

A report on

Ceredigion Pupil Referral Unit

**Portland Place
Aberaeron
Ceredigion
SA46 0AX**

Date of inspection: January 2026

by

Estyn, His Majesty's Inspectorate for Education

and Training in Wales

This report is also available in Welsh

About Ceredigion Pupil Referral Unit

Name of provider	Ceredigion Pupil Referral Unit
Local authority	Ceredigion County Council
Language of the provider	English
Multi-site provision?	Yes
Number of pupils on roll	23
Pupils of statutory school age	23
Date of previous Estyn inspection (if applicable)	17/02/2020
Start date of inspection	19/01/2026

Further information

Ceredigion Pupil Referral Unit (PRU) forms part of Ceredigion Local Education Authority's provision for pupils with social, emotional, and behavioural needs. Nearly all pupils have additional learning needs and have an individual development plan (IDP).

The PRU currently operates across two sites, Canolfan Aeron in Aberaeron and Canolfan yr Eos in Aberystwyth. Plans are in progress to consolidate provision at a single site in Felinfach.

Governance is provided by a single management committee, supported by an integrated line management structure. At present, twenty-three pupils receive education through the PRU.

The overarching aim of the PRU is to enable all pupils to reintegrate into mainstream education and/or progress to further education, training, or employment. All pupils access full-time education, either on-site at the PRU or through a blended arrangement with a mainstream school, EOTAS provision, college, training provider, or employer.

A minority of pupils are eligible for free school meals, and a very few are looked-after children. No pupils learn English as an additional language.

The acting headteacher has been in post since September 2025.

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

Ceredigion Pupil Referral Unit (PRU) provides a calm and supportive environment in which pupils feel known, valued and listened to. Leaders and staff place pupils' well-being at the centre of their work, establishing strong, trusting relationships that help pupils engage with learning and develop confidence. Most teaching is nurturing and purposeful, with staff acting as positive role models and managing behaviour and emotional regulation effectively. Many pupils make suitable progress from their starting points, develop important skills, and achieve meaningful qualifications that prepare them well for the next stage of their lives.

Many pupils have valuable opportunities to develop literacy, numeracy, digital skills, creativity, problem-solving, independence and practical skills through a wide range of lessons, projects and off-site activities. They benefit from exciting approaches, including virtual reality, woodland work, gym sessions, cookery, vocational courses and enrichment activities, which make learning engaging and relevant. Pupils learn about relationships, sexual health, online safety and consent, and are able to participate in a range of experiences through the school's reward scheme and external partnerships.

The PRU supports pupils to prepare for their next steps through strong links with local colleges, Careers Wales and other education providers. A few pupils complete work experience placements where appropriate.

Staff at the PRU provide individual support for pupils with additional learning needs, using strategies such as visual timetables, sensory diets and fidget tools, while encouraging pupils to participate in decisions about their learning.

The PRU is largely safe and caring. Staff use restorative approaches and emotional coaching effectively to help pupils manage behaviour, and safeguarding arrangements are robust. Nearly all staff demonstrate secure knowledge of safeguarding procedures, and concerns are reviewed systematically. Attendance remains a concern, and leaders continue to work closely with families to improve attendance.

Leadership is committed to pupils' well-being, and professional learning helps staff meet the complex needs of pupils. However, leadership capacity is limited by reliance on a small number of key individuals, which affects strategic planning and the consistent evaluation of the impact of initiatives. Leaders use a wide range of evidence to inform self-evaluation and improvement planning, which gives them a well-informed understanding of practice, but because they do not consistently evaluate the impact of actions over time, they are not always clear which strategies have the greatest effect on pupils' progress and standards.

The management committee is committed and actively engaged in the PRU, but over-reliance on leaders' information limits effective challenge, resulting in inconsistent strategic oversight, accountability and evaluation, and reducing its impact on improvement and value for money.

Across the PRU equity of offer for provision through the medium of Welsh is inconsistent.

Whilst leaders are investing in providing nurturing learning environments to promote pupils to feel safe and calm, the current accommodation arrangements do not support pupil well-being and learning opportunities well enough.

Recommendations

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

- R1 Improve the consistency of the quality of teaching and strengthen the planning and the provision for skills.
- R2 Improve attendance
- R3 Strengthen leaders' strategic and evaluative rigour at all levels, so that improvement planning focuses more sharply on impact.
- R4 Strengthen the role of the management committee

What happens next

The PRU will draw up an action plan to address the recommendations from the inspection.

