

A report on

Monmouthshire Pupil Referral Service

**Monmouthshire Pupil Referral Service-South
Mount House Park
Pwllmeyric
Chepstow
Monmouthshire
NP16 6DF**

Date of inspection: October 2025

by

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

About Monmouthshire Pupil Referral Service

Name of provider	Monmouthshire Pupil Referral Service
Local authority	Monmouthshire County Council
Language of the provider	English
Multi-site provision?	Yes
Number of pupils on roll	92
Pupils of statutory school age	92
Date of previous Estyn inspection (if applicable)	09/04/2018
Start date of inspection	13/10/2025

Further information

Monmouthshire Pupil Referral Service (PRS) is maintained by Monmouthshire local authority and operates across three sites. Two of these sites, located in the north and south of the county, provide education for secondary-aged pupils with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties (SEBD). They also offer online tuition for pupils with medical needs and on-site provision for social learning groups.

A third site, based in the north of the county, delivers a combination of face-to-face and online community-based tuition. In addition, a group of pupils with additional learning needs (ALN), whose bespoke programmes are commissioned directly by the local authority, are registered with the PRS.

The PRS now caters for both primary and secondary-aged pupils. Since the last inspection, the number of pupils on roll and the complexity of their needs have increased significantly as the role of the service has evolved. Currently, there are 92 pupils registered with the PRS.

Over a three-year average, 55% of pupils are eligible for free school meals, slightly above the Welsh national figure of 52.6%. A very few pupils have child looked after (CLA) status. A majority of pupils have part-time timetable arrangements in place. A few pupils have either a school or local authority maintained individual development plan (IDP). A very few pupils return full-time to mainstream provision. Nearly all pupils comes from homes where English is the main language. Attendance across the provisions remains a challenge. The

three-year average is 55%. There are fluctuations across the different provisions in pupil attendance.

The service has undergone a recent staffing restructure, which has resulted in the appointment of a seconded Head of Service who took up the full-time position from September 2025.

The PRS was last inspected in April 2018 and was placed in Estyn review. It was removed from Estyn Review in 2020.

Data reported is sourced from the latest available Pupil Level Annual School Census. These figures may be slightly different to those observed during the inspection.

Further information is available from the Welsh Government My Local School website: mylocalschool.gov.wales

- a. The term 'additional learning needs' is being used to describe those pupils on the SEN/ALN register of the school.

Summary

Following a period of instability, the newly appointed seconded head of the Pupil Referral Service (PRS) is bringing much-needed stability and a clear sense of direction. His calm, consistent leadership is helping staff work together more effectively and is beginning to strengthen teaching, learning and curriculum development. This follows a period of frequent staff turnover and weak interim leadership, which disrupted consistency; the new head of PRS has rebuilt systems quickly, restored accountability, and improved morale with a clear vision focused on improving teaching and raising expectations.

Many teachers use their strong subject knowledge to plan engaging lessons that build on pupils' existing skills. Positive relationships between staff and pupils foster confidence, participation and positive behaviour. Pupils benefit from respectful, caring environments where they feel supported to learn. The introduction of professional development and clearer roles for staff is beginning to improve consistency and accountability across the service.

Leadership systems are now operational and show credible capacity to improve within a reasonable timeframe, supported by strengthening partnerships with the local authority and regional consortia.

However, teaching and learning remain too variable. In a few lessons, expectations are too low, and opportunities to develop pupils' literacy and Welsh language skills are missed. Curriculum changes, including new GCSE and vocational options, are at an early stage, so their impact cannot yet be seen. Since September 2025, teaching has been monitored more systematically and staff receive targeted professional training; foundations for improvement are now in place.

Leaders are strengthening the systems for assessment, and behaviour and their consistent use by staff. The use of trauma-informed approaches is helping pupils feel secure and ready to learn. Despite this, attendance remains too low, and too many pupils have part-time timetables, limiting their access to a broad and balanced curriculum offer.

The new additional learning needs co-ordinator is improving support for pupils with additional needs, but the use and monitoring of individual development plans are inconsistent. The management committee is gaining a clearer understanding of the PRS's work but needs to strengthen its ability to challenge and support improvement.

Recommendations

We have made four recommendations to help the PRU continue to improve:

- R1. Improve the quality and consistency of teaching and learning
- R2. Ensure that quality assurance processes focus on pupil progress and outcomes
- R3. Improve pupil attendance, including the use of part-time timetables
- R4. Strengthen the role of the management committee in evaluating the work of the PRS

What happens next

In accordance with the Education Act 2005, HMCI is of the opinion that this PRS is in need of significant improvement. The PRS will draw up an action plan to show how it is going to address the recommendations. Estyn will monitor the PRS's progress about 12 months after the publication of this report.

Main findings

Leading and improving

Following a period of instability, the newly appointed seconded head of the Pupil Referral Service (PRS) is bringing stability and consistency to the provisions. He provides calm, methodical leadership and promotes clear values of respect, communication and collaboration. Senior leaders are beginning to work together more cohesively to sustain a service where pupils have valuable opportunities to develop the key skills they need to progress to the next stage in their education and lives. The new head of PRS has set a clear vision focused on improving teaching and raising expectations, rebuilding systems and restoring accountability, which is beginning to improve staff confidence and morale.

