



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

**A report on**

**Dan y Coed**

**Date of inspection: November 2022**

**by**

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

## About Dan y Coed

Name of provider	Dan y Coed
Proprietor	Orbis Education and Care
Local authority	City and County of Swansea
Language of the provider	English
Type of school	Independent special
Residential provision?	No
Number of pupils on roll	26
Pupils of statutory school age	26
Date of previous Estyn inspection (if applicable)	
Start date of inspection	14/11/2022
<p>Dan y Coed school is an independent special school situated in the West Cross area of Swansea. The school opened in November 2017 and is owned by Orbis Education and Care. It is part of the portfolio of August Equity, a private equity investment company.</p> <p>The school is in a large, detached property with easy access to the Mumbles coastline and the city of Swansea. The school shares the site with its residential provision, which provides a twenty-bed, 52-week provision, which opened in May 2019.</p> <p>Currently there are 26 pupils attending the school. Eleven pupils are residential in the on-site care home and fifteen are day pupils. Nearly all pupils have a statement of special educational needs (SEN) or Education Health and Care Plan (EHCP) and English as their first language. Twelve of the pupils have looked after status. Pupils are placed at the school from local authorities in Wales and England.</p> <p>The head of education has been in post since September 2017. The school has five class teachers, six lead learning support assistants and 21 learning support assistants. In addition, care workers from the residential setting support children in lessons and activities as required. A clinical team, including a speech and language therapist and occupational therapist technician, supports the education team.</p> <p>The school's aim is to 'provide a safe and secure school environment that encourages individuality, confidence and self-esteem'.</p> <p>This is the school's first core inspection.</p>	

Data reported is sourced from the latest available Pupil Level Annual School Census. These figures may be slightly different to those observed during the inspection.

Further information is available from the Welsh Government My Local School website: [mylocalschool.gov.wales](https://mylocalschool.gov.wales)

- a. The term 'additional learning needs' is being used to describe those pupils on the SEN/ALN register of the school.

## Overview

Dan y Coed is a happy and nurturing school that serves pupils' additional learning needs well. The school provides a welcoming, positive learning environment.

Due to their complex and multiple learning needs the ability range of pupils across the school varies considerably. Most pupils at Dan y Coed make strong progress from their initial starting points across a range of important skills. This is due to the valuable support and encouragement they receive from teaching and onsite therapeutic staff. However, pupils' information and technology skills are not developed progressively.

Teaching staff know the pupils very well and make effective use of this knowledge and understanding to tailor learning opportunities to interest pupils and ensure that they make good progress. These engaging experiences are well matched to pupils' needs and lead to high levels of pupil engagement in learning. The school offers a flexible, broad, and balanced curriculum that is well suited to the needs, interests, and aspirations of the pupils. However, there are limited opportunities for pupils to access work related experiences.

A notable strength of the school is the use of its bespoke assessment and achievement continuum, which assesses pupils' progress robustly. This strategy successfully captures each small step of progress relative to an individual pupil's additional learning needs. Nearly all teaching staff use this system confidently to inform next steps in learning, which has a significant impact upon the progress of pupils.

Senior leaders communicate a clear vision for the school that focuses on providing an integrated approach to meeting pupils' needs. The head of education has a clear sense of purpose and provides the school with strong strategic leadership.

Nearly all teaching staff engage well in beneficial professional learning opportunities at the school. However, leaders do not routinely evaluate these opportunities to inform the planning of future learning well enough.

## 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 2003. These regulations require an independent school to meet an appropriate standard in the following areas:

### **The quality of education provided by the school**

The school meets the regulatory requirements for this standard.

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

The school meets the regulatory requirements for this standard.

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

The school meets the regulatory requirements for this standard.

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

The school meets the regulatory requirements for this standard.

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

The school meets the regulatory requirements for this standard.

### **The provision of information**

The school meets the regulatory requirements for this standard.

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

The school meets the regulatory requirements for this standard.

