

A report on the further education provision at

Grŵp NPTC Group

**Dwr y Felin Road
Neath
SA10 7RF**

Date of inspection: March 2026

by

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

This report is also available in Welsh

About Grŵp NPTC Group

Name of provider	Grŵp NPTC Group
Details of the college's further education provision/programmes (i.e. more on the character of the college and its specialisms)	<p>NPTC Group of Colleges was established in 2013 following the merger of Neath Port Talbot College and Coleg Powys. It is a large further education college with around 4,103 further education learner enrolments in the current academic year (2025-2026). The college's total further education funding allocation for 2025-2026 is approximately £34m. The college delivers a wide range of vocational and general education courses across different levels and a large geographical area covering Neath Port Talbot and Powys. It operates across campuses in Neath, Margam, Brecon, Newtown, Pontardawe, Swansea, Llandarcy and Maesteg. In Brecon, recent developments include new town centre provision at The CWTCH and Y Gaer, and the relocation of creative arts, digital industries and professional services to a new campus at Watton Mount in 2025. The college serves communities with diverse socio-economic characteristics. Neath Port Talbot includes areas of relative deprivation, while Powys is a predominantly rural authority with a dispersed population. The college's curriculum offer reflects these differing local contexts and supports learners to progress to further learning, higher education, and employment.</p>
Any significant changes since the last inspection, e.g. changes in name of provider or campuses, merger, amalgamation or change in ownership	<p>In Brecon, there has been a strategic move into the town centre. The CWTCH opened in 2020 followed by Y Gaer in 2023. In September 2025, students studying Creative Arts and Digital Industries (CADI)</p>

	and Professional Services moved to the new campus at Watton Mount.
Number of learners on full time courses of further education	3361
Number of learners on part-time courses of further education	742
Number of learners with Individual Development Plans (IDPs)	239
Number of learners who are care experienced	82 full-time learners; 18 part-time learners
Number of learners who are young carers	98
Number of learners who speak Welsh at home or identify as Welsh speakers?	300 full-time learners (8.93%); 61 part-time learners (8.22%)
Number of learners from ethnic minority backgrounds	229 full-time learners (6.81%); 43 part-time learners (5.8%)
Number of learners from the most deprived areas (top two quintiles in the Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation)	1760 full-time learners (52.4%); 353 part-time learners (47.6%)
Number of learners claiming Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA)	1006 full-time learners (29.93%)
Number of full-time equivalent (FTE) staff directly employed by the college	734
Ownership of the college (stand-alone further education corporation or wholly-owned subsidiary of a higher education institution)	Stand-alone FE corporation
Date of CEO/Principal appointment	CEO appointed March 2004
Date of previous Estyn inspection (if applicable)	01/02/2020

Summary

Across the college, most learners are engaged, motivated and behave respectfully, contributing to calm and purposeful learning environments. Most learners develop secure knowledge and understanding and demonstrate strong practical skills. They apply these effectively in realistic and industry-relevant contexts and make sound progress towards completing their programmes. However, a few learners do not always have a clear understanding of their progress.

Many teachers deliver engaging and well-structured sessions and use their subject expertise appropriately to support learning. In the most effective practice, teachers use practical activities, demonstrations and digital tools to support learners' understanding. However, in a minority of sessions, questioning does not consistently develop learners' higher-order thinking skills, and in a few cases, teaching does not provide sufficient stretch and challenge, particularly for more able learners. Many teachers provide helpful verbal feedback that enables learners to improve their work, though the quality of recorded feedback is too variable. Teachers do not consistently provide sufficient opportunities for learners to develop their literacy, numeracy and Welsh language skills.

The college provides a welcoming and inclusive environment where most learners feel safe and supported. Strong relationships between staff and learners contribute to positive attitudes and a sense of belonging. Learners benefit from a wide range of support services and effective partnership working which helps to coordinate support, respond to learners' needs, and enhance learning opportunities. However, attendance is too variable. The college does not distinguish clearly enough between learners who have additional learning needs (ALN)¹ and therefore require an individual development plan, and those whose needs can be met through general provision.

Leaders provide a clear strategic direction and communicate effectively with staff. Many staff engage positively in professional learning and value the opportunities available to them. Leaders work collaboratively with a wide range of partners to respond to local and regional priorities and to enhance learning opportunities for learners. Governance arrangements are sound, and governors use a suitable range of information to support and challenge leaders. However, the impact of self-evaluation and improvement planning is too variable, and leaders do not ensure sufficient consistency in how effectively improvement priorities are implemented and monitored.

