

A report on
Coleg Plas Dwbl

**Mynachlogdu
Clunderwen
Sir Benfro
SA66 7SE**

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by

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

This report is also available in Welsh

About Coleg Plas Dwbl

Coleg Plas Dwbl, which is part of the Ruskin Mill Trust Group, opened in September 2011. It is an independent specialist college for young people with a range of learning difficulties, including autistic spectrum condition, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, and social and emotional difficulties.

The college is situated on a bio-dynamic 100-acre farm at the base of the Preseli mountains in Pembrokeshire. The land consists of pasture, woodland and extensive gardens for horticulture. There are currently 23 learners aged 16 to 25 years attending the college. Of these, a majority of learners have residential placements and live in the college's residential houses situated locally. The majority of learners are placed by Welsh local authorities with a minority placed by local authorities in England.

The college bases its educational philosophy on the founding principles of the philosopher and scientist Rudolf Steiner, the polymath John Ruskin and the arts and crafts figure William Morris. It offers a Practical Skills Therapeutic Education (PSTE), which gives learners the opportunity to learn through real-life activities. These activities include a wide range of practical sessions in the forge, the farm, craft workshop and the kitchen.

The college principal has been in post since September 2024, he is supported by a deputy principal and an assistant principal. The leadership team is supported by thirteen tutors, and 24 support staff, an occupational therapist and speech and language therapist. The last full inspection of the college was in 2023.

Main findings

Coleg Plas Dwbl provides a calm, welcoming and highly inclusive environment based on mutual respect that supports learners with complex needs effectively. The curriculum is grounded in an ethos of 're-imagining potential' and combines accredited and non-accredited learning with practical, authentic experiences such as land-based learning, underpinned by a 'seed to table' approach. (A holistic approach that follows food through every step of its lifecycle, from cultivation to consumption).

Leaders demonstrate a strong commitment to highly personalised provision tailored to individual sensory, emotional and communication needs. As a result, learners are supported to engage meaningfully in sessions, social situations and decision-making activities, such as the student council and group discussions. Learner voice is a strength of the college.

Nearly all staff know the learners exceptionally well. The college ensures that a strong emphasis on learner well-being is at the core of its work. Staff and learners participate jointly in weekly assemblies, where the work of the college community is celebrated and valued.

Learners understand the role they play in supporting their own well-being through a range of meaningful practical activities, including walking the college grounds, collecting and delivering vegetables to the college kitchen, participating in land-based learning and horticulture, and preparing meals. As a result, learners develop an understanding of healthy lifestyles, improve their self-regulation skills and build the confidence and independence needed to participate in college life and the wider community.

Staff develop strong working relationships between with learners which create a supportive environment where most learners feel safe, valued and encouraged to participate. Staff use a range of engaging activities that promote learner interest and develop their confidence in speaking and collaboration. As a result, many learners show positive attitudes to learning and work well together in sessions.

Spotlight: Communication approaches

Learners benefit from strong collaboration between teaching staff, therapists, residential and support staff. A notable strength is the highly effective use of communication approaches across the college.

Staff are supported to use signing, symbols, communication boards and personalised visual resources consistently to support learners' engagement and participation. By combining a range of communication methods staff reduce learners' barriers to understanding and interaction. As a result, learners experience supportive and predictable environments which supports effective participation and progress in language, social interaction and self-regulation skills.

Staff listen and respond effectively to learner voice. Communication resources beneficially support learners to make purposeful contributions to college life and understanding their own progress. For example, learners expressing their views related to end of term events and work experience placements.

In sessions observed during this visit, nearly all learners demonstrated highly positive behaviours in line with their needs and abilities. Learners are motivated to learn and are highly proud to be members of the college community. In addition, the wider organisation has made a significant investment to enhance the learning environment. For example, an extension to the on-site forge and farm buildings which further enhance the practical learning spaces at the college

Nearly all learners participate in purposeful work experience opportunities both internally and externally. Within the college, learners participate in supporting with administration tasks, work alongside the maintenance team, or participate in horticulture activities. Outside of college, learners are supported with placements which may continue once the learner has finished their course. For example, working as a greensman at a local golf club or in a community kitchen. These experiences enable the development of highly valuable skills and, where appropriate, prepare learners suitably for post-college employment opportunities. This is a strength of the college.

The principal has been in post since September 2024. During this time, the establishment of clear routines and expectations, has contributed effectively to calm learning environments. New staffing arrangements, including the introduction of senior tutor roles and curriculum-based learning assistants, are strengthening collaboration across the teaching team and improving consistency in learner support. As a result, learners benefit from a more nurturing and well-coordinated approach that is helping to improve engagement, confidence and progress.

Leaders provide valuable professional learning opportunities that are closely aligned to the college’s priorities. As a result, staff develop increased confidence and expertise in supporting learners’ complex communication and sensory needs. They ensure consistent practice is implemented, improving learner engagement across the college.

Leaders have embedded a strong safeguarding culture at the college and carry out their responsibilities highly effectively. Additionally, the head of safeguarding for the Trust regularly visits the college and acts as a critical friend to the designated safeguarding person. Staff undertake regular safeguarding training, and safer recruitment processes are robust.

At organisational level, leaders do not evaluate and review the college’s policies and procedures robustly to ensure that they align with the college’s Welsh context and Welsh legislation and guidance.

While communication strategies are well established in practice, the evaluation of impact on learner progress are in the early stages of development.

Recommendations

We have made two recommendations to help the college continue to improve:

- R1 Refine self-evaluation processes to consider the impact of communication strategies on learner progress
- R2 Ensure that the college’s policies and procedures include appropriate reference to the Welsh context of the college and to Welsh Government legislation and guidance.

Progress in addressing recommendations from previous visit or inspection report

R1 Consolidate progress toward embedding communication strategies for learners across the college

Since the last visit, leaders have made strong progress on embedding communication strategies for learners across the college.

Copies of the report

Copies of this report are available from the college and from the Estyn website (<http://www.estyn.gov.wales/>)

The report was produced in accordance with the Learning and Skills Act (2000).

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