



Heronsbridge School



Heronsbridge School, Ewenny Road, Bridgend, CF31 3HT



01656815725

The inspection visit took place on 11/03/2026

Service Information:

Operated by:	Bridgend County Borough Council Adults and Children's Services
Care Type:	Special School Residential Service
Registered places:	4
Main language(s):	English
Promotion of Welsh language and culture:	The provider makes an effort to promote the use of the Welsh language and culture or is working towards a bilingual service.

Themes:



Well-being



Care & Support



Environment



Leadership & Management

Summary:

Heronbridge Special School's residential service accommodates up to four children, offering a supportive environment where they experience positive well-being and develop warm, trusting relationships with the care staff. They communicate in ways that suit them, and care staff respond consistently, helping children make choices and influence daily routines. Children enjoy a wide range of activities that support their physical, social, and emotional development. Healthy lifestyles are promoted, and children benefit from continuity between school and residential routines.

Children receive good quality care and support. Assessments provide the information care staff need to understand children's needs, and personal plans set out how best to support them. Plans reflect children's interests, communication needs, and routines, and are updated when needs change. Care staff follow behavioural strategies and risk assessments promote safety and support children to develop skills. Medication systems and safeguarding arrangements are appropriate and followed by care staff.

The environment is safe, clean, and suitable for children's sensory needs. Children have personalised bedrooms and access to suitable communal and outdoor spaces. Equipment and facilities meet children's needs, and health and safety checks are mostly up to date. Fire safety needs have been assessed, and the necessary compliance actions are confirmed and due to be followed up.

Leadership and management arrangements are effective and support a stable service. Care staff feel supported, and supervision and training arrangements help them develop their skills. Parents and professionals speak positively about communication, relationships, and the quality of care.

Findings:



Well-being

Children are supported to express their views and preferences through a range of individual communication styles. Care staff recognise and respond to the cues children use, such as gestures, vocalisations, or body language, which allows children to influence their routines and activities. Children appear comfortable seeking support or reassurance from familiar care staff, indicating their responses are acknowledged and they can exercise choice throughout the day.

Communication needs are considered, and children have access to various systems to support their understanding and expression. These include basic sign language, visual aids, and other alternative communication tools. Although not all systems were observed being used during the inspection, interactions were adaptable, and care staff adjusted their approach in line with each child's needs. This contributed to children being able to participate meaningfully in daily routines.

Children continue to access their education at Heronsbridge School, and residential care staff support routines which complement their learning. Care staff encourage consistent expectations between school and the residential setting and help children sustain peer relationships formed in school and across residential houses. This promotes continuity and supports children's wider development and social confidence.

Children are supported to develop independent living skills at a level appropriate to their needs. Records show children are encouraged to participate in tasks such as personal hygiene, dressing, eating and general routines. Visual trackers and simple recording systems help monitor progress and identify children's achievements.

Healthy lifestyles are promoted through the range of activities available and the food provided. Children take part in swimming, rebound sessions, sports clubs, and creative activities, all of which support physical, social, and emotional well-being. Menus demonstrate access to a variety of balanced meals, and children were observed having fruit and yoghurt prior to their evening activities. Visual meal information also helps children understand the options available to them.

Parents spoke positively about their children's experiences, describing progress as "*Phenomenal*" and saying their children are "*Thriving*." Comments included "*They are amazing*," "*(Child) is happy there and can't wait to go back*," "*Staff treat (Child) like (Child) is their own*," and "*I feel my (Child) is safe*." Safeguarding arrangements are suitable, and care staff have completed relevant safeguarding and child protection training. This helps ensure children receive care from staff who understand how to keep them safe.

The service promotes Welsh language and culture both within the residential service and through

school-based activities. Children are supported to use key Welsh words and to take part in cultural events such as the school eisteddfod. The service is also making significant progress towards delivering a full Welsh Active Offer.



Care & Support

Assessments completed before children begin receiving the service provide sufficient information to understand children's needs, routines, and risks. Pre-admission assessments include details gathered from families and professionals, and these are used by care staff to plan appropriate support. While assessments vary in detail, the information available is suitable to guide care staff when children first arrive and ensures transitions are managed calmly and predictably.

Personal plans are child-centred and written in accessible language. They include relevant information about what is important to each child, how best to support them and their preferred communication methods. The plans also outline children's interests and routines and are updated when needs change. Children experience consistent care and support from long standing care staff who know them well.

Children's health needs are met appropriately within the service. While parents take responsibility for attending and managing health appointments, care staff support children when required by following advice from external professionals and incorporating this into daily routines. This ensures any health-related recommendations are understood and actioned in the residential service.

Behavioural plans provide guidance on how to support children when they experience distress or display behaviours which may impact others. These plans describe triggers and helpful strategies and actions care staff should take. Care staff demonstrate good knowledge of children's behavioural needs and work to reduce anxiety through predictable routines.

Risk assessments identify potential risks and outline steps care staff should take to minimise harm. These assessments are reviewed and updated. They support care staff to provide safe care and encourage children to take positive risks that promote learning and independence.

