



Arolygiaeth Ei Fawrhydi dros Addysg a Hyfforddiant yng Nghymru  
His Majesty's Inspectorate for Education and Training in Wales

**A report on**

**Tarren school**

**Date of inspection: February 2023**

**by**

**Estyn, His Majesty's Inspectorate for Education**

**and Training in Wales**

## About Tarren school

Tarren School is an independent special school for up to 20 pupils between the ages of 8 and 18 years who have a diagnosis of autistic spectrum condition (ASC).

The school has two sites, both of which are in semi-rural areas. One is situated in Neath Port Talbot and the other site is on the outskirts of Swansea.

There are currently nine pupils at the school, three based on the Tarren School site and six on the Mill Haven site. There is a linked children's home on the site of Tarren school and a minority of pupils live in this home. Many of the pupils at the school are in the care of their local authority and a majority are placed by local authorities in Wales. All pupils are in receipt of a statement of special educational needs, individual development plan or an education, health and care plan.

The school is administered by Val's Place, a private limited company specialising in children's services that has another two independent special schools in England.

This is the school's first monitoring visit since registration. Since registration, there has been a change in leadership at all levels. The proprietor has been in position since August 2021. The headteacher took up position in January 2022 and he is supported by an education director who was appointed in September 2022.

## Main findings

### Strengths

Tarren School offers a warm and nurturing environment for pupils, who respond well to the caring and committed approach of staff. Staff are patient, particularly when assisting pupils in understanding and responding appropriately to their feelings. Over time, the sound working relationships between pupils and staff help to improve pupils' confidence and well-being.

Both school sites consist of large and bright classrooms that provide pupils with stimulating learning environments. Indoor space is generally managed effectively to meet the individual learning needs of the pupils currently on roll. Due to the small number of pupils, they are able to have designated areas where they can reflect and have space to maintain their regulation when required.

There are regular opportunities for pupils to access community resources such as public transport, cafes and shops. This provides pupils with suitable learning experiences, which include living independently, keeping safe in the community and behaving responsibly.

The headteacher is supported well by the education director who has responsibility for other schools within the company. She provides valuable support for the headteacher and is beginning to offer quality assurance around key areas of the school's work. For example, she is working closely with the headteacher to implement a strategic approach to professional development. Online training packages are now education specific, and plans include a greater focus on pedagogy.

### Areas for development

The school does not meet the Independent School Standards (Wales) Regulations.

Whole-school systems for tracking pupil progress are very new and under-developed. As a result, teaching staff do not consistently identify the next steps in learning for pupils well enough.

The quality of schemes of work across the school is variable. Where schemes of work are most effective, they consider the specific needs, interests and planned learning of all pupils well. However, teachers' expectations of pupils are generally too low, and tasks do not consistently challenge pupils at an appropriate level. Consequentially, many activities in lessons are not matched to pupils' abilities well enough and pupils have insufficient opportunities to learn. Planning is not currently well sequenced to build systematically and coherently on pupils' knowledge, skills and interests as they progress through the school.

Currently, the school liaises with pupils' placing authorities to identify therapeutic interventions, where these are appropriate. However, approaches are not co-ordinated well enough to enable teaching staff to make effective use of this information in their work with pupils. The company has recently developed an in-

house provision for therapy, which will allow the school to get support from specialists when needed.

Education staff are regularly used to support pupils within the home. As a result of this, lines of responsibility are not clear enough. In addition, for a considerable period of the school day, the school is understaffed and lacks leadership capacity.

Plans to support pupils who struggle to attend school to ensure that they transition to a full-time timetable are not in place. In addition, monitoring engagement in learning within lessons is underdeveloped. Further, there is a lack of coherent planning for pupils' next steps when they leave school.

Recorded attendance at the time of the inspection did not match the numbers of pupils observed in lessons. Pupils who were in the care home were being marked as present in school. In addition, the school policies do not contain clear guidance for staff on the use of personal mobile phones whilst on site. As a result, the school's arrangements for safeguarding pupils are not robust enough.

The school has outside space for pupils to play safely. The area and resources on the Tarren site for play are limited and do not enable pupils to engage in relevant activities, such as facilitating ball games during break time, to enhance the development of pupils' physical, emotional and social skills. The more extensive outdoor opportunities afforded by the Mill Haven site are underdeveloped. Across both sites, the outdoor space is not maintained well enough.

