



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

A report on

Crownbridge Special Day School

**Turnpike Road
Croesyceiliog
Cwmbran
Torfaen
NP44 2BJ**

Date of inspection: March 2022

by

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

About Crownbridge Special Day School

Name of provider	Crownbridge Special School
Local authority	Torfaen
Type of school	Special
Residential provision?	No
Multi-site provision?	Yes
Number of pupils on roll	115
Pupils of statutory school age	97
Number in nursery classes (if applicable)	.
Number in sixth form (if applicable)	15
Percentage of statutory school age pupils identified as having additional learning needs (a) <i>(The national percentage of pupils identified as having an additional learning need in the special sector is 44.5%)</i>	100%
Date of headteacher appointment	September 2021
Date of previous Estyn inspection (if applicable)	18-03-2014
Start date of inspection	28 th March 2022
Additional information	<p>Crownbridge School is the only special school in the county borough of Torfaen and provides day education for children between the ages of two and 19 across two sites. The school's catchment area comprises Torfaen, Newport and Monmouthshire. The pupils come from a wide variety of backgrounds.</p> <p>Pupils have a range of complex and multiple additional learning needs. The majority of pupils have autism and speech language and communication difficulties. In addition, around 40% of pupils have a learning difficulty and just under a third have physical and medical needs. Just under a fifth have social, emotional, and behavioural needs and a very few pupils have visual or hearing impairments.</p> <p>Many pupils attend the main site in Croesyceiliog and the remainder, attend Crownbridge's provision at a nearby primary school.</p> <p>The majority of pupils have statements of special educational needs and the remainder have non-statutory individual development</p>

	<p>plans. A very few pupils are looked-after by the local authority, or have English as an additional language. Just over half of pupils are eligible to free-school meals. All pupils are from predominantly English speaking backgrounds.</p> <p>The school employs 14 teachers and 79 support staff.</p> <p>The school was a pioneer school for languages, literacy and communication.</p> <p>The school is commissioned by the local authority to provide an outreach service to mainstream schools in the authority. This provision was not included in the inspection of the school.</p> <p>The school was last inspected in March 2014. Since that time the number of pupils on roll has increased from 95 to 116 and there are plans to increase the school by further 50 places.</p> <p>The headteacher was acting headteacher from January 2021 and appointed to the substantive post from September 2021</p>
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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

Crownbridge School continues to provide highly effective education for children and young people with complex and multiple learning needs. Staff at the school have created an inclusive and nurturing space where pupils are safe to express themselves. The involvement of pupils in, for example, decision-making is a particular strength. Staff are sensitive to the needs of pupils and pupil well-being is at the heart of the school.

The needs of pupils vary considerably, and the school makes effective provision for pupils including re-purposing rooms for individual pupils, who might otherwise have been placed in out of county specialist provision, to be taught on a one-to-one or two-to-one basis. Staff generally have a very secure understanding of the needs of the pupils and plan meaningful and enjoyable activities that allow them to make progress at an appropriate pace. In general, many pupils have very positive attitudes to learning and, with the sensitive support of staff, persevere well. As a result, pupils become increasingly confident in their learning and as individuals.

The creative skills of pupils are a particular strength. Pupils gain valuable experiences through song and dance as well as innovative art activities.

The school has adapted extremely well to the challenges of the pandemic and understands the need to re-establish previously familiar routines for pupils. Despite the need to operate strict contact groups, staff provide pupils with thoughtful and worthwhile support to help them return and many pupils attend regularly. The number of pupils on the roll of the school continues to increase and is due to increase further with the planned extension.

Leaders at the school provide a clear vision for the future that is understood well by staff. Leaders and staff have shown great resilience and flexibility during periods of significant and ongoing daily challenge. Over the period of the COVID-19 pandemic approximately 20% of school staff have been and continue to be absent. This continues to put considerable strain on ensuring appropriate staffing levels and impacts on decisions about teaching and support groups. Overall, pupils and staff have adjusted to these challenges exceptionally well and the school has remained open for all classes.