## Recommendations

- R1 Improve opportunities for pupils to develop information and communication technology skills progressively across the curriculum
- R2 Strengthen the opportunities for pupils to develop work related opportunities
- R3 Formalise the evaluation of professional learning opportunities for all staff

## **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.

Estyn will invite Dan y Coed to prepare a case study on its work in relation to its specialist assessment and achievement continuum, for dissemination on Estyn's website.

## Main findings

### Learning

Most pupils at Dan y Coed make strong progress due to the valuable support and encouragement they receive from staff. Over time, many pupils who join the school settle in well, build constructive relationships with their staff and peers, and many make worthwhile progress in their learning. In relation to their individual starting points, most learners meet their personal targets and make secure progress towards fulfilling their potential.

Many pupils, with the support of staff, generally use communication systems that are appropriate to them including signs and symbols. Over time, pupils become increasingly confident in expressing their needs, feeling and choices and in making valued contributions both in answering questions and during class discussions, for example choosing activities to take part in during the school day and indicating their preferred choices of topics for the school curriculum. A minority of pupils develop effective oracy skills and the confidence to use these successfully. For example, they discuss how they have created digital animations confidently. These pupils use technical language and subject relevant vocabulary well.

Across the school, many pupils listen well to staff and to each other. They follow routines successfully. Many more able pupils enjoy listening to an extended presentation by the teacher on beaked whales. They are attentive and respond well to questions.

Most pupils develop and improve their reading skills appropriately. For example, pupils recognise and understand symbols and signs to indicate their choice of snack. A few more able pupils apply reading strategies when accessing reading comprehension tasks such as the Deep Sea Explorer. A few more able pupils can read cake recipes without support and follow the recipe confidently.

Pupils' writing skills include prewriting skills such as sensory mark making and overwriting. With the sensitive support of staff, pupils progress from handheld interventions, where they also develop fine motor skills, to independent writing where they convey meaning well and clearly articulate their views. More able pupils present work appropriately and write with accurate punctuation. For example, they use these skills to write letters to the headteacher requesting permission to undertake a fund-raising activity for a class ant farm. In another example, more able pupils use appropriate and imaginative adjectives to describe ghostly goings-on in a local hotel.

Pupils use their developing numeracy skills well in a range of practical activities across the curriculum. For example, pupils with more complex needs indicate the number of grapes they would like at snack time. Many more able pupils identify, use and make calculations using money appropriately, for example shopping within a budget for cooking ingredients and confidently accessing self-service tills with the correct change. Pupils measure and weigh ingredients successfully as part of cooking activities. In addition, more able pupils can use their estimation skills to adapt recipes, for example appropriately adjusting the cooking time for a cake as a result of using smaller cake tins. A very few pupils engage in data gathering

exercises. For example, enthusiastically collecting information about their peers' favourite foods using symbol communication strategies. They collate the data and record it in tally charts and bar graphs with appropriate support.

Many pupils practise their information and communication technology (ICT) skills appropriately across the curriculum. For example, many pupils use the white board effectively to make choices and indicate their feelings at the start of the day. Nearly all pupils with more complex needs engage positively with end of day transition routines using interactive boards. More able pupils use ICT programmes to create effective short animations or create short videos to showcase their work. A very few pupils demonstrate higher level digital skills by manipulating images and producing detailed designs for a digital school mascot. However, pupils' ICT skills are not developed progressively over time.

Most pupils develop their creative skills well. A few enjoy playing the piano and creating characters out of clay. Most pupils enjoy a range of physical activities which include swimming, trampolining and riding bikes and trikes.

Over time, many pupils make strong progress in developing their social and emotional skills. For example, they learn to listen, follow instructions, take turns and co-operate with teaching staff and with each other. They communicate politely and confidently to visitors at the school.

Older pupils develop beneficial independence skills through regular activities such as shopping for food, cooking meals and washing clothes. Pupils with more complex needs regularly travel into Swansea for lunch with their peers using public transport.