¹ Welsh Government (2018), Additional Learning Needs and Education Tribunal (Wales) Act 2018.

Recommendations

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

- R1 Revise the approach to identifying and meeting the needs of learners with ALN and provide clear guidance for staff on strategies to support these learners
- R2 Improve the effectiveness of teaching, particularly the use of questioning to extend learners' thinking, and ensure appropriate stretch and challenge for all learners
- R3 Strengthen self-evaluation and improvement planning to ensure that leaders identify key weaknesses accurately and take effective action to secure improvement across the college
- R4 Increase the meaningful use of Welsh language across the curriculum so that more learners use and develop their Welsh language skills and understand its relevance to learning, progression, and employment

What happens next

In accordance with section 80 of the Learning and Skills Act 2000 or section 62 of the Tertiary Education and Research (Wales) Act 2022, the provider will prepare and publish a written statement of their action plan in light of the inspection report.

Main findings

Teaching and learning

Nearly all learners across the college are engaged, motivated and demonstrate enjoyment in their learning. Learner behaviour across sessions is consistently respectful and professional, contributing to calm and purposeful learning environments. Learners are confident to ask questions, contribute to discussions and support their peers, creating a strong collaborative learning culture where learners share ideas and work together to solve problems. Most learners work effectively both independently and collaboratively within sessions. They manage their time well and progress with minimal support, particularly in practical activities and independent study.

Most learners develop secure knowledge and understanding and demonstrate strong practical skills in vocational areas. They benefit from a wide range of industry-relevant learning experiences, which enable them to apply their knowledge in realistic settings and make sound progress towards completing their programmes of learning. In engineering and construction sessions, learners demonstrate precision in machining and practical tasks, while in digital and IT provision, learners independently design websites, develop games and produce programming solutions. Many learners use technical and subject-specific terminology accurately and confidently. They connect theory with real-world application, such as sports learners applying sports psychology concepts to elite performance scenarios. Most learners recall prior learning and build on this effectively, developing their skills incrementally over time.

Many learners have a clear understanding of their targets, progress, and progression routes. A-level learners articulate their plans for progression to higher education and know whether they are on track to achieve their aspirational grade targets. In vocational areas, learners understand their targets and projected grade profiles and how their current learning links to future employment, apprenticeships or further study. They identify their progress through a range of tracking systems and digital platforms. However, a few learners do not have a clear understanding of the progress they are making.

Across the college, teachers do not have consistent access to information on individual learning support needs and how they should be met. In a minority of sessions, strategies to apply reasonable adjustments to meet individual learning support needs or to meet the needs of learners with ALN are not applied effectively. As a result, a few of these learners don't make the progress they are capable of towards their learning goals.

In many sessions, teachers give constructive, timely feedback that supports learners to understand what they need to do to improve their work. Feedback is strongest where teachers provide regular verbal feedback to individual learners which helps them to

quickly refine their work. In a few sessions, teachers facilitate beneficial peer-to-peer feedback where learners support each other to improve their skills. In many cases, learners benefit from detailed recorded feedback which they can revisit to support improvement. However, in a few cases, recorded feedback lacks sufficient depth to support learner development.

Many teachers deliver engaging, well-structured sessions. They know their learners well and create inclusive environments where learners feel confident to participate. Many teachers use their subject expertise well to contextualise learning to support learners to apply their skills in the context of their chosen industry, and to prepare them for progression opportunities. In the most successful sessions, teachers use practical activities, demonstrations and digital tools to stimulate learning. These include expert demonstrations in land-based provision and the use of digital platforms and gamification to support engagement. Many teachers across the college provide rich and varied opportunities for learners to develop creativity through a range of collaborative approaches, enabling learners with little prior experience to develop new skills. For example, photography learners capture images of live band rehearsals, which music learners later manipulate and incorporate into showreels to demonstrate their progress.

Where questioning is strong, teachers probe learners' understanding and allow appropriate thinking time. However, questioning often lacks depth and is not sufficiently targeted, resulting in learners remaining passive and limiting the development of higher-order thinking. In a few cases, teachers' strategies for stretching and challenging learners are not embedded well enough, particularly for more able learners. In these cases, work does not extend learners beyond basic task completion.

