



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: March 2024

by

Estyn, His Majesty's Inspectorate for Education

and Training in Wales

About Tarren school

Name of provider	Tarren school
Proprietor	Val's Community
Local authority	Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council
Language of the provider	English
Type of school	Independent special
Residential provision?	Yes
Number of pupils on roll	8
Pupils of statutory school age	8
Date of previous Estyn inspection (if applicable)	27/02/2023
Start date of inspection	11/03/2024

Tarren School is an independent 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 eight pupils at the school, five based on the Tarren School site and three on the Mill Haven site. There is a linked children's home on the site of Tarren School and many pupils live in this home. The school also takes day pupils. Many of the pupils at the school are in the care of their local authority and a minority are placed by local authorities in Wales. All pupils are in receipt of an individual development plan (IDP), statement of special educational need (SEN), or an education, health, and care plan (EHCP).

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

This is the school's first core inspection since registration. The school had a monitoring visit in February 2023. Since registration, there has been a change in leadership at all levels. The proprietor has been in position since August 2021. Having worked at the school as deputy head from 2021, the headteacher started his current position in July 2023.

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

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

Overview

Tarren School is a caring environment where all staff are committed to the school and their pupils. As a result, nearly all pupils feel safe at the school.

Nearly all parents and carers value the regular communication with the school. They believe that the staff at the school know their children well.

A new curriculum has recently been introduced to the school. This is at the early stages of being embedded. The curriculum offer is enriched with a range of beneficial activities outside of the classroom, for example through visits to Cardiff Castle and the local fire station, alongside weekly visits to the gym and local supermarket. However, in a few areas of the curriculum such as personal and social education (PSE), relationships and sex education (RSE) and careers, the provision is limited.

Teaching staff plan experiences that broadly build on pupils' interests. However, planning does not link well enough to the pupils' individual learning needs. As a result, many activities do not provide sufficient challenge.

Processes for tracking, monitoring and evaluating the impact of the school's work in relation to the progress pupils are making are in the very early stages of development.

Improvement planning processes are significantly underdeveloped and do not clearly identify the key areas that the school needs to improve upon.

There are currently no opportunities for pupils to achieve external qualifications whilst at the school.

There are clear processes to help pupils understand the expectations of their behaviour. Staff record incidents of challenging behaviour, using the school's system appropriately. Assemblies to celebrate pupil achievements are held at the school and are valued by the pupils. However, strategies that enable pupils to reflect successfully on their behaviour and learn to manage and regulate their emotions are limited.

Since the school opened in 2019, there have been regular and significant changes to leadership and staffing at the school.

Leaders have failed to identify and address several safeguarding concerns at the school.

The school is not fully compliant with the Independent School Standards (Wales) Regulations 2024 and the school has made limited progress against the recommendations left by inspectors during the last monitoring visit.

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 does not meet the regulatory requirements for this standard.

Although the school meets most of the regulatory requirements for this standard, in order to comply fully with the Independent School Standards (Wales) Regulations 2003 the school should:

- Draw up and implement effectively a written policy on the curriculum supported by appropriate plans and schemes of work [1(2)]
- Ensure the subject matter is appropriate for the ages and aptitudes of pupils, including those with a statement [1(2)(b)]
- Ensure where pupils have a statement, the education fulfils its requirements [1(2)(e)]
- Ensure that the school provide appropriate careers guidance for secondary age pupils [1(2)(g)]
- Ensure the teaching at the school 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 the teaching at the school encourages 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 teaching involves well planned lessons, effective teaching methods, suitable activities and wise management of class time [1(3)(c)]
- Ensure 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 use the information from such assessments to plan teaching so that pupils can make progress [1(3)(g)]
- Provide effective education for all pupils within a class to make progress, including pupils with statements and those for whom Welsh or English is an additional language [1(5)]

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 does not meet the regulatory requirements for this standard.

