



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

**A report on**

**Portfield School  
Off Portfield  
Haverfordwest  
Pembrokeshire  
SA61 1BS**

**Date of inspection: November 2019**

**by**

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

## About Portfield School

Portfield School is situated in the town of Haverfordwest in Pembrokeshire and provides education for pupils with statements of special educational needs (SEN) aged between three and nineteen years. The school caters for pupils with a range of special educational needs, including severe learning difficulties, profound and multiple learning difficulties and autistic spectrum disorder, as well as various genetic disorders, physical and sensory difficulties.

There are currently 158 pupils on roll. Pupils come from a large catchment area across the county of Pembrokeshire and a very few come from a neighbouring local authority. Nearly all pupils have a statement of SEN or an education, health and care plan. Around 38% of all pupils receive free school meals. A very few pupils speak Welsh as their first language. A very few pupils are looked after by the local authority.

It is not appropriate to compare the standards that pupils achieve at the school with national averages or to analyse the performance trends of groups of pupils over time because of the nature of pupils' special educational needs.

The main school campus consists of a primary school in the lower school building and a secondary school in the upper school building. In addition to the provision on the Portfield School campus, the school operates two satellite classes at local secondary schools. These include a class at Haverfordwest High VC School and a class at Ysgol y Preseli which is predominantly English medium with significant use of Welsh. The school also runs an outreach support service for the local authority which supports mainstream schools and learning resource centres to support pupils with SEN. This service was not in scope during the inspection.

An interim headteacher joined the school in September 2018 and was appointed to the permanent post in March 2019. The school was last inspected in March 2013.

The school is a curriculum pioneer school.

Further information is available from the Welsh Government My Local School website at the link below.  
<http://mylocalschool.wales.gov.uk/Schools/SchoolSearch?lang=en>

## Summary

Portfield School is a happy and successful school where pupils feel safe and thrive. Pupils take great pride in their school and most develop as confident learners who improve their physical and emotional resilience particularly well during their time at the school. Nearly all pupils treat each other with respect and many show extremely caring attitudes and empathy to each other and staff.

In relation to their individual needs and abilities, nearly all pupils make strong progress over time against their personal targets. They make particularly effective progress in the development of their independence, communication and social skills. This progress helps them to become more confident learners and promotes their ability to live more independently in the future. Teachers' planning for the development of these skills is a strength of the school.

The school works exceptionally well with the external specialist services available to it to provide an integrated approach to meeting pupils' needs and to ensure that teachers and learning support staff have the strategies to support pupils' learning. As a result, the school provides an extremely high level of care, support and guidance.

Leaders and staff have established a clear vision for the school that sets high aspirations for the personal development of all pupils and is well understood by all members of the school community. The strength of the school's ethos and its effective systems for support and care have a very positive impact on outcomes for pupils.

<b>Inspection area</b>	<b>Judgement</b>
<b>Standards</b>	<b>Excellent</b>
<b>Wellbeing and attitudes to learning</b>	<b>Excellent</b>
<b>Teaching and learning experiences</b>	<b>Good</b>
<b>Care, support and guidance</b>	<b>Excellent</b>
<b>Leadership and management</b>	<b>Good</b>

## **Recommendations**

- R1 Address the health and safety issue identified during the inspection
- R2 Improve the consistency of teaching and learning support so that all practice matches the best in the school
- R3 Ensure that quality assurance processes focus clearly on the quality of teaching and the assessment of pupils' work

## **What happens next**

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

Estyn will invite the school to prepare two case studies for dissemination on Estyn's website on its work in relation to the school's planning for the development of pupils' independence skills, and how the school prepares pupils, parents and stakeholders to contribute to person-centred planning.

## Main findings

### **Standards: Excellent**

Nearly all pupils who attend Portfield School make strong progress from their individual starting points in relation to the targets on their personal plans. Despite the wide variation in the nature and complexity of their needs, the progress that pupils make during their time at the school, supports the development of their wellbeing and independence very effectively.

Nearly all pupils develop extremely worthwhile independence and life skills in relation to their individual needs and abilities. For example, older pupils develop valuable housekeeping skills that promote their ability to live more independently. These include how to use an iron and ironing board safely, learning to shop within a budget and how to prepare healthy food.