Many pupils attain externally accredited courses, including the sectional certificates within the Duke of Edinburgh's Award. Nearly all pupils have achieved life skills challenge certificates during their time at the school. These help to prepare pupils well for their next stage of learning and adult life.

Over the last three years, when they leave the school, half the pupils have progressed to supported living placements, alternative therapeutic placements or have returned home to live with their families. A very few pupils have successfully returned to mainstream schools as a result of the strong progress they make during their time at the school. A few pupils left to attend specialist post-16 provision.

### **Well-being and attitudes to learning**

Nearly all pupils feel happy, safe, and valued at Dan y Coed. They form worthwhile working relationships with adults and participate happily in school life. In relation to their complex needs nearly all pupils make good progress in important areas such as improving their well-being, the development of social skills, managing their behaviour and in becoming more independent in their daily lives. For example, pupils enjoy using their bus passes to access local amenities.

Nearly all pupils settle well to their learning. They enjoy their lessons and engage positively with learning activities. A few pupils work well collaboratively, share ideas and support one another with their learning.



Most pupils, relative to their needs and abilities, exhibit positive behaviour in lessons and around the school due to the skilled support by teaching and therapeutic staff.

Pupils enjoy participating in a range of activities on and off site that help them develop their creative, social, and physical skills. These activities include dog walking and participating in the school's Makaton choir. In addition, pupils enjoy the wide range of sporting activities available at the school such as cycling, dancing and swimming. Many pupils use the outdoor play equipment confidently and independently.

Many pupils develop a sense of responsibility and are eager to help others. On their weekly shopping trips pupils buy items to donate to the local food bank as well as spending time with residents at a local care home.

Pupil voice is a notable feature at the school. Nearly all pupils have beneficial weekly opportunities to make decisions about their learning in the "feedback Friday" sessions. This includes suggestions such as deciding themes and activities for learning such as designing and building a maze for the school hamster. In addition, pupils contribute well to the development of the school through the school council and the eco council. Pupils make helpful suggestions to improve their school experience. This includes making changes and improvements to the food at the canteen and suggesting possible activities for fundraising.

### **Teaching and learning experiences**

Dan y Coed has developed a broad, balanced, personalised curriculum policy and model which influences all aspects of teaching and learning. The school's creative and effective approaches to the design of the curriculum are a notable strength of the school's work. These meet the needs of all pupils exceptionally well. Elements of the school's individualised curriculum and teaching and learning strategies are very closely and successfully linked. This produces inspiring learning experiences for pupils.

Qualifications are accessible to pupils across the school, and they benefit from a range of suitable, need appropriate accreditation such as Duke of Edinburgh Award and BTEC.

The school has recently introduced beneficial opportunities to enhance the curriculum which enable pupils to experience valuable opportunities to develop their learning and understanding outside the classroom. The programme includes worthwhile opportunities for pupils to access a broad range of activities in the local community. However, opportunities for pupils to participate in work related learning is underdeveloped. As a result, pupils do not develop important skills and understanding to prepare them for the next stage in their lives.

Pupils are offered beneficial opportunities to understand how to live well and safely and how to engage in safe positive relationships appropriate to their needs and abilities. This includes staying safe online.

Pupils benefit from a range of interesting educational visits which often relate closely to pupils' individual interests. This includes visits to local beaches and to the National

Museum in Cardiff. In addition, the school provides high quality and exciting opportunities for pupils to work with external organisations such as the Gower Seal Group.

Teaching and assessment strategies effectively support the delivery of the individualised curriculum. Most staff have high expectations of pupils. Where appropriate, teachers make effective use of more able pupils to model good work. In addition, teachers deploy teaching support staff effectively to support learning experiences.

Nearly all teachers have a detailed understanding of pupils' abilities and interests. They use this knowledge well to plan engaging tasks that are challenging and stimulating. Teachers and teaching support staff have strong, trusting, and professional working relationships with pupils. They are skilled and flexible at adapting personalised learning tasks and resources to respond sensitively to pupils' additional learning needs. For example, an edible beach was created for the topic under the sea.