Main findings

The leadership team and staff across the PRU are passionate and place pupil well-being at the heart of all their work and interactions with pupils and their families. There is a consistent focus on providing learning experiences where pupils are happy and valued and can make positive steps towards their future. This is underpinned by strong, trusting working relationships between staff and pupils and a consistent, relational approach to behaviour and well-being.

Teaching and learning

Overall, teaching staff create calm, nurturing and purposeful learning environments that support pupils' engagement and progress. Staff act as positive role models, approaching their work positively. Most staff establish strong working relationships with pupils and maintain clear, consistent expectations for behaviour, rooted in trust and mutual respect.

Most staff manage pupils' behaviour and emotional regulation skilfully. As a result, pupils who require a high level of support re-engage quickly with their learning effectively and meaningfully.

Overall, most pupils who attend the PRU regularly, show positive attitudes to learning and many make suitable progress in developing important skills. Many pupils attain meaningful qualifications that effectively prepare them for the next stage of their lives.

In most lessons, staff know pupils very well and have a detailed understanding of their abilities and interests. They use this knowledge suitably to plan learning that meets pupils' needs. In a minority of lessons, and where appropriate, staff make effective use of pupils' individual targets to plan purposeful learning opportunities. Many staff also use a suitable range of strategies and resources to engage and support pupils' learning. For example, in science, pupils use virtual reality headsets to explore the composition of blood and to experience the solar system.

Most teaching staff ensure that learning activities build well on pupils' prior learning. Leaders have introduced a beneficial learning sequence, 'I do, We do, You do', which supports effective modelling and the development of pupils' skills. As a result, pupils are increasingly developing independence in applying and consolidating these skills.

In most lessons verbal feedback is immediate, positive and supportive of pupils' efforts. This motivates pupils to persevere with their learning tasks and make effective progress over time. Overall, teachers provide useful feedback to help pupils understand the next steps in their learning. In a minority of cases, written feedback includes purposeful

questions which challenge pupils effectively to clarify their thinking or to extend their learning.

Pupils' skill development

The PRU has recently mapped its approach to developing pupils' digital competence, numeracy and literacy skills across the curriculum. This work provides a clearer overview of where pupils have opportunities to practise and apply these skills in different subjects. Many pupils benefit from worthwhile opportunities to develop their numeracy skills in meaningful contexts. For example, in science lessons pupils plot graphs to measure electrical currents or use quadrants to evaluate the abundance of species. In physical education, pupils select appropriate weights accurately and calculate the total load on the bar, demonstrating secure understanding of number and measurement.

Many pupils develop their literacy skills suitably across the curriculum. Most pupils are confident and articulate when contributing verbally in lessons and express their views clearly. For instance, pupils explain their opinions about the role of the United Nations or describe thoughtfully the impact of earthquakes in Haiti. A few pupils produce well-researched and balanced arguments, such as when comparing the safety of mopeds with driving cars. Pupils' writing skills develop appropriately, and many pupils produce extended pieces of writing for a range of purposes and audiences, including newspaper-style articles.

Pupils have valuable opportunities to develop a range of reading skills. These include reading for pleasure, extracting information from texts and developing analytical skills through poetry studied as part of GCSE English. For example, pupils read 'Refugee Blues' and complete written tasks that demonstrate sound analytical understanding. Evidence from a range of stakeholders, including staff, parents and pupils, indicates a broadly positive culture of reading within the PRU. However, the mapping of reading skills across the curriculum is at a very early stage, and leaders have not yet developed a clear reading strategy to promote reading consistently or to strengthen pupils' reading skills further.

Many pupils develop their digital skills confidently. Through e-sports sessions, pupils learn to code and use information and communication technology effectively to create presentations, respond to emails and research information online. The use of virtual reality headsets further enhances pupils' understanding of complex concepts, such as the structure and function of the heart and the nervous system and increases engagement with learning.

Nearly all pupils develop their independence skills beneficially. Pupils plan, prepare and cook meals competently, demonstrating safe and correct use of utensils. Older pupils consolidate these skills further by completing accredited cookery courses, which embed learning and support future pathways. Many pupils also develop their physical skills effectively through a range of on-site and off-site activities. Pupils show increasing independence and correct technique when using gym equipment, such as rowing machines. Off-site activities, including woodland work, provide valuable opportunities for pupils to improve their physical fitness and stamina through practical tasks such as chopping and clearing overgrowth.

Many pupils develop their creativity and problem-solving skills well through a wide range of engaging activities. For example, pupils design and construct wooden stools, create and test rockets and produce thoughtful artwork. These activities encourage pupils to plan, evaluate and refine their work.