Although the school meets most of 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 in compliance with Welsh Government Guidance 283 / 2022 Keeping Learners Safe [3(2)(b)]
- Ensure the school has regard to any Welsh Government guidance on health and safety responsibilities and powers of schools [3(4)]
- Ensure they have a satisfactory level of fire safety, identified by its risk assessment under Part II Fire Precautions (Workplace) Regulations 1997, as amended 1999, and by any report from the Fire Authority [3(5)]
- Ensure the school has a satisfactory written policy on First Aid and it implements this [3(6)]

The suitability of proprietors and staff

The school meets the regulatory requirements for this standard.

Premises of and boarding accommodation at schools

The school does not meet the regulatory requirements for this standard.

Although the school meets most of 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 buildings provide reasonable resistance to penetration by rain, snow, wind and moisture from the ground [5(f)]
- Ensure there is sufficient access so that emergency evacuations can be accomplished safely for all pupils, including those with special needs [5(g)]
- Ensure that access to the school allows all pupils, including those with special needs, to enter and leave the school in safety and comfort [5(h)]
- Ensure that classrooms and other parts of the school are maintained in a tidy, clean and hygienic state [5(n)]
- Ensure that lighting, heating and ventilation in the classrooms and other parts of the school are satisfactory and in accordance with The Education (School Premises) Regulations 1999 [5(p)]
- Ensure there is appropriate arrangements for providing outside space for pupils to play safely [5(t)]

The provision of information

The school does not meet the regulatory requirements for this standard.

Although the school meets most of the regulatory requirements for this standard, in order to comply fully with the Independent School Standards (Wales) Regulations 2003 the school should:

- Ensure that information is provided regarding the information on pupils with statements to the responsible local education authority as may reasonably be required for the purpose of the annual review of the statement [6(8)]

The manner in which complaints are to be handled

The school meets the regulatory requirements for this standard.

Recommendations

- R1 Strengthen the management of safeguarding and address the shortcomings identified during the inspection
- R2 Comply fully with the Independent School Standards (Wales) Regulations 2024
- R3 Ensure that the pupils' additional educational needs comply with the school's current registration category
- R4 Establish effective procedures for quality assurance and improvement planning that focus clearly on pupil progress and the standards they achieve
- R5 Establish ongoing and robust professional learning for staff to effectively meet pupils' additional learning needs

What happens next

Since the school does not meet the standards required for registration, the Welsh Government will require the proprietor to submit an action plan within a specified period of time. This plan will set out the steps that the school will take to meet the standards, and the timescale within which it will complete each step.

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

Main findings

Learning

There is no report on children's learning. This is because the number of pupils present at the time of the inspection was too few to report on without identifying individual pupils.

Well-being and attitudes to learning

There is no report on children's well-being and attitudes to learning. This is because the number of pupils present at the time of the inspection was too few to report on without identifying individual pupils.

Teaching and learning experiences

Teachers and learning support staff have a suitable understanding of the interests of the pupils. Staff develop positive working relationships with pupils, providing reassurance and encouraging verbal feedback.

The school has recently introduced a new curriculum. The curriculum provides appropriate opportunities for pupils to develop skills across the areas of learning. However, the delivery of the curriculum offer is inconsistent. As a result, pupils' opportunity to implement their skills across the curriculum is underdeveloped.

The school's provision for personal and social education (PSE) relationships and sex education (RSE) and careers education is underdeveloped. The school does not currently provide opportunities for pupils to gain external qualifications relevant to their ability.

The school provides a worthwhile range of enrichment opportunities that supplement pupils' wider experiences. For example, they arrange trips to Cardiff Castle and to the local fire station. In addition, weekly visits to the local gym and the supermarket support pupils' development of physical and independence skills suitably.

Teachers' planning does not consistently identify opportunities for the progressive development of skills across the areas of learning. As a result, many activities do not provide sufficient challenge or opportunity to build on pupils' previous experiences and learning. The school has recently implemented a new tracking system, and staff are still in the initial phases of using it to inform their planning. It's too early to assess its impact. The frequent breaks during the day impact on pupils' resilience and their ability to extend the time they focus on and engage in their learning.

