

A report on
Pathways Learning

Unit 12
Mold Business Park
Wrexham Road
Mold
Flintshire
CH7 1XP

Date of inspection: February 2026

by

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

This report is also available in Welsh

About Pathways Learning

Name of provider	Pathways Learning
Proprietor status	Limited company
Language of the provider	English
Type of school	Independent special
Residential provision?	No
Number of pupils on roll	15
Pupils of statutory school age	15
Date of previous Estyn inspection (if applicable)	{PreviousInspectionDate}
Start date of inspection	04/02/2026

School context

Pathways Learning is an independent day school for up to 20 pupils between the ages of 5 and 16 years of age who have a diagnosis of autistic spectrum condition (ASC).

The school is set on a business park in Mold, Flintshire. The school is a limited company, and the proprietors currently also own a tuition provision.

There are currently 15 pupils on roll at the school. All pupils have additional learning needs and have individual development plans maintained by commissioning local authorities. None of the pupils are care-experienced.

This is the school's first monitoring inspection since registration. The current headteacher took up the post in November 2024 and is supported by 2 teachers, an ALNCo, 4 part-time teachers and three teaching assistants.

Summary

Pathways Learning provides a calm and welcoming learning environment emphasising emotional security where nearly all pupils make good progress from their starting points. The school has carefully considered learning areas where pupils engage well in a range of meaningful activities, including practical work that builds subject knowledge alongside enquiry and problem-solving skills.

Pupils speak warmly about the school and describe feeling valued and heard. They show growing self-belief and are increasingly able to make choices, express their views and take responsibility. Activities such as involvement in the student council and learning about rights help strengthen pupil confidence and a sense of belonging.

A broad and balanced curriculum is personalised to promote pupil engagement and achievement. The school provides a wide range of learning experiences in line with the Curriculum for Wales, supported by effective partnerships such as outdoor learning and visiting speakers. Older pupils work towards suitable qualifications, including GCSEs.

Staff have a strong understanding of individual pupils and use this effectively to plan learning and provide tailored support. Pupils benefit from access to specialist therapeutic services provided by the school and wider health services.

A carefully planned phased approach to transitioning into school has helped improve attendance, although this remains a challenge for a small number of pupils.

Policies that support the running of the school meet legislative requirements but do not fully convey the practice developed to meet pupils' needs and the unique context of the setting.

On the basis of this inspection, there is no evidence that the school does not comply with the Independent Schools Standards (Wales) Regulations 2024

Main evaluation

Pathways Learning is a nurturing and supportive school for pupils with autism and anxiety that prioritises wellbeing and emotional safety. The school's well-resourced learning spaces include informal areas to support pupils to self-regulate effectively. This strong pupil-centred ethos emphasises acceptance and respect. The school benefits from a range of therapeutic support including play therapy, speech and language, occupational therapy and psychotherapy. The school provides a small outdoor area.

Pupils feel safe and listened to, they speak positively about their experiences, show pride in their school and demonstrate increasing autonomy and self-advocacy. Opportunities such as the student council, caring for animals, and discussions around their rights support pupils' sense of responsibility and belonging.

Individual pupil interests and aspirations inform curriculum planning. Teaching is flexible, well planned and appropriately differentiated, enabling pupils to engage at their own level and experience success. Learning activities are engaging and age-appropriate, for example in science and creative subjects, pupils develop subject knowledge alongside practical and problem-solving skills.

Staff use their strong knowledge of pupils highly effectively to plan personalised learning and support engagement. Staff are highly responsive to pupils, for example learning support assistants identify the most appropriate times to engage pupils in focused interventions based on their understanding of pupils' behaviour and emotional needs.

The curriculum is suitably broad and provides learning and skills development across the areas of learning and experience of the Curriculum for Wales. This is strengthened through partnerships, for example through weekly outdoor education sessions or speakers who visit the school to provide careers advice. Older pupils work towards a range of appropriate awards and qualifications, including GCSEs.

Nearly all pupils make secure progress in developing key skills. For example, pupils use digital tools confidently to research information, complete quizzes, analyse results and develop basic data-handling skills.

Most pupils communicate positively with peers, staff and visitors, showing strong progress in social interaction and independence since joining the school. When in lessons, nearly all pupils demonstrate positive attitudes to learning.

