



Report summary for parents and carers on Pen-Y-Cwm Special School

Date of inspection: May 2024

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

Overview

Pen y Cwm is a highly inclusive school where staff make pupils feel welcome and valued, and where their successes and achievements are celebrated joyfully.

The headteacher has worked with staff to create a collective purpose, vision and values for the school. These are very securely pupil-centred and include for example developing pupils' aspirations, resilience, independence, respect and empathy.

The relationships between staff and pupils are a particular strength of the school. Most pupils engage positively with staff and develop trusting and caring relationships. Over time, they form respectful relationships and interact positively with their peers. Most pupils are happy in school.

Most pupils make suitable progress from their starting points and against their individual targets. They also make strong progress in the development of their social skills. Over time, they form respectful relationships and interact positively with their peers. Most pupils are happy in school. They develop a tolerance of other's behaviours, with increasing kindness and respect and, greet visitors politely and courteously. Pupils across the school engage enthusiastically in a range of worthwhile leadership roles. As a result, they are fully involved in the life of the school. These experiences positively impact on pupils' their self-esteem and sense of connection with the school and wider community. These experiences prepare pupils successfully for the future.

Over time, most pupils make strong progress in improving their communication skills. Many pupils develop and improve their reading skills appropriately relative to their ability. Many pupils develop their numeracy skills suitably across the school. Overall, throughout their time in school, most pupils make suitable use of information and communication technology (ICT) to support their learning. Most pupils make strong progress in developing their physical skills. However, due to a lack of opportunity, pupils' writing skills are generally less well developed and pupils' skills in applying their numeracy skills in meaningful real-life contexts are underdeveloped also.

Where appropriate, most pupils make strong progress in developing their independence skills during their time at the school.

In the majority of lessons where teaching is most effective teachers and teaching assistants plan fun, multi-sensory experiences that capture and maintain the interest of pupils. Overall, staff have a very good understanding of the needs of pupils in their class. Learning materials and support are well matched to the individual needs of pupils in the class and build incrementally on pupils' understanding.

The school provides a comprehensive range of strategies that support pupils' identified health needs well. It works effectively with a variety of external partners to support the wide range of therapeutic and developmental needs of pupils at the school.

The governing body are clearly committed to the school and passionate about the wellbeing of the pupils. However, they do not have a detailed enough first-hand understanding of the school, its strengths, or areas for improvement.

Since the last inspection the pupil population has increased by 50%. To accommodate the increase, the school lost several valuable spaces including a sixth form common room, life skills room, a science classroom and office/meeting space. The governors and leaders of the school are naturally concerned about the proposal to increase the number of pupils further and the negative impact that this may have on current learning spaces, curriculum offer and ability to provide, for example, essential life skills for pupils.

Recommendations

- R1** Improve arrangements for self-evaluation and improvement planning, including strengthening the role of governing body
- R2** Review and develop the curriculum to meet the needs, interests, and aspirations of pupils, including providing appropriate accredited learning experiences
- R3** Improve opportunities for pupils, across the school, to develop their writing skills

What happens next

The school will draw up an action plan to address the recommendations from the inspection.

School context

Name of provider	Pen-Y-Cwm Special School
Local authority	Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council
Language of the provider	English
Type of school	Maintained Special
Number of pupils on roll	160
Pupils of statutory school age	128
Percentage of pupils eligible for free school meals over a three-year average (The national percentage of pupils eligible for free school meals over a three-year average in Maintained Special is 46.8%)	46.8%
Percentage of pupils identified as having additional learning needs (a) (The national percentage of pupils identified as having an additional learning need in Maintained Special is 100.0%)	100.0%

Date of headteacher appointment	01/01/2023
Date of previous Estyn inspection (if applicable)	30/04/2016
Start date of inspection	07/05/2024
<p>Pen Y Cwm is a day special school maintained by Blaenau Gwent local authority. The school provides education for pupils aged 4-19 with a range of additional learning needs.</p> <p>Many pupils have speech, communication, and language difficulties and/or a learning difficulty. The majority of pupils with a learning difficulty have a severe learning difficulty and around a fifth have a moderate learning difficulty. Very few have profound and multiple learning difficulties. Around half of pupils have autism. A minority have social, emotional, and behavioural needs. Very few pupils have a sensory impairment.</p> <p>There are 167 pupils on roll. Nearly all pupils have either a statement of special educational needs or a statutory individual development plan. A minority of pupils are eligible for free school meals. A very few pupils are from ethnic minority backgrounds. Pupils join the school from Blaenau Gwent and other local authorities including, Monmouthshire, Caerphilly and Newport.</p> <p>There are 31 teachers, 20 classes and 75 support staff. The school is organised into three phases: primary, secondary and post-16. Classes are group largely according to age. Within each class pupils are at one of two stages of learning. These are pre-formal, semi-formal or formal stages of learning.</p> <p>The school was last inspected in 2016 and was judged to have good standards and good prospects for improvement. Since the last inspection the school has increased the number of pupils by 50%. The current headteacher was appointed in January 2023.</p>	

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