Staff from the company's linked children's homes provide additional support in the school. These staff have undertaken basic online professional learning to develop their understanding of pupils' needs. However, residential support staff are not deployed effectively and do not have the relevant strategies and skills to support pupils' learning and skills development appropriately.

Staff regularly celebrate pupils' achievements and share evidence of activities completed with parents and carers through an electronic digital platform daily. Annual

reports to parents and carers are appropriate and provide useful information on topics covered by pupils but do not indicate expected levels of progress well enough.

Care, support and guidance

Staff at Tarren School provide pupils with a caring environment. They know the pupils' interests well and are empathetic to their emotional individual needs. As a result, nearly all pupils feel safe at school.

The school has a comprehensive and beneficial transition programme for new pupils to the school, which supports them well in adapting to a new environment. However, the school provides limited opportunities for pupils to develop important skills needed in preparation for adulthood. For example, there are few opportunities for pupils to attend work experience and they do not receive the impartial careers advice and guidance that they are entitled to. As a result, the school's contribution to transition planning to pupils' future destinations is underdeveloped.

The school offers appropriate opportunities for pupils to explore social and moral themes such as tolerance and respect through the curriculum. In addition, the school has appropriate links with a suitable range of external agencies to support this work. This includes the local police who deliver important sessions on topics such as knife crime and keeping safe online. However, the strategic planning of a cohesive personal, social education (PSE) programme is under-developed. This means that teachers cannot plan effectively for the development of many aspects of pupils' personal development. For example, pupils do not all have access to relationships and sex education. Further, the impact of this important work is limited by pupil engagement to their learning.

Staff do not record information about pupils additional learning needs (ALN) well enough. This includes individual development plans (IDPs), statements of special educational need (SEN) or education, health, care plans (EHCPs) received as part of referral processes when pupils the school. Further, the school does not have effective strategies to identify pupils needs to enable them to plan systematically to meet their ALN either on arrival or as they progress through the school.

At the time of the inspection a minority of the pupils have a primary need that is outside the registration category of the school. In addition, there is a lack of specialist autistic spectrum condition (ASC) provision to support pupils' ALN across the school. For example, the school does not have appropriate facilities to support pupils' sensory needs and staff training in signing and communication is very limited. As a result, many pupils are not receiving provision that is detailed within statutory documents.

Pupils have useful one-page profiles that explain how they would like to be supported and they contribute appropriately to these documents. Individual education plans (IEPs) provide appropriate strategies for use in class with long-term success criteria. However, IEPs do not link well enough to pupils' ALN or targets from statutory documents such as IDPs. As a result, this limits their usefulness in helping staff to identify the most appropriate teaching and learning strategies. Teachers do not use information about pupils' ALN well enough to inform their teaching.

Leaders have recently employed an occupational therapist who has begun to complete assessments for all pupils. In addition, leaders have recently appointed a speech and language therapist. This work to support the therapeutic needs of the pupils is in the very early stages of development and it is too early to evaluate the impact.

Processes for helping pupils to understand expectations of their behaviour are clear, and staff use the school's system to record incidents of challenging behaviour appropriately. Pupils value and look forward to celebrating their achievements during assemblies. However, strategies that enable pupils to reflect successfully on their behaviour and learn to manage and regulate their emotions are limited and not consistently included in behaviour plans.

The school has appropriate arrangements to promote exercise and healthy eating and drinking and, as a result, most pupils understand the importance of choosing a healthy lifestyle. There are suitable opportunities for pupils to be active during the school day and to take part in regular sporting activities. For example, pupils enjoy completing circuits in the local gym and a regular swimming session. In addition, the school provides a suitable range of opportunities to enrich many pupils' learning and well-being through a comprehensive offer of extra-curricular activities, for example after-school football clubs, cinema trips and bowling.

Although nearly all staff understand their responsibilities for safeguarding, this understanding doesn't always translate into consistent practice. There are clearly identified designated safeguarding persons (DSPs) for the school on each site who report to the proprietor as overall DSP. However, the lack of formality within procedures and record keeping impacts on the school's ability to ensure that pupils are safe. The completion of statutory training in safeguarding and Prevent duty is inconsistent. In addition, several concerns in relation to health and safety of the sites were brought to the attention of the proprietor during the inspection. As a result, the school's arrangements to keep pupils safe do not meet requirements and give cause for concern.