Recent changes to the leadership and staffing structure have strengthened capacity across sites by establishing clear roles and responsibilities and providing consistency and accountability. These changes are beginning to enhance strategic oversight, particularly in teaching, learning and curriculum development. Leaders are beginning to nurture a growing culture of collective responsibility for improvement.

Over time, leaders at the PRS have not made sufficient progress in addressing the recommendations from the previous inspection. They have not secured important improvements, for example, in improving the quality and consistency of teaching and learning or improving the attendance of pupils.

Since the appointment of the head of the PRS, leaders are beginning to demonstrate a secure understanding of the quality of teaching and learning, using a systematic monitoring, evaluation and review process that includes learning walks and data tracking to inform improvement. However, processes do not focus sharply enough on the progress that pupils make. The working relationship with the school improvement partner is effective. The ongoing support for improving the quality of teaching and learning and curriculum development underpins development priorities well.

Leaders are beginning to engage well with pupils, parents, carers and staff as part of their self-evaluation activities and use feedback as part of their quality assurance processes. Pupil Engagement Officers support pupils and their families well. However, statutory reports to parents and carers have not been provided over an extended period of time.

-The head has introduced newly established professional development review processes to support improvement. Teachers and support staff now have measurable targets linked to improvement priorities. Professional learning is well planned. This aligns well with improvement priorities or individual personal development needs. However, the

evaluation of professional learning on teaching and its impact on pupil progress, is at an early stage of development.

The management committee demonstrates a broad and valuable range of expertise which supports a balanced understanding of the diverse needs across the PRS. Recently the management committee's understanding the PRS's work has improved, aided by more detailed reports from the head. The role of the management committee in gathering first hand evidence to inform their understanding of the strengths and areas for development is underdeveloped. This means that they are not in a position to provide robust challenge.

Teaching and learning

Senior leaders work collaboratively with staff to design beneficial schemes of learning that reflect the four purposes and Areas of Learning and Experience (AoLEs) of the Curriculum for Wales. Leaders are at the very early stages of broadening the curriculum offer for older pupils by introducing additional GCSE and vocational qualifications. This is not yet fully embedded and limits the opportunities for pupils to achieve a range of GCSEs or equivalent qualifications.

Leaders are using professional learning and staff skills audits effectively to build staff expertise and to enhance provision. They work collaboratively with staff across provisions to develop suitable plans to ensure that pupils develop their literacy, numeracy and digital skills. Curriculum planning is at a very early stage of implementation, and it is too early to evaluate the impact of the new curriculum plans on pupils' outcomes and progress.

Provision for relationships and sexuality education (RSE) is well established. While planning for well-being is a consistent thread across all areas of learning, religion, values and ethics (RVE) is underdeveloped. Leaders promote pupils' cultural development through activities linked to the curriculum, such as visits to local historical sites. However, work to ensure that pupils develop a deeper understanding of the history, culture, and diversity of Wales remains at an early stage and is an area for further development.

Leaders have recently developed a clear and strategic approach to assessment and tracking that is flexible, holistic, and well aligned to the diverse needs of pupils across the PRS. Assessment systems are in place and suitably adapted to accommodate pupils' needs and provide an overview of progress in academic learning, well-being, and engagement. Overall, many staff use assessment information well to plan the next steps in learning. A new pupil progress-tracking system introduced in September supports earlier identification of underachievement and provides a stronger foundation for improvement, though it is too early to see measurable impact.

Overall, teaching and learning is too variable across the range of provisions. Where teaching is most effective, in around half of lessons, teachers have high expectations and

are aspirational for what pupils can achieve. They are beginning to embed elements of the PRS teaching principles, such as sharing learning intentions and using questions for learning effectively.

Many teachers have secure subject knowledge, which they use suitably to plan learning that builds on pupils' prior knowledge and understanding. Many form positive relationships with pupils, fostering confidence, participation and consistently positive behaviours. A majority of staff use verbal praise and feedback suitably to recognise effort and guide improvement. In the most effective lessons, teachers regularly review progress against individual pupil learning targets, helping pupils take ownership of their learning.

In a few cases, teachers' expectations are too low, limiting pupils' progress. Staff sometimes miss opportunities to develop pupils' literacy skills, for example by not promoting subject vocabulary or modelling language effectively. In these lessons, support staff can be overly passive, reducing opportunities to reinforce or extend learning. A few teachers do not build positive relationships with pupils and do not always manage challenging behaviour effectively. Consequently, in these lessons, pupils make limited progress, often due to disengagement in learning.

When they attend regularly, a majority of pupils make suitable progress in developing their literacy skills. However, there are limited opportunities for pupils to write at length across a range of genres, which restricts the development of sustained writing skills. There are limited opportunities for pupils to develop their Welsh language skills.

