effectively represent the views of a wide range of young people.

Young people who might be in danger of offending or taking part in anti-social behaviour learn consequences of actions by joining various activities, such as the fire fighter for a day

project with south Wales fire service. They engage well in the activities, and this has a demonstrable impact on their behaviour in school and in the community.

Young people who are socially isolated and reclusive become more independent, and more confident to use public transport and other public services available to them.

## **Empowering**

The young people who receive one-to-one support begin to establish a better understanding of their situations, their emotions and how to keep themselves safe. They begin to establish a more stable and independent lifestyle.

Young people are enthusiastic and enjoy their interactions with the Youth Support Service. They acquire vital skills for life but also have fun. A few go on to be advocates for other young people and several young people aim to become youth workers themselves to 'give back' and share with other young people the positive experiences they have gained from youth work.

Through youth work in Bridgend, young people are empowered to be the best they can be. They develop the ability to make positive choices and gain in confidence to participate in school or to find work. They come to understand themselves and how to negotiate the world around them.

Through a project provided by Menter Iath, young people learn about Welsh language and culture, but generally young people do not develop their Welsh language skills to help them with future employment or to take part in activities through the medium of Welsh.

## **What young people can expect from youth work provision**

The quality of youth work across the service is consistently strong. Youth workers are highly skilled, passionate and committed to placing young people at the centre of their practice. They establish trusting and respectful relationships and create safe, inclusive spaces where young people feel listened to and valued.

The trauma-informed approach is embedded securely. Youth workers demonstrate a strong understanding of the diverse experiences and challenges that young people may face, including anxiety, breakdown in family relationships and adverse childhood experiences. Tiered triage processes, including access to clinical psychology and speech and language support at Tier 3, ensure that support is proportionate and increasingly specialised due to the skills and approach of youth workers. As a result, young people engage well and develop resilience, self-confidence and independence.

Youth workers plan purposeful and stimulating activities across a broad curriculum. Youth Work is facilitated through sports, arts and crafts, cooking, music, hair and beauty,

informal and formal learning and group discussion. Engagement levels are positive and increasing across provision, with 8,648 additional engagements in 2024-2025, demonstrating that activities meet genuine community needs.

Experiential learning is a strength of the offer. Within the Inspire2Work programme, young people benefit from structured CV coaching and job application workshops delivered through a multi-agency approach. They receive practical support to develop their CV, search for employment, access benefits and attend education or training. Reflective workbooks used across the youth emotional health team supports young people to recognise and articulate their progress. Travel training approaches remove practical barriers to participation.

Youth workers demonstrate high expectations for young people with ALN. They make flexible adaptations to ensure meaningful inclusion, including one-to-one and two-to-one support, use of quiet spaces, outreach youth work, health and well-being groups, hybrid youth council delivery and specialist provision such as Club Dawel. These approaches ensure that young people who might otherwise struggle to engage participate confidently and safely.

Outreach and detached youth work is intelligence-led and adaptive. Staff use shared data on aspects like housing, attendance and police tracker intelligence to identify emerging need and respond quickly.

Preventative education is embedded effectively within universal provision. Mobile youth outreach services addressing healthy relationships, reflects a timely and co-ordinated response to locally identified need, such as domestic abuse concerns. Staff show flexibility in removing barriers to engagement, delivering interventions in schools, homes, libraries and community venues where appropriate.

The universal offer is thoughtfully planned and responsive to the needs of young people. A broad range of open access provision is delivered across multiple venues, alongside Inspire programmes in community settings, the Youth Council, Youth Outreach and the Mobile Youth Centre, ensuring comprehensive geographical coverage. Termly planning is informed by young people's feedback and strengthened through shared digital planning systems and dedicated development days. Engagement strategies are proactive and well targeted. Roadshows for Years 7 to 9, attendance at parents' evenings and participation in Wellfest events raise awareness of the service and support appropriate referrals. Inclusive access is promoted effectively, for example through engagement opportunities for electively home-educated learners via Club Dawel and coffee mornings for parents, enhancing understanding of and access to the youth offer.

Support for vulnerable young people is purposeful, well targeted and responsive to emerging risk. Effective information-sharing arrangements enable early identification of young people, including siblings and those from families receiving support from social services or assessed as lower risk within youth justice. Staff respond proactively by referring these young people into appropriate services, helping to reduce the likelihood of escalation.

Structured and highly effective interventions are delivered through outreach and detached provision, providing focused support for young people with ALN, LGBTQ+ young people, those at risk of homelessness, young people experiencing anxiety, young people at risk of becoming NEET, and those vulnerable to risk-taking or anti-social behaviour. Specialist programmes, including YPOP and a dedicated health and wellbeing group, offer targeted and timely support that responds directly to identified need.