Many teachers use questioning effectively to encourage and stimulate discussion with pupils and provide them with frequent, clear, and encouraging feedback. In a few cases, teachers use skilful questioning to engage more able pupils. Many teachers successfully use verbal and nonverbal cues to ask questions that encourage and stimulate discussions with pupils. Many staff across the school use appropriate resources and skilful techniques, such as communication devices and signing, to enable pupils with more complex needs to communicate effectively.

In nearly all cases, teachers' planning relates closely to the targets set in pupils' one page curriculum plans. This approach supports pupils very effectively to make progress in those areas that promote their wider personal and skills development including making healthy lifestyle choices, for example taking responsibility for hand hygiene and recognising stranger danger.

Behaviour management is effective across the school. Teachers and teaching support staff manage pupils' behaviour skilfully due to their knowledge and understanding of the needs of the pupils. They challenge pupils, expertly decoding nonverbal communication in order to pre-empt and encourage pupil engagement and outcomes.

Teachers provide valuable and supportive verbal feedback which supports pupils' learning well. In addition, feedback within pupils' electronic books provides valuable opportunities to discuss progress and links to previous learning well.

The school's innovative, bespoke assessment strategy very successfully captures each small step of progress relative to pupils' additional learning needs. This includes capturing valuable information across a range of skills relevant to the needs of the pupils. This is a significant strength of the school. Nearly all teaching staff use this to inform next steps in learning, which has a significant impact upon the progress of pupils.

## Care, support and guidance

The school provides a safe and nurturing environment that encourages pupils' individuality and self-esteem. The school's caring ethos and use of person-centred approaches contribute effectively to pupils' well-being, engagement and personal development. Nearly all pupils respond positively to this environment and as a result develop improved levels of confidence to become increasingly independent at school and in their daily lives.

The school has effective systems to communicate with parents and carers. As a result, parents and carers are well informed of their child's well-being and progress in a range of key skills.

Pupils' well-being and attendance is monitored effectively, and the school provides supportive interventions when required.

Teaching staff know and understand their pupils' additional learning needs well. A prominent feature at the school is the effective support and collaboration between the onsite therapy team and teaching staff. This successful working relationship supports pupils' additional learning needs well and leads to consistent approaches across the school. As a result, most pupils make effective progress across a range of important skills. In addition, the school works appropriately with a range of external support agencies to ensure that pupils have access to specialist advice and support where required.

Pupils' one page curriculum, one page profiles and individual education plans are valuable documents which include beneficial targets which are reviewed regularly. In addition, these plans include useful approaches to promote pupils' learning and well-being successfully. Nearly all staff use this information purposefully and flexibly in their teaching and planning.

The school's positive behaviour strategy is well established and understood by nearly all teaching staff at the school. This helps to create a constructive culture which reinforces positive relationships and behaviour at the school.

The school is successful in encouraging pupils to participate actively in the life of the school and within the local community. The school offers beneficial opportunities for pupils to take on responsibilities and to become active citizens. For example, pupils have beneficial opportunities to take responsibility for recycling at school.

The school has developed worthwhile practice in promoting pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development in relation to their needs and abilities. This provision encourages pupils to take responsibility for their actions and to show consideration for others' point of view. As part of their learning most pupils develop an understanding of the heritage and culture of Wales. In a creative project pupils created colourful Welsh dragons out of boxes, which are displayed proudly in the school entrance.

Teaching staff plan appropriate experiences to prepare pupils for the experiences of adult life. This includes valuable opportunities to develop cookery skills and to work in

the school's snack bar. However, there are limited opportunities for pupils to access work related experiences outside school.

