

A report on

Talocher School

**Wonastow Road
Monmouth
Monmouthshire
NP25 4DN**

Date of inspection: March 2026

by

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

About Talocher School

Name of provider	Talocher School
Proprietor status	Aspris Children's Services (part of the portfolio of the Waterland group)
Language of the provider	English
Type of school	Independent ALN specialist
Residential provision?	No
Number of pupils on roll	37
Pupils of statutory school age	36
Date of previous Estyn inspection (if applicable)	13/12/2023
Start date of inspection	16/03/2026

School context:

Talocher School is an independent school specifically organised to provide additional learning provision for pupils with autistic spectrum condition (ASC), social, emotional mental health needs (SEMH), and associated needs. The school is located on the outskirts of Monmouth, and is administered by Aspris Children's Services, which is part of the portfolio of the Waterland group, a private equity investment company.

The school's mission is to empower learners through meaningful and engaging learning experiences, developing their independence, resilience and communication skills.

The school is registered for up to 60 pupils aged 7 to 18 years. There are currently 37 pupils on roll, each of whom has an individual development plan (IDP) or an education, health and care plan (EHCP). A few children are care-experienced and most pupils are placed by English local authorities.

The school's last core inspection took place in February 2020. Following this, the school was subject to a period of follow-up activity, with the most recent visit taking place in December 2023. Since the last inspection there have been significant changes to leadership, staffing and therapeutic provision.

The current headteacher was appointed in January 2024.

Summary

Talocher School provides a supportive environment where strong relationships enable pupils to feel safe and re-engage with learning successfully. Staff know pupils very well and use this understanding to create calm, purposeful learning experiences that over time build pupils confidence.

The curriculum is broad and relevant, combining academic learning with practical and therapeutic experiences that support pupils' independence and preparation for the future. Opportunities such as outdoor learning and work-related experiences enhance engagement and motivation. A particular strength is the school's structured approach to developing reading, which enables many pupils to make strong progress and apply their reading skills with increasing independence. Pupils also make steady progress in numeracy through practical learning approaches.

Teaching is effective in most cases, with many staff adapting their approaches thoughtfully in response to pupils' needs. Where this is strongest, pupils engage well and make strong progress. However, in a minority of lessons, activities do not provide sufficient challenge or respond closely enough to pupils' progress.

The school supports pupils' personal development very well. Through consistent staff modelling and a well-developed health and well-being curriculum, pupils develop respect, confidence and positive relationships with staff and each other. Opportunities such as the peer mentor programme and school council enable pupils to take responsibility and contribute to the school community.

Leaders provide clear direction and have established a reflective culture that supports improvement. Safeguarding arrangements are robust and well understood by staff. Although attendance has improved, it remains too variable for a few pupils. In addition, limitations in information technology infrastructure restrict opportunities for pupils to develop their digital skills.

Overall, the school's strong relationships, inclusive ethos and effective provision support nearly all pupils to make positive progress in their learning, well-being and readiness for their next steps.

Main evaluation

Talocher School provides a welcoming and nurturing environment where pupils feel safe, valued and understood. Strong relationships between staff and pupils underpin the school's work. Staff know pupils exceptionally well and create a calm and supportive atmosphere where pupils can re-engage with learning and build confidence over time.

Curriculum and individualised learning experiences

The curriculum is broad, meaningful and tailored effectively to pupils' interests and future aspirations. It combines recognised qualifications with practical learning experiences such as outdoor learning, cooking and managing finances, helping pupils to apply their skills in real-life contexts.

At Talocher School, learning extends beyond traditional academic subjects to include therapeutic and practical opportunities. The school makes very effective use of its outdoor learning environment. Pupils engage in purposeful activities including habitat maintenance, hide-building and bushcraft, developing independence, creativity and communication skills. Tangible outcomes of their work, such as benches and a nature pool, foster a sense of pride and motivate pupils to engage more fully in their learning.

The school has a well-established careers programme which prepares pupils well for their next steps. Strong links with colleges and local businesses provide pupils with beneficial experiences of further education and the world of work. As a result of the progress they make over time, together with effective guidance and support, many pupils move on to further education when they leave the school.

Developing reading

A particular strength of the school's work is its structured and purposeful approach to developing pupils' reading skills. The school meets pupils at their individual levels of need, supporting progression from early reading skills through to reading for a range of purposes, including GCSE-level texts

Provision for pre- and emerging readers is especially effective. Pupils benefit from a well-embedded, adaptive programme that builds systematically on prior learning. As their reading skills develop, pupils increasingly apply these to writing and communication. As a result, pupils make strong progress from their varied starting points.