Older pupils improve their understanding of the world of work through an extensive range of well-planned enterprise activities and work experience placements. For example, they learn to use carpentry tools at a joinery company to upcycle furniture, make bird boxes and wooden planters, and to practise catering and customer service skills in a local café and charity shop.

Younger pupils and those with more complex needs make equally strong progress over time in developing their independence skills. For example, they support familiar routines in class by distributing items to their peers, fetching the equipment they need and clearing up after themselves after learning activities or at the end of break and meal times. Pupils in the foundation phase and key stage 2 develop their cooking skills from an early age by stirring and mixing ingredients and kneading the dough to make bread.

Across the school most pupils make highly effective progress in improving their communication skills. Pupils with complex needs communicate successfully using switches, voice output machines and eye-gaze technology. Pupils who require support to communicate verbally use a range of strategies including gesture, signing and symbols confidently to make choices and demonstrate their understanding.

In many lessons, pupils make secure progress towards their learning goals. They settle quickly to tasks and recall prior learning effectively. Most pupils listen carefully to the instructions they receive in class and respond enthusiastically to the guidance they receive from staff.

Many pupils make strong progress in their reading and writing skills in relation to their individual starting points. Key stage 2 pupils read simple written instructions well, for example, when making a sandwich, or follow sequences of symbols to support their ability to complete the task with suitable independence. Many more able pupils improve their handwriting skills and use correct grammar in longer pieces of writing that describe what they have done at the weekend or a visit to the school by the local authority's director of children and schools.

Most pupils develop their numeracy skills very well and use these constructively in contexts that help them significantly to become more independent. For example, they consolidate their understanding of weights and measures and apply this successfully

when preparing food, or when estimating the volume of liquid needed to fill containers of different sizes. More able pupils improve their coin recognition and money handling skills, and collect and record simple data sets which they use to create Venn diagrams and bar graphs.

Many pupils use information and communication technology successfully to extend and support their learning. For example, more able older pupils re-draft their written work to produce presentations that incorporate text and images or use digital technology to produce short films that they link to QR codes for inclusion in their 'All About Me' scrapbooks. Younger pupils use interactive floor projectors to explore the relationship between cause and effect as they learn more about topics such as the seasons and the weather.

Many pupils develop their creativity skills assuredly in line with their abilities through engaging activities such as participating in sensory stories, or writing, filming and presenting a weather forecast. They respond confidently to problem-solving tasks that require them to make appropriate choices and identify what materials they need to complete their tasks.

Many pupils participate enthusiastically in activities that develop their physical strength and resilience such as swimming, horse riding and camping expeditions. Pupils with restricted movement make strong progress in improving their co-ordination and physical responses through valuable programmes of physiotherapy, hydrotherapy and rebound therapy.

Many pupils across the school make suitable progress in developing their understanding of the Welsh language in relation to their needs and background. Nearly all pupils who attend the satellite class at Ysgol y Preseli develop valuable bilingual skills and interact confidently with their peers in Welsh and English.

Nearly all pupils in key stage 4 and key stage 5 achieve a beneficial range of accreditation in relevant areas that reinforce successfully their literacy, numeracy, independence and social skills. Over the last three years, all pupils have progressed to further education, specialist residential college, adult service provision or employment.

### **Wellbeing and attitudes to learning: Excellent**

Nearly all pupils at Portfield School are happy and settled. They feel safe and secure in the calm environment the school provides and take great pride in their school. Many pupils respond warmly and politely to visitors to the school. They are eager to learn more about them and to share their own achievements with them.

Nearly all pupils develop extremely positive relationships with each other and with staff. They treat each other with significant respect and many show caring attitudes and empathy to each other and to staff. Many carry out unprompted spontaneous acts of kindness, for example, helping another pupil to carry their possessions to the bus or assisting other pupils at lunchtime to cut up their food.

In relation to their needs and abilities, most pupils develop as confident learners who become increasingly independent in their learning as they move through the school. Most pupils engage enthusiastically in their learning, show sustained levels of concentration and focus particularly well in lessons. Many pupils develop their

resilience significantly as they move through the school. They persist with tasks and, with sensitive encouragement from staff, understand that making mistakes can help them learn and react positively to them.

