

**A report on**  
**The Branas School**

**Branas Isaf  
Llandrillo  
Corwen  
Denbighshire  
LL21 0TA**

**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 The Branas School

Name of provider	The Branas School
Proprietor status	Branas Isaf, a subsidiary of CareTech (Holdings) Ltd
Language of the provider	English
Type of school	Independent special
Residential provision?	No
Number of pupils on roll	16
Pupils of statutory school age	16
Date of previous Estyn inspection (if applicable)	01/06/2022
Start date of inspection	09/03/2026

### School context:

Branas School provides specialised education, care and therapy for boys aged 11-18 who present with complex social, emotional and mental health needs and moderate learning difficulties. It offers highly specialist provision for pupils who present with complex needs and who have experienced significant adverse and traumatic life experiences.

There are currently 16 pupils on roll at the school. Pupils are looked-after by local authorities in England and Wales and live in children's homes operated by CareTech. Seven pupils have an education, health and care plan (EHP). All pupils speak English as their first language.

The headteacher has been in post since July 2024 and the school's last monitoring inspection was March 2024.

## Summary

Branas School provides a welcoming learning environment where pupils feel safe and supported. Many pupils join the school after experiencing disruption in their previous education. Through consistent routines, clear expectations and strong multi-disciplinary support, pupils improve their attendance, behaviour and engagement in learning.

The school curriculum is highly responsive to pupils' individual starting points, interests and needs. Learning combines classroom-based subjects with regular access to the wider community, helping pupils build their knowledge and skills in a range of contexts. Over time, pupils develop skills in literacy, numeracy, digital technology and science. They are supported to apply their learning, for example linking ideas from science to technology or using mathematical skills in practical activities. By the end of Key Stage 4, many pupils achieve a range of qualifications and accreditations and move on to further education and training.

Activities such as climbing, kayaking, educational visits and community engagement help pupils to develop resilience, teamwork and problem-solving skills. These enriching experiences provide opportunities for personal development and prepare pupils for life after school.

A notable strength of the school is the close collaboration between education, care and therapeutic staff. A wide range of assessment data is used to inform individual learning plans, and this integrated approach helps staff provide consistent support to meet pupils' emotional and behavioural support needs. As a result, pupils are increasingly willing and able to participate in lessons and wider school activities.

School leaders have established a clear vision focused on inclusion, mutual respect and developing independence. Pupils contribute actively to school life by sharing their views and taking part in decision-making, which helps them develop a sense of responsibility and belonging within the school community.

Leaders have experienced challenges in recruiting and retaining teachers in a small number of subject areas, which has adversely affected the consistency of teaching and learning across the school. Leaders analyse the school's performance and implement structured plans to support improvement. However, success criteria are not consistently measurable, and timelines and responsibilities are not consistently defined. As a result, the impact of actions on pupil outcomes is not systematically evaluated and professional learning that focuses on improving teaching and learning is underdeveloped.

## Main evaluation

Branas school provides a welcoming and supportive learning environment where pupils feel safe. Staff develop respectful relationships with pupils that support positive behaviour and engagement in learning. Pupils are proud of their school and are actively involved in contributing to school life.

### **Achievement and progression**

Nearly all pupils make particularly strong progress in improving their engagement and attendance. This is a notable strength as nearly all pupils arrive at the school following significant periods of disruption in their education.

The school provides a broad and balanced curriculum that is informed by appropriate individual subject baseline assessments and is responsive to pupils' needs and interests. The curriculum combines classroom-based subjects with a focus on community-based and experiential learning.

Overall, nearly all pupils make secure progress in a range of skills, particularly in literacy, numeracy, digital competence and science. Nearly all pupils at Key Stage 4 gain a range of qualifications and accreditations, including GCSEs. Last academic year, nearly all pupils progressed successfully into further education, for example onto vocational level one courses such as animal care and bricklaying.