Recommendations

R1 Continue to ensure that the skills of staff are well matched to the needs of pupils

R2 Ensure that feedback is purposeful and relevant, and that it allows pupils to progress

What happens next

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

Main evaluation

Learning

Due to their complex and multiple learning needs the ability range of pupils across the school varies considerably.

The school's inclusive culture creates a nurturing space where pupils feel safe to express themselves orally. Pupils develop their oracy and communication skills in line with their ability. In general, many pupils are confident in responding to questions. Pupils are respectful and provide support and encouragement to one another. Over time and where appropriate, many pupils develop confidence in speaking and more able pupils engage willingly in extended and meaningful conversations. These more able pupils express their ideas, thoughts, and recollections very clearly. Most pupils across the school listen attentively to staff and follow instructions willingly. They generally engage in learning activities with enthusiasm

Most pupils develop appropriate reading skills. This ranges from recognising and understanding symbols and signs to independently selecting books such as the Big Friendly Giant and reading both silently, on their own and aloud to others. Many pupils, where appropriate, enjoy reading a range of genres such as science fiction and factually based materials.

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, for example in formally writing to the headteacher requesting a school trip as a reward for their hard work and effort. In another example, pupils use appropriate and imaginative adjectives such as sweet, salty and sour to describe the "disastrous dinner".

Many pupils develop appropriate number skills and, over time and where appropriate, these become more relevant to real life contexts.

Most pupils clearly enjoy identifying single numbers using a range of multi-sensory approaches and become increasingly able to recognise numbers. Over time, the majority of pupils differentiate between concepts such as big, small, long and short. Younger pupils, for example, demonstrate increasing independence in using a number line to add up three digits. Many pupils develop an appropriate understanding of the value of money. The majority of abler pupils use this knowledge wisely when budgeting for purchases in local shops. More able pupils create surveys, input data into spreadsheets, produce simple bar charts and analyse data to produce meaningful conclusions.

Over the past two years many of the more able pupils have become increasingly familiar and confident in using online platforms to communicate with teachers and their peers. For example, pupils very effectively host and present whole school assemblies. These are uplifting experiences that nearly all pupils engage in with passion, enthusiasm, and unbridled enjoyment.

Many pupils, with the support of staff, generally use communication systems that are appropriate to them including, sign, switches, symbols. Over time, pupils become increasingly confident in expressing their needs, feeling and choices such as during pupil voice sessions and in making valued contributions in answering questions and during class discussions.

Older, generally more able pupils work well in deciding what snacks and drinks to serve in the school café. Pupils allocate responsibilities to one another and carrying out tasks diligently.

The creative skills of pupils are a particular strength. Members of the school choir are enthusiastic and proud of their abilities. The majority of pupils, as part of regular activities that reinforce learning, engage very well in song and dance.

Whilst learning about aboriginal art, all pupils engaged in creating pointillism images using small, distinct dots of colour to create imaginative paintings. The artwork produced by a very few pupils is of exceptional quality.

Where appropriate many older, generally more able pupils develop worthwhile independence skills such as preparing food and cooking, using a washing machine, learning to iron and cleaning away after themselves. In addition, they attend interviews for positions of responsibility, for example managing the school café.

In addition and where appropriate, nearly all older pupils attain externally accredited courses, including the Duke of Edinburgh's Award. A few complete entry level courses in mathematics successfully. These help to prepare pupils well for their next stage of learning and adult life.

Well-being and attitudes to learning

Overall, with very few exceptions pupils engage well with staff and their peers. They accept individual difference and are supportive of one another. Most pupils' attitudes to learning are exemplary. They settle quickly and are attentive in both group and individual learning situations. Many work very effectively in small groups. The mutual support and encouragement pupils provide one another is a particular strength.

It is clear that pupils feel safe in school. The established routines and relationships between pupils and staff have created an environment in which pupils are free to express themselves safely. This has assisted greatly in re-establishing the regular attendance of many pupils following the extended periods of lockdown.