Most pupils understand and follow the routines established for lessons, assemblies and movement around the school calmly and confidently. Nearly all behave very well in lessons and around the school throughout the day. Many wait patiently and take turns appropriately, for example, in the dining hall when queuing for their lunch, or taking their plates and cutlery back to the trolley. Older pupils take responsibility for planning and preparing learning activities together.

During their time at the school, many pupils develop very effectively as responsible citizens who engage successfully in their community and take pride in the contributions they make. For example, they volunteer in the community to create accessible outdoor spaces for people with restricted mobility. The school council has a strong profile, and many pupils take on leadership roles with increasing confidence. Members of the school council carry out worthwhile activities to improve the school environment, for example, by organising a litter pick.

Older pupils act as beneficial role models to younger pupils. They provide helpful support in physical education lessons, and at break times. This approach develops their confidence and self-esteem very effectively. The 'Tech Team' pupil group produces valuable resources to promote online safety and a few pupils have contributed to a youth safeguarding conference.

Many pupils have a strong understanding of the importance of a healthy diet and exercise. They make healthy food choices and take part enthusiastically in physical activities. For example, pupils in key stages 3 and 4 regularly plan and prepare healthy meals, they eat together, and during meals display exemplary table manners and well-developed conversational skills. Pupils across the school take part energetically in physical activities, such as boccia, circuit training and country dancing, and improve their skills and spatial awareness well.

### **Teaching and learning experiences: Good**

The school provides a broad and stimulating curriculum that meets the needs of nearly all learners successfully. Leaders have reviewed and started to amend their approach to the curriculum to ensure that it meet the requirements of learners with the most complex needs and addresses suitably the national educational reform agenda. This new approach is at an early stage.

Many teachers work together closely to produce a coherent curriculum which focuses suitably on developing pupils' real life skills and independence. For example, they plan rich and engaging learning tasks each half-term that emphasise the development of these skills in purposeful contexts. This consistent focus on developing pupils' independence links well to purposeful accreditation for older pupils and is a strong feature of the school's work.

Older pupils have valuable opportunities to participate in work-related education and work experience. The school has increased the range of partnerships it offers pupils, including a respite centre, a community charity shop and a local furniture upcycling social enterprise. These opportunities enable pupils to develop their skills in a highly beneficial variety of real-life contexts, promoting independence and lifelong learning effectively. This is a very successful feature of the work of the school.

Pupils benefit from a wide range of exciting and worthwhile opportunities to develop their skills outside of the classroom. For example, the Shakespeare for Schools Festival enables pupils to improve their literacy and communication skills, while building their confidence and teamwork in front of a live audience. The curriculum promotes pupil participation in many purposeful conservational and ecological activities locally, such as litter picking in nearby woodlands, and tree planting with the park ranger in the Pembrokeshire Coast National Park. This work, accredited through The Duke of Edinburgh's Award, acknowledges and rewards a wide range of skills and abilities, leading to valuable accreditation for pupils.

The school's strategic planning to develop pupils' skills across the curriculum is effective and purposeful. For example, learning support assistants and teachers, supported by external specialist services, work together closely to meet pupils' communication needs well. This support includes helpful communication approaches such as sign language, symbols and the use of tablet communication devices. Pupils have worthwhile opportunities to develop their digital skills through a range of well-planned activities. For example, pupils in key stage 4 use software effectively to create animation relating to an expressive arts project on the legend of Excalibur.

The provision for pupils to learn about Welsh culture, heritage and values is appropriate. The school has won national awards that promote Welsh culture and heritage over many years, and a few pupils experience success in competitions at the Urdd Eisteddfod.

Most teachers and learning support assistants develop productive and caring working relationships with pupils. This approach creates a consistently calm learning environment across the school that supports the positive behaviour of nearly all pupils. Working closely together, staff create beneficial routines that enable pupils to work together collaboratively, confidently and with growing independence. They support pupils thoughtfully to develop their emotional and physical resilience.

