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■ Gareth Bale at the Noah's Ark Children's Hospital for Wales, Cardiff, where he visited four-year-old patient Cian Case, front. With Cian are his sister Bethany, six, mum Lorraine, brother Dylan, nine, and dad Richard

Bale makes surprise visit to children at hospital

FOR little Cian Case, Christmas was always going to be different than for the majority of other four-year-old boys.

Unlike most children, brave Cian is spending the festive break at Cardiff's University of Wales hospital as he battles against the cancerous spinal and brain tumours he was diagnosed with earlier this month.

It is only the beginning of a long journey for the Case family, from Llanharan, with Cian facing up to eight months of intensive chemotherapy and radiotherapy to ease his symptoms and hopefully beat the disease that threatens his life.

Cian is in constant pain and has undergone surgery to remove the majority of a tumour that was only found to be growing on his spine after he went to the doctor complaining of stomach pains barely a month ago. He has also been told "seeds" of the cancer have impregnated

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his brain. The surgery resulted in Cian losing all feeling below his waist, with doctors pessimistic over his long-term mobility despite the fact he has gained some sensation.

It is a grim predicament, but Cian's family have done everything in their power to make sure this Christmas is still one filled with magic. And they were helped on their way by a surprise visit from a global football star that left sports-mad Cian and the family stunned on Christmas Eve.

Gareth Bale, along with his partner Emma Rhys-Jones, shocked staff and patients when they arrived on Christmas Eve afternoon to dish out gifts to Cian and some of the other children.

Cian's dad Richard said: "Most of the VIP visits to the ward over Christmas were pre-planned and we

were aware of who would be arriving at any given point, but Gareth turning up on Christmas Eve was a total shock.

"I was in my scruffs as we were just preparing to bath Cian ready to get him into his new PJs and the arrival of Santa.

"If I had known of Gareth's visit I would have at least been wearing my Wales shirt, which I'd only changed a half hour earlier. There was no media accompanying him, so you could tell it was a gesture that he wanted to perform rather than feeling obliged to. Gareth was genuinely interested in Cian and his condition and gave him a Spiderman present for Christmas.

"He was also happy to pose for a photo with the family, which his lovely girlfriend volunteered to take."

Following Bale's visit, Cian's family, consisting of mum Lorraine, Richard, sister Bethany and brother

Dylan, were all allowed to stay in Cian's hospital room on Christmas Eve night so they could all wake up together on Christmas morning.

Richard added: "Although you would never choose to spend Christmas at hospital, the nurses on Rainbow Ward did everything to make it as special as possible.

"Cian didn't have the strength to open all his presents on Christmas Day, but hopefully he will feel a bit better soon to enjoy the rest."

Cian's parents are writing a blog in his name to promote awareness of his condition. You can follow his story at www.ciansstory.uk. Cian was just one of a number of children Bale spent time with during his visit on Thursday.

Lucy Griffiths, whose son Jayden was at the Children's Hospital for Wales with breathing difficulties, said: "It made our Christmas."

Warning of torrential downpours this week

SOUTH Wales may have escaped the worst of the flooding hitting parts of northern England and North Wales - but forecasters have warned of torrential downpours later this week.

The Met Office says prolonged heavy rain could hit the region on Wednesday.

It comes after a wet but mild festive season which has left fields and parkland waterlogged and standing water on parts of the South Wales road network.

The region has so far escaped the dire flooding that has affected areas such as Cumbria and Greater Manchester.

But a spokesman for the Met Office said heavy rain and gales could be set to hit South Wales, with the organisation issuing a yellow "be aware" warning covering the whole of Wales.

"Rain, heavy at times and often prolonged, is expected to affect most parts of western Britain through Wednesday," the weather warning noted.

"Rain will be heaviest and most persistent over the higher ground of these regions. Gales will accompany this heavy rain, with severe gales likely in some exposed coastal areas."

Winds could hit speeds of up to 70mph in exposed parts, with 50-60mph gusts widely expected.

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