There is measurable impact with partners reporting improved job applications, progression into education, employment and training, completion of accredited and non-accredited awards, increased resilience and self-reliance. There has been a notable reduction in anti-social behaviour linked to Caerau Kicks and Tackle After Dark and strengthened community engagement through the youth council and community events.

### **Spotlight: Changing the Game: Early Intervention Through Youth Diversion**

Tackle after Dark provide free, targeted youth diversion for young people aged 10–17 in areas of high need. The initiative aims to reduce anti-social behaviour and support positive personal development through structured, preventative engagement.

Delivered in partnership with South Wales Police, Bridgend County Borough Council, and Ospreys in the Community, the programmes offer weekly and rugby sessions, mobile youth provision, and mentoring support. Activities are delivered in accessible community settings, including a repurposed underground car park, enabling engagement with young people who may not access more traditional provision.

Alongside sport-based activities, young people participate in educational workshops covering healthy relationships, online safety and substance awareness. These are complemented by coaching and informal guidance designed to strengthen self-esteem, resilience and decision-making skills.

The initiatives forge positive relationships with trusted adults, successfully engage hard-to-reach young people, and provide meaningful early intervention. As a result, they contribute to improved well-being, increased pro-social behaviour and strengthened community safety and cohesion.

Multi-agency working is strong and highly effective. Close collaboration across partners ensures timely and coordinated support. Joint duty rotas and partnership panels for young people leaving court or at risk of becoming NEET exemplify co-ordinated planning. Young people benefit from a highly effective and extensive range of impartial guidance, delivered through strong and well-established partnerships with a collective vision that provide comprehensive and responsive support.

Preventative equalities work is embedded well across partnerships. Hate crime awareness initiatives, drug awareness and anti-racism projects delivered collaboratively with the community safety team demonstrate coordinated and proactive responses to discrimination and community tensions. Projects such as 'Joining the Dots' exemplify coordinated inclusion work, supporting young people at risk of permanent exclusion and widening suitable provision pathways.

Overall, young people can expect high-quality, relational youth work delivered by skilled practitioners who respond flexibly and proactively to need. Provision is broad, inclusive and increasingly impactful, with clear evidence that it contributes positively to young people's health and well-being, learning and future opportunities.

### **Leading and improving**

The Bridgend Youth Support Service manager and the team of staff demonstrate a strong commitment to delivering high-quality support to young people. Senior leaders, including the chief executive, actively support the service and recognise its strategic importance. The cabinet member provides appropriate support and constructive challenge, and there is effective scrutiny through the overview and scrutiny committee.

Robust performance management arrangements are in place to both support and hold the service to account. The Youth Support Service manager provides regular performance reports to the director, ensuring clear lines of accountability. The service is well embedded within the Early Years, Education and Young People Strategic Plan and is closely aligned with the corporate plan, reflecting its contribution to wider organisational priorities.

The Youth Support Service manager and senior youth workers produce a comprehensive annual self-evaluation. The service collects a broad range of information about its work and demonstrates a clear commitment to reflecting on practice. However, the self-evaluation report tends to emphasise descriptions of activity rather than consistently analysing the measurable impact of provision over time. In a few areas, evidence of immediate outcomes is provided, but longer-term progress and sustained impact are not always fully explored.

The Youth Support Service makes effective use of a wide range of suitable venues across the local authority, alongside its mobile youth bus, to deliver provision. Evergreen Hall

Youth Centre in Bridgend offers a high-quality and welcoming space for young people. The venue is used by multiple partners, often working collaboratively with the service, to provide a broad range of open access and targeted support. The mobile youth bus enhances flexibility and responsiveness, enabling the service to extend its reach and deliver provision in communities across the authority where need is identified.

Bridgend Youth Support Service have an effective digital offer that includes a website and a range of social media accounts. The content is created by the young editors group and receives a high level of engagement. The website provides clear information about the services on offer and incorporates online surveys which is followed up with 'You Said, We Did' feedback. Young people can access further support online support through the chatbot function on the website. In addition, a youth led Padlet has recently been launched for young people to interact with.

Long term NEET outcomes for Year 11 to Year 13 continue to perform better than the Wales average in most years, demonstrating sustained impact. A seven-year analysis shows Bridgend outperforming national NEET percentages across Year 11 to Year 13, indicating strong early identification and support. Governance structures make regular use of data to monitor outcomes, such as NEET tracking, emotional health data and homelessness indicators, however heavy reliance on grant funding poses risks to long term sustainability.