Many pupils make suitable progress in mathematics and numeracy. For example, older pupils demonstrate secure numeracy skills, including accurate calculation of measures, angles, and percentages. They confidently use problem-solving strategies in practical situations such as budgeting and cooking. More able pupils show strong reasoning when working with algebra and geometry.

By the time they leave the PRS, the majority of pupils gain formal accreditation, with a few pupils achieving five or more GCSEs or equivalent qualifications. A few do not achieve any formal accreditation. Leaders at the PRS recognise the need to ensure that more pupils need to achieve qualifications to support their next steps in learning and prepare them effectively for the world of education, training and employment.

Well-being, care and support

Strong, respectful staff pupil working relationships which create a climate of trust are evident across most provisions. This is strongest where there is a calm and nurturing ethos underpinned by a focus on pupil well-being. Where this is securely in place, pupil behaviour is well managed and incidents of challenging behaviour are minimised. Most staff know their pupils' needs well and build on this understanding to support pupils to

make progress in their social development, well-being and confidence as learners. Frequent staff changes previously damaged trust and consistency; under new leadership, the culture is becoming more positive and inclusive, with clearer expectations and improved relationships.

Leaders have recently introduced well-considered changes in the management of pupil behaviour to support a consistent approach across the provisions. This is strengthened using trauma informed approaches to help pupils feel safe, secure, and ready to learn. As a result, many pupils demonstrate sound engagement in learning and positive behaviour. However, rates of fixed term exclusion are too high. Leaders have recently introduced new processes to support the reduction of fixed term exclusion rates. It is too early to evaluate the impact of these. The overall environment is increasingly calm and predictable, though measurable improvements in attendance and wellbeing will take time to embed.

The PRS's arrangements for safeguarding pupils do not give any cause for concern. The designated safeguarding person (DSP) is proactive and has quickly recognised areas for improvement to strengthen processes and systems which support and underpin the strong safeguarding culture evident across all provisions.

Overall, there is a strong commitment to meeting the needs of pupils with additional learning needs (ALN). However, the variability in planning, practice and the evaluation of impact across the provisions limits the consistency of pupils' experiences. The ALNCo has been in post since September 2025 and is making key improvements. For example, developments in the one-page profiles are supporting staff well to improve their understanding of the needs and interests of pupils. At present, a minority of pupils have individual development plans (IDPs). However, these are not used or monitored consistently. Leaders are aware of these shortcomings and are taking steps to develop a more strategic approach, for example working closely with local authority officers and building the capacity of staff.

Over the last few years pupil attendance rates across the service have been too low. A lack of robust analysis of attendance data or trends has resulted in ineffective targeting of support to improve pupils' attendance. For around half of the pupils, attendance rates at the PRS are below what they were in their mainstream schools. Since September, attendance has been identified as a priority for improvement with a more systematic approach to managing barriers to attendance. However, this is at the early stages of implementation.

A majority of pupils have part-time timetable arrangements which reduces their access to a full range of educational experiences. Where part-time timetable arrangements are in place, all pupils have a pastoral support plan. However, review of these plans to ensure that they remain fit for purpose is inconsistent, resulting in too many pupils having

significantly reduced access to a broad and balanced curriculum offer. This limits the progress that they make and is a significant barrier in preparing them appropriately for their next stage in life and learning.

There are informal opportunities for pupils to contribute to their experiences at the PRS. Leaders and staff recognise the need to provide a wider range of more formal opportunities for all pupils to contribute meaningfully to all aspects of their learning and development during their time at the PRS. This is at the very early stages of development.

Additional information

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

The PRU's arrangements for site management do not give any cause for concern

The PRU has appropriate arrangements for promoting healthy eating and drinking

Leaders and management committee manage the PRU's finances appropriately, including the use of the pupil development grant.

Evidence base of the report

Before an inspection, inspectors:

- analyse the outcomes from the parent/carers and pupil questionnaires and consider the views of teachers and the management committee through their questionnaire responses

During an inspection, inspectors normally:

- hold a meeting with parents/carers to hear their views on the PRU and its effectiveness
- meet the headteacher, management committee, senior and middle leaders (where appropriate) and individual teachers to evaluate the impact of the PRU's work
- meet pupils to discuss their work, to listen to them read and to gain their views about various aspects of their PRU
- meet groups of pupils in leadership roles, such as representatives from the PRU council and eco-committee
- visit a broad sample of classes, including learning support groups and undertake a variety of learning walks to observe pupils learning and to see staff teaching in a range of settings, including classrooms, support groups and in outdoor areas
- where appropriate, visit the specialist resource base within the PRU to see pupils' learning
- observe and speak to pupils at lunch and break times and at a sample of after-school clubs, where appropriate
- attend assemblies and daily acts of collective worship
- look closely at the PRU's self-evaluation processes
- consider the PRU's improvement plan and look at evidence to show how well the PRU has taken forward planned improvements
- scrutinise a range of PRU documents, including information on pupil assessment and progress, records of meetings of staff and the management committee, 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 (www.estyn.gov.wales)

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

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