Leadership and management

Since the school opened in 2019 there has been instability in the leadership of the school. During this time, the school has had four headteachers and the leadership structure in the wider organisation has also changed.

The current headteacher of Tarren School, who was appointed in July 2023, is enthusiastic, committed, and highly invested in the pupils and staff of the school. However, the headteacher has had limited opportunities for professional development in their leadership skills. Staff feel that the school is on an upward trajectory and morale is improving under the leadership of the new headteacher.

The headteacher shares important information with staff through regular meetings. As a result, staff are suitably informed about behavioural issues and upcoming events. Job descriptions show that leaders have a coherent understanding of how their organisation should operate to achieve its aims. These descriptions are comprehensive and clear.

Leaders in the school have implemented a helpful calendar of quality assurance, administrative and reporting activities to provide staff with clear timelines for the completion of important tasks.

The school's self-evaluation and improvement planning processes are significantly underdeveloped and do not clearly identify the key areas that need improvement. Although the headteacher undertakes regular lesson observations to quality assure teaching and learning at the school, they do not focus well enough on pupil progress. The evaluations focus too heavily on teaching; are too generous and do not accurately identify weak aspects of teaching or where pupils make less than expected progress. The documenting of quality assurance activities lacks sufficient detail and does not provide robust opportunities for professional dialogue between leaders and staff effectively. This limits their ability to plan systematically to improve important aspects of teaching and learning.

The headteacher, through regular conversations and annual performance reviews, supports staff to self-reflect upon their performance and identify areas of personal strength. However, this process does not focus well enough on the impact of their teaching on pupil progress. The headteacher actively promotes staff well-being and routinely reflects with them on reasonable adjustments required to support staff in their work. As a result, the headteacher has built supportive and open relationships with staff and has a sound understanding of their capabilities and training needs.

Leaders provide staff with a range of beneficial induction training to support their introduction to the school. However, the completion of mandatory training is not monitored well enough. Staff value professional development opportunities to develop their practice, including twilight sessions where staff collaborate and share ideas. However, staff and school leaders do not benefit from direct opportunities to collaborate with other schools, teachers or leaders.

Staff professional learning and development is not linked well enough to the needs of pupils, the school or individual staff improvement priorities. Although all staff have completed relevant online training courses, they have received limited opportunities to develop their understanding of recently introduced curricular approaches or how to support pupils with autistic spectrum condition (ASC). In addition, only a very few members of staff have received training in signing, despite this being listed as statutory provision within individual development plan (IDP) documents.

The professional working relationships between the school, parents and carers are strong. Parents and carers are happy with the progress pupils make in recognising their emotions and developing initial independent skills. Nearly all pupils feel leaders actively seek, listen and respond well to their feedback.

The proprietor, in the relatively short time in role, has begun to establish suitable arrangements for the strategic oversight of the school, this includes the recent appointment of two directors to distribute leadership more widely. However, these arrangements are at a very early stage of implementation and are not delivering effective strategic oversight and governance of the school.

The headteacher sends management reports to directors and the proprietor each week, including details of outstanding maintenance tasks at each school site.

However, despite receiving repeated reports, directors and the proprietor have not authorised actions to remedy the issues raised. Furthermore, leaders have not successfully addressed most of the shortcomings identified at the last monitoring visit. As a result, leaders have a weak record for implementing and sustaining changes.

Leaders have failed to identify and address many safeguarding concerns at the school. As a result, the school does not have suitable procedures to quality assure the effectiveness of its arrangements for safeguarding pupils.

The school does not comply with the Independent School Standards (Wales) 2024. As a result of the areas of non-compliance with the Independent School Standards (Wales) Regulations 2024 and the safeguarding concerns raised during the inspection, the Welsh Government may wish to recommend formally to the school that it should not accept new pupils until these matters have been addressed.

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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