The school regularly uses an area of the care home on the Tarren site to support a very few pupils to regulate. The school does not have the permission of the Welsh Government to use this room as part of the school.

## Recommendations

### The school should:

- R1 Comply fully with the Independent School Standards (Wales) Regulations 2003
- R2 Ensure that teachers make effective use of assessment outcomes to plan suitable next steps in pupils' learning and to inform their individual education plans
- R3 Ensure that tracking systems provide a clear picture of the progress pupils make over time
- R4 Ensure that transition plans for pupils both joining and leaving the school are clear and coherent and include appropriate time frames
- R5 Apply to the Welsh Government for a material change to the registration of the school

## Compliance with the standards for registration

### Standard 1: The quality of education provided by the school

The school does not fully meet the regulatory requirements for this standard. In order to comply fully with the Independent School Standards (Wales) Regulations 2003, the school should:

Ensure the school has a curriculum policy set out in writing and supported by appropriate plans and schemes of work, and implement it effectively [1 (2)]

- Ensure that the subject matter appropriate for the ages and aptitudes of pupils, including those pupils with a statement [1(2)(b)]
- Ensure that the school provide appropriate careers guidance for secondary age pupils [1(2)(g)]
- Ensure that the curriculum provides the opportunity for all pupils to learn and make progress [1(2)(i)]

Ensure that the teaching enables pupils to acquire new knowledge, and make progress according to their ability so that they increase their understanding and develop their skills in the subjects taught [1(3)(a)]

Ensure that the teaching encourage pupils to apply intellectual, physical or creative efforts and to show interest in their work and to think and learn for themselves [1(3)(b)]

Ensure that lessons well planned, teaching methods effective and suitable activities used and class time is managed wisely [1(3)(c)]

Ensure that teachers show a good understanding of the aptitudes, needs and prior attainments of the pupils, and ensure these are taken into account in the planning of lessons [1(3)(d)]

Ensure there is a framework in place to assess pupils' work regularly and thoroughly and that information from such assessment utilised to plan teaching so that pupils can make progress [1(3)(g)]

Ensure that the school has in place a framework by which pupil performance can be evaluated by reference to either the school's own aims, as provided to parents and/or, by national norms [1(3)(h)]

1(5) Ensure that teachers provide education which enables all pupils within a class to make progress including pupils with statements and those for whom Welsh or English is an additional language

### Standard 2: The spiritual, moral, and cultural development of pupils

On the basis of this visit, there is no evidence to indicate that the school does not meet the regulatory requirements for this standard.

### **Standard 3: Welfare, health and safety of pupils**

The school does not fully meet the regulatory requirements for this standard. In order to comply fully with the Independent School Standards (Wales) Regulations 2003, the school should:

- Prepare and implement written policies to safeguard and promote the welfare of children who are pupils at the school which complies with Welsh Government Guidance 283 / 2022 Keeping Learners Safe [3(2)(b)]
- Ensure school staff are deployed in such a way as to ensure the proper supervision of pupils [3(7)]
- Maintain an admission and an attendance register in accordance with The Education (Pupil Registration) (Wales) Regulations 2010 [3(9)]

### **Standard 4: The suitability of proprietors and staff**

On the basis of this visit, there is no evidence to indicate that the school does not meet the regulatory requirements for this standard.

### **Standard 5: Premises of and boarding accommodation at schools**

On this visit, Estyn did not inspect Standard 5.

### **Standard 6: The provision of information**

On this visit, Estyn did not inspect Standard 6.

### **Standard 7: The manner in which complaints are to be handled**

On the basis of this visit, there is no evidence to indicate that the school does not meet the regulatory requirements for this standard.

## **Recommendation regarding continued registration**

When considering this school's registration the Welsh Government may wish to have regard to the following recommendation:

The school does not currently meet the requirements of the Independent School Standards (Wales) Regulations 2003. To comply fully with these requirements, the school should address the issues identified above for each standard.

Inspectors' judgements on this limited inspection should not prejudice the findings of a future full Section 163 inspection.

## 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 Regulations 2003. In schools that provide non-maintained nursery education, this report also satisfies the requirements of Schedule 26 of the School Standards and Framework Act 1998.

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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