Overall, many learners demonstrate strong digital skills. They make effective use of digital platforms to support their learning and develop useful digital competencies relevant to their vocational areas. Many learners develop beneficial literacy skills within sessions, such as highlighting key information and using structured reading techniques to strengthen their confidence and comprehension. For example, in cabin crew sessions, learners routinely highlight key information and accurately use technical vocabulary in discussions. A few learners, however, continue to produce work with basic spelling errors that are not corrected consistently. In a few vocational sessions, learners develop their numeracy skills well. For example, sports and public services learners use coordinates to plan route cards confidently, and in sustainable fashion, learners apply radius and circumference to solve design problems. However, learners do not routinely develop their literacy and numeracy skills outside of dedicated skills sessions, and a minority are unclear about their progress or expectations in these areas.

Very few Welsh speaking learners across the college have the opportunity to engage in significant aspects of their learning through the medium of Welsh. In learning areas where

Welsh language has been identified as a priority, for example, health and social care, childcare, creative industries and sport, an increasing number of learners complete elements of their programmes using a small amount of Welsh. In these areas, the college has focused its efforts on training and supporting staff and encouraging learners to use Welsh as the language of learning. However, across provision, too few sessions include sufficient reference to the language, culture, and context of Wales.

The latest verified learner outcomes are the Medr consistent performance measures (CPM) for 2024/25, although contextualised data was unavailable at the time of the inspection.

Outcomes for learners on vocational programmes have generally improved across most levels over the last three years. Outcomes are strongest at Levels 2 and 3 and have generally been in line with, or above, national averages. Outcomes for learners on Access to HE programmes have declined to be well below national averages.

The proportion of learners passing and achieving higher grades in three or more A-levels over two years has improved significantly over the period and is now in line with national averages. Retention of learners from AS to A2 has also shown improvement, although this remains slightly below the national average.

The overall pass rate for learners undertaking the Skills Challenge Certificate has improved significantly and is now slightly above the national average.

To improve teaching and learning further, the college should focus on:

- Improving the consistency and effectiveness of questioning to ensure all learners are engaged and supported to develop deeper understanding and higher-order thinking skills
- Strengthening the use of stretch and challenge in lessons, particularly for more able learners, through better differentiation and extension activities
- Improving the quality and consistency of written feedback so that it provides clear, actionable guidance for learners to improve
- Ensuring teaching is consistently adapted to meet the needs of learners with additional learning needs
- Embedding the development of literacy and numeracy skills more systematically across all areas of provision, beyond discrete skills sessions
- Increasing opportunities for learners to develop and use Welsh language skills meaningfully across the curriculum
- Improving outcomes for learners on Access to HE programmes and learners with ALN

Well-being, care, support and guidance

The college provides a welcoming and inclusive environment, supported by a wide range of lively communal spaces and quieter areas, dedicated study zones, well-equipped libraries, and access to information and resources, all of which are valued by learners.

Across the college, relationships between staff and learners are strong and respectful and as a result most learners behave well and participate confidently in learning and wider college life. Consistent expectations around conduct and responsibilities enable learners to develop a sense of belonging and mutual respect. As a result, many learners show understanding of the needs of others and develop reflective skills.

Many learners develop confidence and self-esteem through their learning and wider enrichment opportunities, for example through participation in sporting tournaments and volunteering abroad. These real-life experiences enable the development of confidence, resilience and independence. Most learners demonstrate positive attitudes and professional behaviours in practical settings, which support their readiness for employment and future progression.

The opportunities for the collective learner voice to be heard and to influence leaders are a strength and contribute to a culture where learners are active members of the college community. Elected student representatives participate in a college Senedd and implement initiatives such as promoting different cultures and selecting resources for libraries on the experiences of people with protected characteristics.

The college provides targeted support for learners who may face challenges in accessing further education, including home-educated learners, those with refugee or asylum seeker status, care-experienced young people, and young carers. This support includes specialist well-being services and tailored financial assistance. Dedicated transition and review officers work closely with schools across Neath Port Talbot and Powys to support learners with ALN as they prepare for their next steps. School teachers also support pupils and college learners to work together on projects. For example, they work together to plan and deliver a performing arts production for a public audience at Theatr Brycheiniog.