The tracking of pupils' progress in developing their skills is underdeveloped. As a result, leaders are unable to evaluate clearly how well pupils progress from their starting points or identify gaps in pupils' skills accurately.

Curriculum and learning experiences

The curriculum offer is suitable for the needs of many pupils. Small class sizes enable staff to tailor learning experiences effectively to pupils' individual needs and interests. As a result, many pupils engage positively with learning that is personalised and relevant. Leaders have established clear plans to develop a meaningful and coherent curriculum, including subject overviews that map provision across all areas of learning. Planning is reviewed formally each half term, providing valuable opportunities for staff to reflect collaboratively on curriculum design and delivery. However, these curriculum plans are at an early stage of development and are not yet sufficiently refined to ensure consistency and progression across subjects. Further, provision for Welsh is underdeveloped and inequitable across the PRU.

Pupils access positive curriculum pathways that lead to a range of appropriate accreditation and qualifications aligned with their interests and aspirations. Most pupils attend off-site provision for part of the week, where they engage in practical learning such as carpentry and plumbing. Partnership work with organisations including the fire service, armed forces and RNLI further enriches the curriculum. Pupils value these experiences and record them in their pupil websites, which provide a meaningful record of progress and are shared with families.

Pupils learn about a wide range of relevant and important topics through Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE), such as sexual health, online safety and consent. Across both sites, individual social intervention sessions help pupils to develop their social skills and emotional understanding.

Alongside core subjects, pupils benefit from a broad range of additional learning opportunities, including weekly physical education, cookery, social intervention sessions and, where appropriate, vocational courses. Further, staff make effective use of external providers to broaden pupils' experiences and enhance the curriculum. Pupils participate in a wide range of activities, including surfing, cinema visits, escape rooms and science projects, which they value highly.

Preparing for next steps

Leaders have established strong links with local colleges and external providers, which support pupils in developing clear aspirations for post-16 pathways. Pupils are aware of the qualifications required to access their chosen courses and, where appropriate, a few take part in worthwhile work experience, such as placements in local primary schools. Social intervention sessions focus on future pathways, including further education and employment. Older pupils on both sites meet fortnightly with the Careers Wales officer, which provides opportunities for college visits and practical activities with alternative education providers. These arrangements support engagement and help pupils develop trusted relationships with adults who guide their next steps.

Pupils' well-being, safety and attendance

The PRU provides a largely safe, caring and respectful environment. Pupils' experiences and staff actions combine to create a culture where safety, well-being and positive relationships are prioritised consistently.

Pupils value being listened to and have regular opportunities to speak privately with adults, which contributes directly to their sense of security and emotional well-being. As a result, many pupils enjoy attending the PRU and demonstrate increasing confidence in engaging with learning and routines over time.

Behaviour is generally positive and managed effectively, contributing directly to pupils' sense of safety and well-being. Staff support pupils to treat others with respect and as a result, pupils are generally calm in lessons and at breaktimes. Pupils' interactions with staff and visitors are typically respectful and purposeful. Further, staff use emotional coaching and restorative approaches effectively. This has strengthened pupils' ability to reflect on their actions and understand consequences.

Professional learning supports staff to respond effectively to pupils' challenging behaviour. Staff feel well supported by leaders and the local authority behaviour team and demonstrate confidence in managing challenging situations.

Leaders maintain appropriate oversight of behaviour through systematic recording and regular review, and they deploy staff appropriately to manage risk effectively. However, while behaviour data is collected regularly and reviewed at individual pupil level, it is not analysed rigorously enough by leaders to identify patterns or inform preventative work. As a result, opportunities are missed to use this information more strategically to strengthen curriculum planning, professional learning and continuity of support.

Staff demonstrate secure knowledge of safeguarding responsibilities and apply procedures consistently. Concerns are logged promptly and accurately on a centralised electronic system, ensuring that information is detailed, factual and focused on individual pupils. Automated alerts to safeguarding leaders ensure that concerns are reviewed without delay, which supports early identification and timely response.

Safeguarding leadership within the PRU is strong. The designated safeguarding team demonstrates a shared and secure understanding of thresholds, escalation routes and statutory responsibilities. Daily safeguarding meetings ensure that concerns are reviewed systematically and shared appropriately with staff, supporting consistent vigilance across both sites. Safeguarding records are well maintained, secure and thorough and follow-up with external agencies is persistent.