The skillful and sensitive support of staff assists pupils in understanding both their own emotions and the emotional responses of others. Based on their understanding, a minority of pupils become increasingly aware of triggers and know how to assist other pupils in keeping to the school rules "stop, think, do the right thing". Overall, pupils are sensitive, caring and kind to one another.

Pupil voice is a particular strength and continues to develop well. Pupils are passionate advocates for the areas that they represent such as eco and healthy schools, rights respecting and Criw Cymraeg.

Members of the school council gathered evidence on how difficult it was for people with disabilities to travel around their local area. Working with a university they recorded evidence to create a video presentation to educate people on how to think how their actions affected disabled people. The video was presented to the local authority council chambers and is also used by the local secondary school in their parent evenings to encourage more considerate parking. Recently the message of the project has expanded further afield with its inclusion in an Amnesty International publication "Know your rights", co-written by Angelina Jolie and launched on national television.

Owing to the coronavirus pandemic, inspectors will not report pupils' rates of attendance during the academic years 2020-2021 and 2021-2022. Inspectors will, however, consider the school's provision for monitoring and improving attendance as part of inspection area 4 (care, support and guidance).

Teaching and learning experiences

The school has used its previous role as a Welsh Government Pioneer School to design an innovative, purposeful, pupil-centred curriculum. The school's strategic approach to curriculum planning has involved contributions from all teachers. The curriculum is mapped robustly and effectively against the new requirements of the Curriculum for Wales and the areas of learning and experience.

Whilst the school places a strong focus on a collaborative planning approach, the involvement of a few teaching assistants in curriculum planning is inconsistent.

There are effective links with a number of outside organisations to ensure that pupils benefit from an extended range of valuable learning experiences and resources. For example, a few pupils access carpentry sessions at a local training provider, whilst others access riding for the disabled sessions at the local stables.

The school has a beneficial personal and social education programme that includes appropriate sex and relationship education. In addition, there are effective and robust arrangements to promote healthy eating and drinking and to develop pupils' awareness of healthy lifestyles. These include growing produce in the school garden. Pupils prepare and cook healthy meals such as harvest soup and fruit salads, which they also sell in the school's café that is open to the public. Many pupils take advantage of the extensive opportunities provided to take regular exercise such as the outdoor gym, assault courses and yoga sessions.

The school has developed effective practice in promoting the pupils' moral and cultural development. This offer includes the school Eisteddfod and assemblies that celebrate pupils' achievements. This provision and the caring, nurturing environment is carefully planned and encourages pupils to take responsibility for their actions and show consideration for others' feelings and points of view.

The school's exciting extra-curricular activities make a valued contribution towards developing pupils' self-confidence and creativity. For example, pupils enjoy visiting places of local interest such as Big Pit, the beach and the athletic stadium.

Where appropriate, for pupils that attend the school's satellite provision at Penygarn Primary school, a few pupils have opportunities to integrate into mainstream lessons. In addition, a very few older pupils at the main site access the local comprehensive school for a GCSE mathematics course.

Teachers' planning throughout the school is very thorough and generally well matched to the needs of the pupils. They plan and deliver lessons in a very purposeful manner. In a few cases, however, teaching activities for a few pupils with more complex needs do not engage the pupils well enough. This results in a lack of challenge and pupil disengagement.

Relationships and interactions between staff and pupils are highly effective. Almost all staff manage the behaviour of the pupils very well. However, on a few occasions the behaviour of a few pupils interferes with the learning of others.

Most teachers and staff make successful use of the school's communication approaches to promote effective interaction with pupils. There are valuable and beneficial opportunities for older pupils to apply their knowledge and skills in real life situations, through the school's independent living skills space and on-site café that is accessible to the local community. Teaching staff provide a range of valuable opportunities that allow pupils to express their feelings and emotions in ways that are appropriate to them. The provision for the development of communication, pupil independence and independent living skills is a strength of the school.