In many lessons, teachers have high expectations of pupils' work and behaviour. In these lessons, teachers set meaningful objectives, plan interesting and engaging tasks and use a suitable range of resources to support teaching and learning. They also plan relevant opportunities to develop pupils' communication, literacy and numeracy skills. However, in a few lessons, the pace of learning is too slow. As a result there are missed opportunities to engage pupils effectively. In addition, on a few occasions staff are too quick to intervene to support pupils. This inhibits the development of pupils' independence.

Nearly all staff make effective use of a range of communication strategies when supporting pupils with their learning. They use these strategies skilfully to provide helpful feedback to pupils in lessons in ways that meet their individual needs and abilities. Many teachers provide suitable written feedback that is specific to the pupil and helps them understand what they need to do to improve. In these cases, pupils respond well. However, in a few cases, the purpose of written feedback is unclear.

## **Care, support and guidance: Excellent**

Staff at the school provide an extremely high level of care, support, and guidance for their pupils. They apply the school's robust policies consistently, which supports pupils' learning outcomes and wellbeing very successfully.

The school has well-established processes which enable staff to track and monitor pupil progress highly effectively. There are a purposeful range of assessments that are well-matched to pupils' needs and abilities. Leaders and teaching staff use the outcomes of these assessments expertly to ensure their planning of the curriculum provides valuable learning experiences for nearly all pupils. The school has recently refined its tracking system to introduce the tracking of communication skills to strengthen the monitoring process. This initiative is in the early stages of development. Procedures for tracking and monitoring attendance are robust.

The school has very strong systems in place to set, track and monitor pupils' individual education plan (IEP) targets. There are strong links between the objectives in pupils' statements, the setting of IEP targets and teachers' planning. This robust process provides nearly all pupils with worthwhile opportunities to make progress during their time at the school. Annual review meetings use person-centred approaches exceptionally well and the school supports pupils and parents extremely effectively to contribute fully to the process. This has significantly strengthened pupils' involvement in their own learning. This work is a powerful aspect of the school's provision.

The school works exceptionally well with a range of professionals to enhance pupil outcomes. This includes physiotherapists, speech and language therapists and assistants, occupational therapists, and representatives from the local authority and Careers Wales. The involvement and contribution of these professionals to annual review meetings strengthen this process significantly. As a result, pupil information is shared effectively and targets for improvement are set jointly to provide an integrated approach to meeting pupil needs. However, the availability of these services to the school and families is inconsistent.

Staff know their pupils very well. They provide carefully considered opportunities for pupils to develop their communication skills. The focus on this aspect enables nearly all pupils to develop their independence skills very effectively as they progress through the school. Staff provide exceptionally positive role models for pupils. They promote consistently the school's values and a culture of tolerance and respect. As a result, most pupils develop a strong sense of caring towards others and demonstrate acts of kindness as they go about their school life. Staff promote a strong sense of being part of a community to which pupils respond very positively. Consequently, nearly all pupils build high levels of trust, cooperation, and positive attitudes about themselves and others.

Communication with and support for parents is highly developed. The school has a range of effective communication systems in place, including the use of social media, apps and newsletters to keep parents well informed. Links with parents are significantly strengthened through the role of the school's parent community engagement officer who provides a helpful single point of contact for all parents. The school offers highly beneficial social activities to engage parents in the learning of

their child such as coffee mornings, and fund-raising events at Christmas. The school provides an extremely effective training programme for parents to share learning and behaviour strategies between home and school. This is valued greatly by parents.

The school ensures that there are meaningful opportunities for pupils to contribute fully to the life of the school. There are well-established opportunities for all pupils to take part in the school council, eco committee, and the 'Tech Team'. The school strongly promotes pupil involvement in other activities to develop their confidence and social skills, including drama activities, educational visits to develop team-building skills and access to sports events. As a result, most pupils improve their confidence during their time at the school.

There is a robust and well-established personal, social education programme across the school, which is particularly effective in supporting pupils' development of personal and social skills. Throughout the school day, staff deliver this programme skilfully. For example, they support pupils' understanding about making healthy food choices, the dangers of alcohol, tobacco and substance misuse. This approach promotes effectively the development of pupils' skills for life, preparing them well as they progress through the school and towards adulthood.