The college provides a valuable range of support services to help learners overcome barriers to learning. These include academic and well-being support such as loaning digital devices, providing safe spaces, and access to mental health and counselling services. Where appropriate, hybrid teaching supports continuity of learning for learners facing challenges related to transport or health. Learners also benefit from access to external services that support their wider needs.

Spotlight: A cohesive, learner-centred approach to partnership working

The college has developed a highly collaborative, learner-centred well-being culture through strong internal and external partnerships. Cross-college teams work closely with local authorities, health services, the police and third sector organisations to coordinate timely and effective support, including robust admissions processes, responding to mental health needs and identifying learners at risk. Close working between tutors, learner support teams, human resources, estates and professional learning teams ensures a consistent and proactive response to emerging needs. For example, library services provide timely information and guidance that align with the tutorial programme. This effective partnership working ensures that support is well coordinated, responsive and preventative, helping learners feel safe, valued and well supported.

Learners value the support provided by the college and feel they benefit from timely and personalised interventions. For example, temporary reduced timetables are used well when learners are experiencing difficult periods in their lives, or to enable them to balance engagement in elite sports with their studies.

Attendance across the college is variable and a minority of learners do not attend consistently enough. As a result, learners' engagement in learning and participation in the wider support and opportunities offered by the college are reduced. Leaders have an increased focus on recording in-class attendance and use this data effectively to identify learners at risk, however, the impact of these new arrangements on attendance remains a focus for development. Punctuality is generally appropriate, although a few learners arrive late to sessions, affecting the smooth start of learning and readiness to engage.

The college has established procedures and staffing structures to address a wide range of learning needs. However, the college does not clearly distinguish between learners assessed as having ALN and therefore requiring an individual development plan (IDP), and those whose needs can be met through the provision made generally available. This hinders the college's ability to effectively evaluate how well the needs of individual learners and groups are being understood and met.

The college provides a wide range of advice and guidance, with clear progression pathways and exposure to career opportunities helping many learners develop ambitions and focus on future goals. Guest speakers and industry visits inspire learners and strengthen engagement.

Overall, safeguarding practices at the college are strong, systematic and well embedded. Clear governance and reporting structures, alongside a well-established safeguarding strategy, ensure effective oversight and monitoring. Strong partnership working enhances intelligence sharing and preventative approaches, and initiatives such as a 'Cuppa with a

Copper' engage learners effectively in proactive work. Safeguarding information is highly visible across campuses, and most learners know how to access support and report concerns. The college continues to strengthen campus security and is implementing a risk-based approach to controlled access, contributing to a safe learning environment.

To improve further, the college should focus on:

- Improving how it distinguishes between learners with ALN and those whose needs can be met through general provision
- Strengthening how the college evaluates how well it meets the needs of learners with ALN
- Improving attendance

Leading and improving

The chief executive officer (CEO) has established a clear vision and direction for the college that is supported by effective governance and strong partnerships. They are supported well by the principal and vice principals who have clearly defined roles and responsibilities. As a team, they have created a positive culture of communication and engagement with staff to share and discuss a wide range of information. As a result of this engagement, leaders have adopted an alternative system for initial and diagnostic assessment of literacy and numeracy. In addition, staff performance management arrangements have been updated to strengthen links with individual professional learning activities.

Senior leaders provide a clear strategic direction for the college, supported by well-structured plans that align suitably with national priorities and local needs. These plans set out appropriate priorities and are understood by staff across the organisation. Leaders ensure that roles and responsibilities are clearly defined, which helps support accountability at all levels. Leaders have established effective channels of communication, including regular CEO briefings, updates and opportunities for two-way dialogue between senior leaders and other staff. As a result, many staff feel well informed about college priorities and understand how their work contributes to these.

Overall, governance arrangements are effective. Governors demonstrate a sound understanding of the college's performance and priorities. They use a broad range of information, including performance data and external benchmarking, to scrutinise outcomes and support strategic decision-making. Established processes enable governors to engage directly with curriculum leaders and contribute to target-setting and improvement planning. This provides appropriate challenge and support to senior and middle leaders. Senior members of the board recognise a need to strengthen the range of

expertise within the governing body further, particularly in relation to finance and curriculum matters in light of major development plans for estates and provision.