In English, most pupils develop their ability to write coherently and produce longer extended texts over time, while also demonstrating higher-order thinking skills when discussing characters and comparing texts. Most pupils demonstrate the progressive development of digital skills, including understanding online safety and managing content. Pupils transfer knowledge between subjects, for example linking learning about radio waves in physics to discussions about Wi-Fi in IT.

Over time most pupils make strong progress in numeracy and are supported to achieve a range of accredited learning from entry level to GCSE. Additionally, teachers across curriculum areas work together to plan opportunities for pupils to apply and extend their knowledge. For example, the maths teacher uses data collated at sports day for pupils to work out averages. In science lessons, pupils learn about time and distance and go on to extend their learning in maths to calculate speed.

In practical and creative activities, pupils develop sound communication and planning skills, for example when building a wind turbine in science or organising musical performances.

Within wider curriculum offers, pupils develop resilience, teamwork and problem-solving skills. This is a particular strength of the school.

### **Spotlight: Curriculum enrichment through regular outdoor and community learning**

Branas school provides a highly engaging enrichment curriculum that extends learning beyond the classroom. Pupils regularly access physical education lessons at a local leisure centre and participate in a wide range of outdoor learning activities, including climbing, kayaking and weaselling. They also take part in educational visits to museums and historical buildings to support their learning in humanities subjects and access the wider community for meaningful and purposeful activities to enhance wellbeing and build life skills.

The school adopts a flexible and adaptive approach, providing experiences that respond well to pupils' individual needs and interests. Through these activities, pupils are motivated to develop a breadth of skills including problem-solving, communication and teamwork.

This enhanced curriculum supports pupils' personal development by enabling them to face manageable challenges, learn through trial and error and develop strategies to overcome difficulties. As a result, many pupils develop resilience, greater self-reliance and improved emotional regulation. For many pupils, the trust placed in them to manage new environments and behave respectfully in public spaces successfully builds their self-belief and provides solid foundations for further learning.

Since the last core inspection, leaders have expanded opportunities for older pupils who have completed end of year examinations and are preparing to transition out of the school. Pupils benefit from the development of important life skills through activities including visits, outdoor education, sport, short course qualifications such as science, mathematics and photography, volunteering in the wider community, and part-time work placements.

### **Teaching and assessment**

Nearly all teachers adapt teaching well to support pupils to make progress in important skill areas or formal examinations. For example, teaching in English focuses strongly on developing examination skills and strategies, while IT lessons successfully support pupils in developing safe and responsible use of technology, such as recognising reliable information and how to deal with cyber-bulling.

Nearly all teachers establish clear boundaries and reinforce these positively, contributing to calm and purposeful learning environments. Overall, lesson planning is well organised and meets the individual emotional and behavioural needs and interests of pupils well. The small class sizes mean that staff provide a high degree of support for individual pupils. However, planning to meet the specific additional learning needs of pupils is less well developed and this results in the limited use of specialist strategies within lessons.

In nearly all lessons, teachers provide clear verbal feedback and guidance on how pupils can improve their work. In mathematics, feedback is particularly effective in scaffolding next steps in learning and pupils' work demonstrates progress over time. In music and outdoor education, teachers demonstrate strong subject knowledge and provide concise feedback that helps pupils improve their skills.

In most lessons teachers use effective questioning and clear explanations to help pupils recall prior knowledge and apply it to new learning. Nearly all staff use praise purposefully to reward pupils and to celebrate their achievements. This feedback helps pupils develop a sense of pride in their learning. However, inconsistencies in teaching caused by the turnover of teaching staff in a few subject areas have negatively impacted pupil progress.

Teachers assess pupils regularly and use this to inform future planning. The school has recently introduced targeted interventions to help pupils make better progress in key skill areas such as reading. These are recently established and are beginning to have a positive impact on pupil progress and confidence.