There is strong collaborative working across education teams, characterised by effective multi-agency engagement, co-production and joint delivery of services. Teams work together purposefully to align support and respond to the needs of young people. The Youth Support Service and the youth justice service hold joint development days, providing valuable opportunities for staff to share expertise, reflect on practice and learn from one another. The Youth Support Service is well integrated within the department and is regarded as an important strategic and operational partner across a range of service delivery areas.

The Youth Support Service works closely with third sector partners across the authority with service level agreements in place. One partnership, Bridgend Youth Matters (BYM) is an arrangement between the Youth Support Service and the third sector. BYM work strategically to map provision across the authority to avoid duplication. Through a joint initiative with BYM, the young inspectors project, led by young people, produced a comprehensive inspection report on youth provision. The findings of this report are being used to help with improvement planning across the partnership.

### **Spotlight: Evergreen Hall: Partnership in Action**

Bridgend Youth Support Service's Evergreen Youth Hub provides a five-day-a-week, open-access provision for young people aged up to 25. The hub offers a safe, welcoming environment where young people can access a broad range of integrated support services in one accessible location.

The co-located model brings together Bridgend Youth Support Service with key partners including Llamau, CAMHS, Jobcentre Plus, the NHS, the Youth Justice Team and BCBC Housing. This coordinated approach reduces barriers to engagement, strengthens early intervention and enables young people to access support for housing, mental health, employment and well-being in a single, trusted setting.

The recent integration of Jobcentre Plus within the Inspire 2 Work+ work clubs has improved attendance and engagement. Young people report feeling more comfortable attending appointments at the hub, resulting in more effective support planning and clearer progression routes into employment and training.

Partnership working also enables rapid, responsive intervention. In one instance, coordinated on-site action secured safe accommodation within an hour for a young person experiencing street homelessness.

Overall, the youth hub at Evergreen Hall demonstrates how co-location, strong partnership working and a youth-centred approach can improve engagement, strengthen pathways and deliver tangible outcomes for vulnerable young people across Bridgend.

Staff benefit from regular supervision and routine appraisals, and they value the supportive approach taken by managers, particularly the strong emphasis on well-being. These processes help to identify professional learning needs and monitor performance effectively. Staff also work collaboratively together, offering peer support and sharing good practice in managing casework. However, the increasing complexity, intensity and emotional demands of working with young people with multiple and often acute needs are placing pressure on staff. Although access to more specialist supervision is being piloted where staff are working with young people with more complex needs, there is not yet consistent understanding across staff how they might access more structured and specialist supervision to support their professional resilience, reflective practice and safe decision-making.

Staff at all levels have access to a broad range of professional learning opportunities, many of which are also extended to colleagues in the third sector, strengthening practice across the wider youth work network. Leaders are responsive to emerging training needs; for example, bereavement training has been provided to enhance staff confidence and competence in supporting young people experiencing loss. Staff are encouraged to

undertake relevant qualifications and are offered secondment opportunities to develop leadership skills. These approaches contribute positively to workforce development and support effective succession planning within the Bridgend Youth Support Service.

Leaders promote a positive safeguarding culture across the service, ensuring that appropriate reporting and recording procedures are consistently followed. Staff are suitably trained, and safeguarding documentation is comprehensive and up to date. The service works effectively with the education engagement team manager in addressing safeguarding and professional concerns. The education engagement team manager provides weekly safeguarding updates to managers across the department, strengthening oversight and communication. All staff hold the appropriate level of DBS in line with corporate policy and complete mandatory Prevent training. The Youth Support Service plays a key role in providing wraparound support for young people referred through Prevent, contributing to multi-agency safeguarding arrangements and helping to reduce risk.

## Evidence base of the report

Before the inspection, inspectors:

- analyse the outcomes from the young people questionnaires and consider the views of young people, staff, and partners where appropriate through their questionnaire responses

During the inspection, inspectors normally:

- meet the principal youth officer/chief executive, board of trustees, senior and middle managers, individual youth work staff, and volunteers to evaluate the impact of the provider's work
- meet young people to discuss their provision, to listen to them and to gain their views about various aspects of their provider
- visit a broad sample of youth work sessions, including youth clubs, street based detached work and school-based activities across the provision, where appropriate
- observe and speak to young people during provision sessions
- look closely at the provider's self-evaluation processes
- scrutinise a wide range of provider documents, including information on learner participation and outcomes, staff meeting records, information on learners' well-being, including the safeguarding of young people, and records of staff training and professional learning

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 young people...*’ or ‘*very few young people...*’. 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 provider and from the Estyn website (<http://www.estyn.gov.wales/>)

The report was produced in accordance with the Learning and Skills Act (2000).

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: [www.estyn.gov.wales](http://www.estyn.gov.wales)

**This document has been translated by Trosol (English to Welsh).**

© 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: 08/05/2026