The school's arrangements for safeguarding pupils meet requirements, although measures in place for the management of traffic around the school site require improvement.

### **Leadership and management: Good**

In recent years, the school has faced increased challenges resulting from changes to the leadership team and the growing complexity of the learning needs of its pupils. In addition, the school is managing the limitations of its site and buildings. Despite these challenges, the school has maintained a strong focus on its core purpose and ensuring that systems and provision support its work effectively.

The headteacher, senior leadership team and staff team have established a shared vision based on providing pupils with the personal and communication skills needed for adult life. This vision sets high aspirations for the personal development of all pupils. It is well understood and embraced by the whole school community. Working together, staff have developed a strong ethos and effective systems for the support and care of pupils. These have a very positive impact on outcomes for pupils.

The leadership team has revised approaches to the development of language and communication skills, tracking and the curriculum, and is currently reviewing their specific roles and responsibilities. It is too early to assess the impact of these developments on outcomes and provision.

There are beneficial arrangements for staff to meet weekly to discuss the progress of pupils, aspects of teaching, training needs and to plan together. These arrangements ensure that there is a strong and consistent focus on the school's core purpose and its development priorities. They provide the leadership team with effective oversight of the work of the staff and enable them to monitor progress in meeting priorities.

The school bases its development priorities appropriately on meeting the increasing needs of the pupils within the limitations of the site, addressing national priorities and the careful evaluation of available data on pupil progress. Leaders use the findings from quality assurance activities well to ensure the provision for individual pupils meets their needs. However, the use of lesson observations and learning walks to evaluate the impact of specific aspects of teaching and assessment of pupils' work is underdeveloped.

There are effective strategic partnerships with parents and a wide range of external providers, including local employers, other schools and the college. The school is proactive in seeking partners to support its priorities and works well with them to strengthen its curriculum and support provision.

Staff professional learning opportunities are regular, well-organised and balance suitably the need for training to support the personal and day-to-day needs of pupils with that to support the school's improvement priorities. For example, recently training has focused on the development of pupils' language and communication skills. There is also a strong focus on supporting the wellbeing of staff and developing the leadership capacity of all staff. Senior leaders ensure that responsibilities are shared appropriately and staff have the support and training needed to fulfil their roles and to improve their professional expertise.

Governors are developing a sound understanding of the priorities for development and the key issues for the school. They are supportive of the school and are developing their role suitably as a critical friend.

The newer purpose built upper school building has large classrooms and outdoor spaces that are generally well organised and resourced to support learning appropriately. However, overall, there are shortcomings to the school site, with limited space and accommodation available to meet fully the numbers and needs of pupils. In particular, the older lower school building is cramped and not all classrooms provide suitable sensory spaces. Despite these limitations, the staff create a calm and orderly learning environment, which pupils respond to positively.

There are sufficient well-qualified and experienced teachers, and leaders deploy these effectively to meet the needs of pupils in the different classes. The school has a large number of support staff who provide very effective care and assistance to pupils.

The leadership team and governors scrutinise the budget carefully. They ensure that spending supports school priorities. The school has detailed plans for the use of the various grants including the pupil development grant. The evaluation of the impact of these grants is under-developed.

## Copies of the report

Before an inspection, inspectors:

- analyse the outcomes from parent and pupil questionnaires and consider the views of teaching, support staff and the governing body through their questionnaire responses

During an inspection, inspectors normally:

- hold a meeting with parents 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 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, where appropriate
- visit lessons and undertake a variety of learning walks to observe pupils learning and to see staff teaching in a range of settings
- observe and speak to pupils at lunch and break times and at a sample of after-school clubs
- 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](http://www.estyn.gov.wales))

Estyn evaluates a provider's effectiveness using a four-point judgement scale:

<b>Excellent</b>	Very strong, sustained performance and practice
<b>Good</b>	Strong features, although minor aspects may require improvement
<b>Adequate and needs improvement</b>	Strengths outweigh weaknesses, but important aspects require improvement
<b>Unsatisfactory and needs urgent improvement</b>	Important weaknesses outweigh strengths

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 going to press. Any enquiries or comments regarding this document/publication should be addressed to:

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