Spotlight: Partnership working to enhance learning opportunities and community engagement

Leaders have developed productive partnerships with a wide range of stakeholders, including schools, local authorities, employers and external agencies. These partnerships support the college's responsiveness to local and regional priorities and help to inform curriculum planning. In a few areas, collaborative initiatives, such as employer engagement activities and joint provision, enhance learners' experiences and provide valuable progression opportunities. For example, provision and facilities at the Llandarcy Academy of Sport and the Hafren Theatre in Newtown provide high quality learning environments and contribute positively to the college's role within its communities. Recent developments in Brecon are enhancing learning opportunities for the local community as well as supporting the regeneration of the town centre.

Leaders have a broadly accurate understanding of the college's strengths and areas for improvement and have taken appropriate steps to address previous recommendations. The college has established suitable self-evaluation processes with leaders and managers drawing on a range of first-hand evidence, performance data, and benchmarking information to evaluate provision. Many staff engage positively in review activities, including course reviews and quality improvement planning. In several key areas, these processes lead to beneficial improvements. For example, in aspects of teaching practice and learner support the college's 'insights programme' provides practitioners with structured opportunities to review and reflect on their teaching practice through observation, peer support and professional discussion. However, the overall impact of self-evaluation and improvement planning is too variable across the college. Leaders do not ensure sufficient consistency in how effectively improvement priorities are implemented and monitored. In particular, tracking of key cross-college priorities, such as the continued development of Welsh language skills and provision for learners with ALN, is not robust enough.

Leaders place a strong emphasis on professional learning and provide a broad range of opportunities for staff, including structured development programmes and collaborative opportunities to share effective practice. For example, staff work together during review and evaluation days to share practice and support improvements in teaching and learning. Many staff engage well with professional learning and develop as reflective practitioners. Staff are well supported by their line managers and value the opportunities available to them. For example, management training programmes are helping support aspiring managers in their professional development and internal career progression. However, leaders do not evaluate the impact of professional learning systematically enough. As a

result, they do not always know which activities have the greatest impact on improving teaching quality and learner outcomes.

Operational management arrangements are generally sound. Leaders have established clear systems and processes to support the day-to-day running of the college. These include updated arrangements for recording and monitoring attendance, although not all staff are using the updated information well enough to challenge and support learners to improve their in-class attendance. Communication between teams is effective, and many staff form positive and supportive working relationships with colleagues and managers. For example, the consistent use of the new learner behaviour policy is having a positive impact and is improving behaviour across the college.

Arrangements for identifying and supporting learners with ALN in line with the Additional Learning Needs and Education Tribunal (ALNET) Act are not clear enough, resulting in inconsistencies in staff understanding and application of ALN processes across the college.

The college delivers a comprehensive range of vocational and academic courses across its learning areas. Many courses give learners the opportunity to progress to the next higher level. The college uses a wide range of local and national labour market information to make sure provision meets demand. The college has developed effective working relationships with its local schools and the two local authorities across its geographical region to enhance the information pupils and parents receive when considering attending the college. In addition, the college is working collaboratively with a sub-contractor to widen participation and deliver niche provision in relation to forestry, horticulture, and nature restoration.

To improve further, the college should focus on:

- Strengthening strategic leadership and operational oversight of ALN
- Improving the consistency and impact of self-evaluation and quality improvement planning
- Developing robust arrangements to evaluate the impact of professional learning on teaching quality and learner outcomes
- Strengthening its strategies for developing Welsh language skills across the college

Additional information

Safeguarding arrangements

The provider's arrangements for safeguarding young people and vulnerable adults do not give any cause for concern.

Evidence base of the report

Before the inspection, inspectors:

- analysed the outcomes from the learner questionnaires and consider the views of teachers and support staff through their questionnaire responses

During the inspection, inspectors:

- met the chief executive, governors, senior and middle managers and individual teachers, instructors and support staff to evaluate the impact of the provider's work
- met learners to discuss their work, listen to them and gain their views about various aspects of their provider
- visited a broad sample of sessions, including classroom, workshop and online activities across the provision
- observed and spoke to learners outside of sessions
- looked closely at the provider's self-evaluation processes
- considered the provider's quality improvement plan and looked at evidence to show how well the provider had taken forward planned improvements
- scrutinised a wide range of provider documents, including information on learner assessment and progress, records of meetings of staff and the governing body, information on learners' well-being, including the safeguarding of learners, and records of staff training and professional learning

After the on-site inspection and before the publication of the report, Estyn:

- reviewed 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 learners...*’ or ‘*very few learners...*’. 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 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:

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