### **Integrated wellbeing and engagement support**

Leaders have created an integrated care, education and therapeutic model and this holistic approach allows pupils to feel safe and supported. The sharing of expertise and knowledge is a strong feature of this joined up approach allowing staff to work effectively to support pupil wellbeing and engagement. For example, education staff provide daily briefings to care and therapeutic teams on pupil well-being, achievements and upcoming events. Similarly, therapeutic expertise informs approaches to teaching and learning and care managers keep the school informed about matters relevant to pupils in school.

Overall, pupils attend well. Most pupils demonstrate positive attitudes towards learning and engage well in lessons responding well to the clear routines and consistent expectations this integrated approach brings. Pupils show curiosity and interest in learning and are confident when speaking about their work and interests. Pupils show pride in their work and are happy to discuss their learning, including with visitors to the school.

The school promotes regular opportunities to celebrate effort, attendance and positive attitudes to learning. These opportunities encourage pupils to value their successes and develop a stronger sense of belonging within the school community. Staff from the school and pupil residences use consistent approaches to pupil wellbeing, behaviour management and classroom routines, helping pupils understand expectations. The school has rigorous systems for managing and reviewing incidents of challenging behaviour. Over time, nearly all pupils improve their engagement and reduce levels of challenging behaviour.

The school and wider residential provision has a thorough approach to managing risk. Staff carefully manage individual pupil risk assessments to enable pupils to access a broad curriculum, including community-based activities, safely. Through the multidisciplinary work of Branas Isaf, staff have access to a wide range of important information to ensure positive and consistent support to meet the complicated needs of pupils. However, key information for staff is not always sufficiently concise or practical to guide teaching and learning.

## **Leadership**

Since the last inspection, school leadership has changed significantly. During this period, leaders have established a stable learning environment with a clear vision and ethos of inclusion, mutual respect and independence that is well understood by staff across the school and wider organisation. As a result, the curriculum and pastoral systems reflect these intentions and pupils develop skills and knowledge for life beyond school.

The headteacher is supported by a deputy head and a team of six key teachers. They are overseen by the responsible individual for the school, who also manages the wider Branas Isaf care and clinical services. Leaders have introduced new quality assurance systems, for example, they monitor teaching and learning through lesson observations, learning walks and analysis of assessment data enabling them to identify appropriate priorities for school improvement. However, improvement planning does not always include clear success criteria or accountability measures to evaluate impact on pupil outcomes. Further, in a few areas, systems and processes do not yet enable leaders to readily access information and identify improvements. For example, in important areas such as reviewing the school's compliance with the Independent School Standards (Wales) Regulations 2024.

Leaders have established a secure safeguarding culture. Staff understand their responsibilities in keeping pupils safe and leaders respond promptly to any concerns.

Leaders have suitable processes for staff appraisal focusing on well-being, pupil progress and teamwork. However, the use of professional learning to drive improvements in teaching and learning is underdeveloped.

Leaders use pupil feedback effectively to contribute to school improvement and listening to pupils' views is a strong feature of the school. For example, the school council designed a new school logo and uniform. Pupils participate in democratic elections for key roles, and all pupils serve on sub-committees including for environmental initiatives, sports, digital skills and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. This inclusive approach supports all pupils to experience leadership roles and influence school life and events such as World Book Day, St David's Day and awareness of cultural celebrations such as Ramadan.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

### **The provision of information**

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

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

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

## **Safeguarding**

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

## **Recommendations**

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

- R1 Improve the stability and consistency of teaching
- R2 Strengthen self-evaluation and improvement planning to focus more clearly on measurable impact on pupil outcomes
- R3 Strengthen professional learning to have a consistent focus on teaching and learning

## **What happens next**

Estyn advises the proprietor to amend its current development plan to show what actions the school intends to take in response to the recommendations. It is also advisable to circulate this plan, or a summary of it, to all parents/carers at the school.

## Evidence base of the report

Before an inspection, inspectors:

- analyse the outcomes from parent/carer and pupil questionnaires and consider the views of teachers and support staff through their questionnaire responses

During an inspection, inspectors normally:

- hold a meeting with parents/carers to hear their views on the school and its effectiveness
- meet the headteacher, governors/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

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