Strategic oversight of safeguarding by the management committee relies too heavily on information provided by senior leaders and is not sufficiently well developed to include independent scrutiny or systematic evaluation of safeguarding and behaviour patterns and trends. As a result, the committee is not yet able to assure itself fully that safeguarding arrangements remain robust and effective over time.

Attendance remains a significant concern with many pupils attending on reduced or bespoke timetables. While attendance is monitored closely and leaders demonstrate a strong understanding of individual circumstances, a core group of pupils continue to attend very infrequently.

Responding to pupils' additional learning needs

Leaders at the PRU demonstrate a strong commitment to meeting the needs of pupils with additional learning needs (ALN). Staff provide tailored support and use a range of strategies, including visual timetables, sensory diets and fidget tools, to help pupils self-regulate and engage in learning. Person-centred practice is developing appropriately, with pupils involved in decision making at review meetings. Staff receive relevant training to support diverse needs. Coordination and evaluation of support are at an early stage, and

individual targets lack precision. Leaders do not have an effective system to track progress towards these targets, which limits staff's ability to evaluate and plan targeted interventions.

Pupil voice

Pupils have valuable opportunities to demonstrate leadership responsibilities. For example, through membership of the school council or through guiding visitors around the sites. Additionally, pupils are provided with a wide range of experiences and activities through the PRU's reward scheme which includes visits to Llangrannog, Escape Rooms in Aberystwyth and visits to Borth beach.

Leadership

The PRU's leadership team places pupils' well-being at the forefront of their work, fostering supportive relationships with pupils and families. The leadership team is relatively inexperienced and relies on a small number of key individuals, which limits strategic oversight and results in leadership that is often operational rather than strategic. Further high staff turnover affects leadership capacity and consistency at the PRU. The leadership team benefits from internal and external support, including local authority leadership programmes, the school improvement adviser, mentoring and collaborative networks. This is beginning to strengthen the quality of strategic direction at the PRU and is leading to improvements in a few areas.

Leadership supports a strong culture of parental engagement, reflected in clear communication systems, accessible information for families and a range of opportunities for parents to engage with the PRU. As a result, parents are well informed about expectations, provision and their children's progress, which helps to build trust and positive relationships between families and staff. Further, leaders have established effective partnership working arrangements with a wide range of services. This is a strength of the PRU. These include for example Careers Wales, the Youth Justice Service and Ceredigion School Counselling Service. As a result, pupils receive timely, coordinated and personalised support, contributing to improved well-being and engagement.

Leaders draw on a wide range of evidence to inform self-evaluation and improvement planning, including learning walks, instructional coaching, scrutiny of pupils' work, questionnaires and tracking systems. This enables leaders to have a well-informed understanding of current practice. However, because leaders do not consistently evaluate the impact of actions over time, self-evaluation is often descriptive rather than sharply evaluative. Consequently, leaders are not always clear about which strategies are making the greatest difference to pupils' progress and standards.

Leaders have established a comprehensive professional learning programme that reflects the needs of pupils at the PRU. As a result of targeted training in trauma-informed practice, neurodivergence, safeguarding and specialist interventions, staff are developing professional confidence and are beginning to apply consistent approaches. In the most effective practice, this leads to calm, predictable learning environments where pupils feel safe, engaged and better able to regulate their emotions and access learning. Consequently, pupils' attendance, engagement and readiness to learn improve, and incidents of challenging behaviours reduce. However, while leaders identify positive changes in staff practice and pupil engagement, they do not yet evaluate systematically the sustained impact of professional learning on pupils' progress, behaviour and standards.

Leaders focus on national priorities is suitable. For example, leaders are aware of attendance and the poverty agenda. However, strategic planning and evaluation of national priorities at the PRU is at the very early stages of development. Across the PRU equity of offer for provision through the medium of Welsh is inconsistent.

The management committee demonstrates commitment to the PRU through regular engagement activities, including visits, learning walks and a clear focus on pupils' well-being and attendance. However, because members rely heavily on information presented by leaders, monitoring does not lead to sufficiently robust challenge. As a result, oversight of leadership capacity, safeguarding and the use of funding is inconsistent. Consequently, while the committee shows dedication to the PRU's ethos, weaknesses in strategic oversight, accountability and evaluation limit its effectiveness in driving improvement and securing value for money.

Whilst leaders are investing in providing nurturing learning environments to promote pupils to feel safe and calm, the current accommodation arrangements do not support pupil well-being and learning opportunities well enough.

Additional information

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

A site management concern was raised during the inspection, and the local authority has been notified.

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/carer 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.

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