Staff manage transitions across the school skilfully using schedules, visual cues and songs. The opportunities for transition are constructed well by staff, which gives pupils authentic and important learning opportunities. As a result, many pupils are well prepared to move around school and between activities calmly, such as from a soft play activity into a more formal lesson. Despite effective and thorough planning to meet the communication needs of pupils, the use of schedules and visual cues is underdeveloped in a few classes.

Nearly all staff use incidental Welsh and signing well. Nearly all teachers make effective use of ICT and multimedia resources to enhance and enrich the quality of teaching.

Many staff use questioning particularly well to move pupils on in their learning at an appropriate pace. Teachers manage incorrect answers skilfully and are sensitive to pupils' feelings whilst explaining corrections. Feedback to pupils is a positive feature in many lessons. Across the school, teachers mark pupils' work regularly. They annotate work to ensure that others working with the pupils know what they have done well. However, teachers do not always use written feedback well enough to make it clear what pupils need to do to improve their learning.

The school has well-established assessment systems that are used to record pupils' progress and behaviour. These effective recording procedures are continually updated to ensure that all staff working with the pupils have a wealth of useful information. This supports teachers' planning and helps staff to implement appropriate teaching strategies to enhance the outcomes for most pupils.

Parents are kept well informed about their child's progress and achievements through home to school diaries, phone calls and meetings. Annual school reports to parents are detailed and informative. They include a range of data, photographs and next steps in learning.

Care, support and guidance

Crownbridge School is a caring and nurturing community that provides valuable care, support and guidance for its pupils. Pupils' well-being is at the heart of all aspects of the school's work. Staff are sensitive to pupils' needs and consistently promote a positive culture based on the school's core aims of "dignity, respect and independence". This caring atmosphere contributes well to pupils' positive levels of well-being, their personal development, and the standards that they achieve from their initial starting points.

The school communicates with parents very effectively and recognises and values the strength of the relationship with parents. The school supports families to identify and practise communication strategies that are beneficial to pupils both at school and at home. In addition, the school's family liaison officer offers extremely valuable and empathetic support to families. This includes a "listening service" and coffee mornings, which are valued by parents.

The school monitors pupils' wellbeing, attendance and behaviour effectively and pupils look forward to their exciting reward sessions. In addition, the school provides beneficial and supportive interventions. This includes repurposing rooms to provide more appropriate learning spaces for the very few pupils who need high levels of staff supervision and support to meet their individual and highly complex emotional needs.

Pupils' person-centred profiles and individual development plans are purposeful and include beneficial targets, which are reviewed regularly. These plans include useful approaches to promote pupils' learning and well-being. The plans are shared well with staff and many teachers use this information effectively in their teaching and planning. The school has appropriate systems to monitor pupils' progress against their individual targets. The school works well with pupils, parents and external agencies in developing and reviewing individual plans to meet and support additional learning needs. As a result, pupils have access to specialist advice and support where required.

The school prepares pupils well in their transition to adult life. It provides beneficial information and guidance regarding options available to pupils in their next steps. Close links with local colleges and other agencies enrich the provision in this area. As a result, pupils are well supported to access future learning and work-related experiences.

The school offers pupils valuable opportunities to take part in decision-making about important aspects of school life and within the community. The school's "Our voice" pupil group celebrates diversity and encourages empathy and inclusion throughout the school and within the locality. For example, pupils have contributed to a community project relating to issues of access for disabled people. Pupils presented their ideas to local councillors in the Council chamber.

There is an assured ethos of safeguarding at the school, which impacts positively on pupils' well-being. There are robust safeguarding processes in place to report safeguarding concerns, and the school makes timely referrals to outside agencies when appropriate. Staff are conscious of school measures and of their duties and responsibilities regarding safeguarding.

All staff undertake regular safeguarding training at an appropriate level. Staff are supported to respond appropriately and sensitively to any safeguarding concerns.

The school has sound safe recruitment procedures and ensures that all new members of staff receive safeguarding information upon appointment

Leadership and management

Leaders at Crownbridge have provided dedicated support and leadership throughout a time of great challenge for the school. They continue to face extremely high levels of operational challenge on a daily basis, in part due to the ongoing impact of the pandemic. Leaders have demonstrated resilience and flexibility in order to effectively ensure the well-being and safety of both pupils and staff at the school.