Daily records give an account of children's mood, activities, diet, and personal care. They are mostly clear and sufficiently detailed. Incident reporting processes are in place and used appropriately to record concerns or significant events. Behaviour monitoring sheets provide useful information about patterns and triggers.

Medication systems are suitable, and care staff follow established procedures for storage, administration, and monitoring, helping ensure children receive medication safely and as required.



Environment

The environment provides a safe and comfortable space that supports children's well-being. The service operates across two houses on the site, and both properties offer environments which are suitable for the children who stay there. Each house has its own bedrooms, communal areas and outdoor spaces, and the layout in both houses ensures children can move around safely and engage in a range of activities with ease.

Bedrooms in both houses are personalised and contain familiar items such as themed bedding, toys and decorations linked to children's interests. These personal touches help create a homely atmosphere and give children a sense of identity and comfort while staying at the service. Communal living areas are spacious, well-furnished and equipped with toys, games, and creative materials, allowing children to relax or participate in activities of their choice. Sensory equipment is available for children who require additional sensory input.

Bathroom facilities across the two houses are clean, accessible, and suitable for supporting children's personal care needs with dignity. Having both a shower and bath ensures children's needs and preferences can be accommodated. Kitchens are equipped appropriately for meal preparation, and dining areas enable children to eat in a calm and sociable setting. Visual meal displays help children understand the food options available to them.

The kitchen areas in each house contain appropriate equipment to support the preparation of meals, snacks, and drinks. Visual meal displays are used effectively to help children understand the food options available to them. The service has achieved a Food Standards Agency rating of 5 (Very good), demonstrating strong food hygiene practices and a commitment to maintaining safe kitchen environments.

Outdoor areas attached to each house provide opportunities for safe outdoor play, including equipment such as sand pits and seating areas. Although some general upkeep, such as grass cutting, is required, this relates to seasonal factors and does not impact the suitability of the space. Care staff support children to use the outdoor areas safely and ensure activities are adapted to the conditions.

Health and safety arrangements across both houses are suitable. Records show servicing certificates for gas, electrical installations and portable appliance testing are mostly in date. Personal Emergency Evacuation Plans (PEEPs) have been reviewed and provide clear guidance on how to support children in an emergency. Fire safety arrangements have been identified, and the actions needed to maintain compliance are recognised and scheduled for follow-up. Overall, the environment across both houses is safe, comfortable, and supportive of children's

well-being, offering spaces which meet their needs and promote positive daily experiences.



Leadership & Management

Leadership and management arrangements support a well-run and child-centred service. The manager has a strong understanding of children's needs, routines, and behaviours, and provides consistent oversight that helps maintain stability within the team. Care staff told us they feel supported in their roles and described a positive culture where they can ask questions, share concerns and receive guidance when needed.

Supervisions take place termly and provide opportunities for care staff to reflect on their practice, discuss any challenges, and identify areas for development. Records show supervisions include clear goals and evidence of reflective discussion. Annual appraisals are also completed and give staff an opportunity to review progress, discuss achievements and consider training or development needs for the year ahead. Care staff reported finding both supervisions and appraisals constructive and supportive.

Training arrangements are in place, and core training has been completed by most care staff. Some gaps remain in the training matrix, and the manager is working with the wider organisation to ensure all outstanding modules are completed. Despite these gaps, care staff demonstrated a good understanding of the children they support, and experienced team members guide newer staff as needed.

Safe recruitment processes are followed, and staff files contain the appropriate checks to confirm suitability for working with children. Missing information is followed up promptly. Care staff told us they feel encouraged to develop their skills and valued opportunities to progress within the service and wider organisation.

Quality assurance systems are in place. The Responsible Individual (RI) completes regulatory visits, and quality of care reviews are carried out, although these would benefit from more detailed evaluation and wider feedback from families, children, and professionals. Nonetheless, where improvements are identified, action is taken.

Feedback from parents reflects strong communication and supportive relationships. Parents told us, *"Communication is excellent, I receive a phone call every day"* and *"I can ring them if I have any concerns."* This demonstrates families feel informed and reassured about their child's stay.

Professionals also highlighted positive working relationships and the approach of the management team. One professional commented, *'I have found the management very professional, child focused, warm and highly nurturing.'* and *"I would welcome more provisions like these for the children and families we support."* These statements reflect confidence in the service's leadership

and collaborative working practices.

Areas identified for improvement

Where we identify **Areas for Improvement** but we have not found outcomes for people to be at immediate or significant risk, we discuss these with the provider. We expect the provider to take action and we will follow this up at the next inspection.

Where we find outcomes for people **require significant improvement** and/or there is risk to people's well-being we identify areas for **Priority Action**. In these circumstances we issue a Priority Action Notice(s) to the Provider, and they must take immediate steps to make improvements. We will inspect again within six months to check improvements have been made and outcomes for people have improved.

CIW has no areas for improvement identified following this inspection.

CIW has not issued any Priority action notices following this inspection.

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