Spotlight: Building emotional literacy through targeted talk

At Pathways Learning, learning support assistants (LSAs) deliver fifteen-minute-long interventions to build pupils' communication skills and understanding of emotions and behaviour. Working at a time when pupils feel safe and calm, the LSA shares a brief scenario that is discussed together.

This can be demonstrated by the LSA reading a short text describing two young people in a group of three friends talking about a day trip they had been on together to watch motorcycle racing. The LSA then asks questions about what could be assumed from the story and the wider context. For example, that at least two of friends enjoyed motorcross; that listening to the conversations of others in this kind of situation is appropriate; and that individuals have different interests that they care about.

These interventions allow pupils to extend thinking through talking and listening. Over time, pupils become more able to infer meaning from written text, visual prompts, tone and actions in stories, and increasingly use appropriate emotional language to explain their reasoning. This approach helps pupils to strengthen their understanding and use of language, the ability to interpret and answer questions related to social scenarios and develop emotional literacy through calm, purposeful engagement in learning.

Nearly all pupils have experienced poor attendance and limited engagement in compulsory education resulting in prolonged absences from structured formal learning. Since opening, the school has taken great care to plan the transition of each pupil into their new learning environments through rebuilding trust and confidence to re-engage with learning. Leaders have a detailed understanding of the barriers their individual pupils experience and use a breadth of highly personalised approaches including working effectively with parents and wider stakeholders to enable gradual increasing attendance.

As a result, nearly all pupils make strong improvements in their attendance over time compared to previous settings. However, a minority of pupils do not attend regularly enough to make consistent progress.

The school has robust systems in place to track pupils' academic progress, well-being and additional learning needs. The school ALNCo oversees and monitors a wide range of beneficial interventions to support pupils' learning and well-being. This strong collaboration with teaching and support staff effectively supports improvements in targeted areas such as communication and fine motor skills.

Leaders have developed a skilled and committed staff team. They model respectful relationships and consistently promote inclusion and ambitious aspirations for all pupils. Staff feel well supported by leaders and value the strong teamwork and communication across the school.

Leaders have developed a suite of policies to guide the work of the school, with appropriate reference to Welsh Government guidance. However, these do not consistently reflect the unique context or the strong personalised practice evident across the school.

Leaders are developing a strong safeguarding culture at the school and staff have a secure understanding of the importance of their role in keeping pupils safe. Leaders have established clear systems, ensuring regular training is in place and that pupil safety and wellbeing are at the heart of all decisions.

Close collaboration with the co-located tuition service enhances opportunities for both staff and pupils. Staff benefit from a range of professional learning that ensures they have the skills and knowledge to effectively understand and meet pupils needs.

On the basis of this inspection, there is no evidence that the school does not comply with the Independent Schools Standards (Wales) Regulations 2024.

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 2024. These regulations require an independent school to meet an appropriate standard in the following areas:

The quality of education provided by the school

On the basis of this inspection, there is no evidence that the school does not comply with this standard.

The spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils

On the basis of this inspection, there is no evidence that the school does not comply with this standard.

Welfare, health and safety of pupils

On the basis of this inspection, there is no evidence that the school does not comply with this standard.

The suitability of proprietors and staff

On the basis of this inspection, there is no evidence that the school does not comply with this standard.

Premises of and boarding accommodation at schools

On the basis of this inspection, there is no evidence that the school does not comply with this standard.

The provision of information

On the basis of this inspection, there is no evidence that the school does not comply with this standard.

The manner in which complaints are to be handled

On the basis of this inspection, there is no evidence that the school does not comply with this standard.

New recommendations

We have made one recommendation to help the school continue to improve:

- R1 Strengthen the school's policies to ensure they reflect consistently its specialist provision and provide clear guidance

Safeguarding

The school's arrangements for safeguarding pupils do not give any cause for concern.

What happens next

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

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

Appendix 1: Numbers – quantities and proportions

The report makes references to different quantities and proportions e.g. '*most pupils...*' or '*very few pupils...*'. We use these terms to describe quantities and proportions as outlined in the table below:

nearly all =	with very few exceptions
most =	90% or more
many =	70% or more
a majority =	over 60%
half =	50%
around half =	close to 50%
a minority =	below 40%
few =	below 20%
very few =	less than 10%

Copies of the report

Copies of this report are available from the school and from the Estyn website (<http://www.estyn.gov.wales/>)

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 (Wales) Regulations 2024. 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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Publication date: 10/04/2026