There is a robust culture of safeguarding at the school. Staff at all levels are alert to the signs of possible abuse and neglect. They follow appropriate procedures to ensure that the children at the school receive effective support and protection. All staff undertake regular beneficial training to keep pupils and themselves safe. They understand the school's arrangements for safeguarding and respond to safeguarding concerns promptly. The school has sound safer recruitment procedures. The school's arrangements to keep pupils safe meet requirements and give no cause for concern.

### **Leadership and management**

The head of education has been in post since the school was founded. During this time, she has developed a clear vision for the school. This has been developed through a process of meaningful consultation with stakeholders. As a result, she has created a shared vision, which is well understood by all. This vision underpins the strong safeguarding culture at Dan y Coed, as well as the wider work of the school.

In recent years, the school has faced significant challenges including the Covid-19 pandemic and the more recent cost of living crisis. Leaders have supported staff effectively and demonstrate a caring ethos which values the well-being of staff as well as the pupils in their care.

Leaders are visible around the school. They act as positive role models for pupils and provide valuable support for staff. Leaders also establish strong and productive relationships with families and carers, which have a significant impact on the progress of pupils. This includes having strong lines of communication across the school so that issues that may affect learning and well-being can be addressed promptly.

The proprietor gives worthwhile challenge and support to the school, for example via the director of education (an employee of the proprietor). She has a clear understanding of the strengths and priorities for development at Dan y Coed. She has a valuable range of skills and knowledge which allow her to offer suitable support, challenge, and quality assurance to the school leaders. In addition, the director of education values the high-quality professional dialogue and challenge provided by the head of education.

Senior leaders alongside the director of education have established a clear cycle of quality assurance activities for evaluating the work of the school. This provides a useful overview of key events over the year and includes a programme of lesson observations and learning walks, assessment dates, stakeholder feedback opportunities and professional learning sessions. Further, thoughtful processes such as the "Feedback Friday" sessions enable teaching staff to make meaningful contributions to the self-evaluation process. As a result, leaders and teaching staff have an accurate understanding of the school's strengths and areas for improvement.

The school improvement plan links clearly to the areas of improvement identified within self-evaluation processes. This plan includes relevant actions to improve the

school's provision, who is responsible for each action and how leaders intend to achieve these actions within appropriate timescales. The school is in the early stages of recruiting a replacement deputy head teacher, which will further strengthen the capacity of the leadership team to drive improvement across the school. In addition, leaders have begun to review opportunities for staff to take on additional teaching and learning responsibilities.

The school has several bright and purposeful learning environments. Due to the nature of the pupils attending the school, they greatly benefit from having extended areas to use when they need to regulate their behaviours. The outside space has recently been improved by the addition of a covered area. However, limitations on the outdoor space impact on the number of resources the school can provide for learning. In addition, the school does not have adequate information technology equipment, which impacts on the ability of the teaching team to deliver education to progressively develop pupils' ICT skills.

The school has a small team of teachers, which is supported effectively by a larger team of learning support assistants and support staff drawn from the residential provision. However due to limitations in the consistency of support staffing the quality of support provided is variable. This has been highlighted appropriately within the school development plan.

Nearly all teaching staff engage keenly in the positive culture of professional learning at the school. There are beneficial opportunities for staff to share teaching ideas and practice through regular feedback opportunities and informal peer observation. These activities link well to the priorities for development identified in the school improvement plan. Staff are in the early stages of making useful collaborations with other schools to learn about good practice and bring new ideas into their teaching. However, leaders do not routinely evaluate these opportunities to inform the planning of future learning well enough.

The school has appropriate systems for managing the performance of teaching staff. There are suitable opportunities for staff to discuss their performance and progress with leaders. These lead to valuable opportunities for all teaching staff to develop their understanding, knowledge, and skills across a wide range of areas related to their role or aspiring roles.

Leaders have responded positively to the previous annual monitoring visit recommendations and have made strong progress with meeting these.

The school is fully compliant with the Independent School Standards (Wales) Regulations 2003.

## 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

## Copies of the report

Copies of this report are available from the school and from the Estyn website ([Estyn Website](#))

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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