Across the school, reading is integrated effectively into the wider curriculum through a structured programme that staff adapt skilfully. Leaders have strengthened this provision through targeted professional learning, which is shared effectively across the staff team.

Nearly all pupils make secure progress in reading, with many making rapid gains. This progress contributes significantly to pupils' confidence, self-image and social development. For example, a few pupils develop the ability to independently read and respond to messages from friends, which strengthens their social interactions and well-being

Provision for the development of pupils' mathematical and numeracy skills is highly effective, with opportunities to develop skills across the curriculum. For example, practical activities, such as constructing 3D shapes using marshmallows and spaghetti, help pupils to understand concepts like vertices, faces and edges more securely. Nearly all pupils make secure progress in numeracy, with a few making very rapid progress.

Teaching and pupil progress

Across the school, nearly all teachers rapidly develop secure, effective working relationships based on trust, respect and a strong understanding of their pupils. Supported by effective communication between staff, teachers develop a holistic and up-to-date understanding of pupils' needs and adapt their practice accordingly.

Where teaching is most effective, staff use this knowledge well to respond flexibly to pupils' emotional needs and interests, adapting approaches in real time. This supports pupils to engage positively with their learning and contributes to calm, purposeful classroom environments.

In nearly all lessons, teachers plan purposeful opportunities for pupils to develop their skills progressively. Regular, collaborative review of planning and pupil progress ensures that learning experiences are meaningful and appropriately matched to pupils' needs. The

school's systems for monitoring progress are well developed and take careful account of pupils' social and emotional development. Staff use daily observations effectively to reflect on the impact of provision and make informed adjustments to their teaching.

Across the school, many teachers use feedback highly effectively to motivate and engage pupils. Verbal feedback is a particular strength. Most staff use questioning well to encourage curiosity and thinking, adapting their approach to suit individual pupils. As a result, nearly all pupils understand their next steps and how to improve.

Where teaching is strongest, pupils experience appropriate levels of challenge and make strong progress. However, in a minority of lessons, activities rely too heavily on pre-prepared written tasks and do not respond sufficiently to pupils' progress. In these instances, the level of challenge is inconsistent and pupils engage less well.

Over time, nearly all pupils make secure progress from their individual starting points. Across the school, there is a consistent focus on developing literacy, numeracy and wider skills in most areas of learning. This collaborative approach ensures that pupils benefit from meaningful opportunities to build confidence and apply their skills in a range of contexts. As a result, nearly all pupils make strong progress in key skills, particularly in reading and numeracy.

Pupils use digital equipment in a range of contexts. For example, when using tablets to create stop-motion animations of ten-pin bowling. However, limitations in ICT infrastructure restrict the range and consistency of digital learning experiences. As a result, pupils do not develop their digital skills as fully as they could.

Relationships and personal development

Nearly all staff are highly effective role models, consistently promoting respectful, compassionate interactions across the school. This, alongside the school's health and well-being curriculum, contributes to a positive and supportive culture where pupils feel valued and understood.

As a result of this consistent approach, nearly all pupils treat their teachers with respect and warmth. Most develop positive relationships with their peers and work well together when given the opportunity. Pupils are polite and welcoming to visitors, and many demonstrate genuine pride in their achievements.

Over time, pupils develop stronger social and communication skills, particularly those who have previously experienced difficulties with engagement. For a few pupils, this progress is transformative. Increasingly, pupils contribute to discussions, listen to others and express their views.

Most pupils show respect, responsibility and tolerance in daily school life, including through their involvement in the school council and community activities. These experiences support the development of leadership, cooperation and empathy, preparing them well for life beyond school.

Pupils demonstrate these skills particularly well in small group contexts, such as school council sessions and health and well-being discussions. In these situations, they collaborate effectively, listen to one another and work towards shared decisions. For example, during a team quiz exercise, pupils work together to solve problems and reach a consensus, showing effective listening, compromise and enjoyment in teamwork.

Peer mentor programme

The peer mentor programme provides valuable opportunities for pupils to develop leadership and take responsibility within the school community. Through structured training and purposeful activities, peer mentors support other pupils and contribute positively to a culture of inclusion and mutual respect.

The collaborative nature of the programme, where pupils work alongside staff, supports their development and encourages them to take on new challenges. Through this role, pupils develop important skills such as communication, active listening and problem-solving. For example, they prepare and deliver presentations about their work and lead discussions with parents and other pupils. These experiences build confidence and deepen their engagement.

As a result, the programme strengthens relationships across the school and makes a clear contribution to pupils' personal development and well-being.