Since her appointment, the headteacher has developed a clear vision for the school. She developed this 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 in Crownbridge, as well as the wider work of the school.

Leaders have a sensitive and meaningful approach to managing staff well-being. They use beneficial processes to listen to the staff team and make positive changes, for example through the work of the well-established staff wellbeing team. As a result, most staff feel well supported by leaders at the school.

School governors have an appropriate range of skills and knowledge, which allows them to offer suitable support and challenge to leaders at the school. They draw on expertise from their other roles, for example within social services, the police and local authority. As a result, they bring worthwhile expertise to their roles, for example through their careful evaluation of the school's budget and advocating on behalf of the school with the local authority in relation to the funding formula. Leaders at the school ensure that grants are used effectively.

The headteacher and governors have a good understanding of current school priorities. Due to the high level of current operational demand, leaders are making changes to the systems and processes for planning for school evaluation and improvement. These are in the early stages of development.

Leaders continue to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic swiftly and effectively to support pupils' learning. Where pupils struggled on their return to school following lockdown, appropriate interventions were quickly identified to support their re-engagement with learning. Staff continue to evaluate the impact of these initiatives and adapt and refine practice to support all learners.

Leaders ensure that all stakeholders participate well in the current process of self-evaluation and improvement planning. Most pupils feel that staff listen to their

feedback about their school. As a result, pupils have designed and planned the “Woodland Area”. Nearly all staff feel that they contribute to self-evaluation processes.

The school engages successfully with a wide range of partners to evaluate the impact of developments at the schools such as the role of the family liaison officer. They evaluate the impact of established approaches carefully, using parent feedback meaningfully to inform these evaluations.

Leaders have developed highly effective strategic partnership working with a range of relevant stakeholders to improve opportunities and outcomes for pupils. For example, links with local mainstream schools support integration with mainstream peers and provide pupils with opportunities to extend their learning.

Leaders at the school have responded very successfully in trialling innovative approaches to the curriculum such as curriculum design and its assessment strategy. As a result of this work, the school has presented to both national and local audiences. In addition, the school's approaches in developing pupil voice as part of the person-centred practice model have been shared widely with other schools and practitioners.

The school uses its resources effectively to meet the additional needs of most pupils. Leaders have used spaces creatively within the school to meet the challenging social and emotional needs of pupils who struggle to work alongside their peers. However, a very few classes are overcrowded.

Leaders have created a culture at the school that is reflective and includes purposeful professional enquiry. For example, the school assessment professional enquiry group has completed research, reviewed practice in other schools and consulted with stakeholders at the school to review the effectiveness of the assessments at the school.

Leaders promote and support the professional learning of all staff well. Staff benefit from a wide range of high-quality professional learning opportunities to improve their performance. These enable staff to gain valuable knowledge and skills in important and relevant areas such as autism, behaviour management and specialist communication approaches. Activities align closely to the school's and national priorities.

Planned professional development reviews and performance management meetings enable staff to identify training needs to raise standards and improve provision.

Leaders have responded appropriately to recommendations from the last core inspection.

Evidence base of the report

Before an inspection, inspectors:

- analyse the outcomes from the parent/carer and pupil questionnaires and consider the views of teachers and the governing body 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, senior and middle leaders (where appropriate) and individual teachers to evaluate the impact of the school's work
- meet pupils to discuss their work, to listen to them read 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 a broad sample of classes, including learning support groups and undertake a variety of learning walks to observe pupils learning and to see staff teaching in a range of settings, including classrooms, support groups and in outdoor areas
- where appropriate, visit the specialist resource base within the school to see pupils' learning
- observe and speak to pupils at lunch and break times and at a sample of after-school clubs, where appropriate
- attend assemblies and daily acts of collective worship
- 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 has 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, information on pupils' wellbeing, 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 (www.estyn.gov.wales)

The report was produced in accordance with Section 28 of the Education Act 2005.

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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