Safeguarding culture

The school has a strong safeguarding culture underpinned by clear leadership and highly effective communication systems. Leaders ensure that safeguarding remains a constant priority through regular, structured meetings and frequent briefings, which enable staff to share concerns promptly and maintain a shared understanding of pupils' needs.

Staff receive appropriate training and demonstrate confidence in recognising, recording and reporting concerns. Clear guidance supports consistent and timely responses. Leaders maintain effective oversight through secure recording systems and robust processes for reviewing cases and monitoring vulnerable pupils. Well-established referral and escalation procedures, supported by engagement with external agencies, ensure that concerns are acted upon swiftly.

Education around bullying, relationships and wider safeguarding themes contributes to a culture where pupils feel safe and confident to raise concerns. This is reinforced by strong relationships, with pupils and parents reporting high levels of trust in the school's care. Overall, the consistency of practice, clarity of expectations and strong professional collaboration ensure that safeguarding is embedded effectively in the school's day-to-day work.

Leaders also monitor attendance and pupils' engagement closely and implement targeted follow-up strategies. Attendance has improved compared to the previous year, reflecting the impact of clear expectations and proactive approaches including attendance plans, incentives, multi-agency involvement and home visits. These strategies are strengthening engagement in learning. However, attendance and engagement remain too variable for a few pupils, reflecting the complexity of their needs.

Relational practice

The school places a strong emphasis on relational practice, including access to trusted adults and therapeutic support. This helps pupils feel safe and understood and supports improvements in pupils' emotional regulation and readiness to learn, particularly for those who have previously struggled in other settings.

Leaders have strengthened well-being provision through more proactive planning, supported by daily communication and structured intervention. They have established a clear, trauma-informed approach to behaviour that is increasingly understood and applied by staff. As a result, responses are more consistent and focused on de-escalation and repairing relationships, contributing to a calmer environment.

Systems for recording and analysing behaviour are used effectively to identify patterns and inform targeted support. This enables leaders to adapt provision and support staff, contributing to improved engagement and a reduction in incidents for many pupils.

Leadership

Since their appointment, the headteacher has strengthened the school's strategic direction through restructuring the senior leadership team, clarifying roles and developing middle leadership. This has fostered a more collaborative and reflective culture, where staff contribute increasingly to evaluation and improvement. As a result, there is growing consistency in practice and staff have a clear understanding of expectations.

Leaders have a secure understanding of the school's strengths and areas for development. The school development plan provides a suitable framework for improvement, and, in key areas such as behaviour and reading, there is clear evidence of positive impact.

A reflective culture

Leaders have established a strong, whole-school culture of reflective practice that drives continuous improvement. Staff at all levels contribute to regular review cycles, including three-weekly and half-termly evaluations of teaching and curriculum impact. This draws appropriately on assessment information, behaviour analysis, staff feedback and pupil voice. This collective reflection informs timely adaptations to both behaviour approaches and curriculum design. For example, staff use detailed analysis of incidents and intervention logs to refine trauma-informed strategies and support plans, leading to improved engagement and fewer incidents over time.

In parallel, collaborative curriculum reviews ensure learning experiences remain highly personalised and responsive to pupils' needs and interests. This joined-up approach has led to significant improvements in attendance, engagement and pupils' confidence, communication and independence.

Leaders engage effectively with stakeholders and take appropriate account of their views. Parents and carers value the strong communication, approachable leadership and the high levels of care and support provided to pupils. They report notable improvements in pupils' well-being, confidence, behaviour and engagement with learning.

The proprietor provides appropriate support and challenge through regular quality assurance and structured oversight, which strengthens leaders' accountability and contributes to identifying priorities for improvement. However, inefficiencies in administrative processes and limitations in ICT infrastructure reduce efficiency and constrain leadership capacity, including the school's ability to develop digital learning further.

Leaders have established a positive culture of professional learning, where nearly all staff value its impact on pupils. Professional learning aligns clearly to school priorities, particularly trauma-informed practice, autism and communication, and meeting pupils' additional learning needs. This is improving staff knowledge, confidence and consistency in practice. As a result, teaching approaches are becoming more aligned across the school, supporting improvements in pupils' engagement, behaviour and readiness to learn.

Nearly all staff feel well supported by leaders and believe that systems and structures enable them to carry out their roles effectively.

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.

Safeguarding

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

Recommendations

We have made three recommendations to help the school continue to improve:

- R1 Build on established practice to ensure all teaching provides appropriate challenge and meets the needs of pupils
- R2 Strengthen provision for the development of pupils' digital skills
- R3 Continue to improve attendance and engagement in learning

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

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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