



Arolygiaeth Ei Mawrhydi dros Addysg a Hyfforddiant yng Nghymru  
Her Majesty's Inspectorate for Education and Training in Wales

**A report on**

**Coleg Plas Dwbl**

**Date of inspection: October 2019**

**by**

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

## About Coleg Plas Dwbl

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

The college is situated on a farm at the base of the Preseli mountains in Pembrokeshire. The land consists of pasture, woodland and extensive gardens for horticulture. There are currently 15 learners aged 16 to 25 years attending the college. Of these, nine learners are funded for education programmes, and six are funded by social services. Many learners are placed by Welsh local authorities with a few placed by local authorities in England. The majority of learners live in the college's residential houses situated in local villages.

The college bases its educational philosophy on the founding principles of the philosopher and scientist Rudolph Steiner. It offers a practical skills therapeutic education curriculum, which gives learners the opportunity to learn through real-life activities. These activities include a wide range of practical sessions in the workshop, the forge, the farm and the kitchen.

Since the last monitoring visit, the college has re-organised its leadership team. It now consists of a principal, assistant principal, education learning coordinator, land manager and head of residential care. Since that visit, the college has employed a psychotherapist, speech and language therapist and counsellor to provide therapeutic support for learners.

The last full inspection of the college was in May 2015.

## Main findings

### **Strengths**

The college provides a calm learning environment. Tutors and support staff work together effectively to respond consistently to learners. They know their learners well and build strong working relationships with them. This helps learners to feel safe and confident to take risks and develop new skills.

In sessions, tutors provide clear guidance and instruction. They plan stimulating and challenging activities that motivate learners and build thoughtfully on their interests and aspirations. They provide positive and reassuring verbal feedback that helps learners to remain on task and work positively towards their targets.

Many learners make strong progress against their session goals. Many learners recall previous learning and improve their problem-solving skills well. More able learners develop successfully their higher level thinking and reading skills in project-based work and practical contexts, for example planning a design project in the iron forge.

The college has strengthened its arrangements for leadership and management. The appointment of middle managers to co-ordinate the work of teams is helping to improve communication, consistency of practice and quality assurance processes across the college. These arrangements are at a very early stage. The college has responded positively to the recommendations from the previous monitoring visit.

### **Areas for development**

The college gathers a wide range of information on many aspects of its provision. However, it does not evaluate this information well enough to identify its priorities for development.

Since the last visit, the college has experienced an increase in the number of learners with highly challenging behaviours. It has strengthened its provision to support the needs of these learners, for example by employing a counsellor, psychotherapist and speech and language therapist. The college has recently introduced positive behaviour support plans for a few learners to assist education staff working with learners in sessions. However, this initiative is at a very early stage.

### **Recommendations**

**The school should:**

**R1. Ensure that improvement planning takes account of the college's evaluation of its strengths and key areas to develop**

**R2. Implement behaviour support strategies for all learners who require them to maximise progress and wellbeing in sessions**

## **Progress in addressing recommendations from previous note of visit or inspection report**

### **Recommendation 1: Ensure that session observations focus suitably on the progress learners make in their sessions, particularly in literacy and numeracy**

Since the last monitoring visit, the college has reviewed its approach to session observations to ensure that they focus suitably on the progress learners make in sessions, particularly in the development of their literacy and numeracy skills.

This focus ensures that tutors' planning includes regular opportunities for learners to apply and develop these skills. As a result, most learners express themselves confidently. They listen carefully and respond appropriately when asked to extend answers or develop their ideas. In practical sessions, learners practise and consolidate their numeracy skills in purposeful contexts, such as the college kitchen or vegetable gardens. However, the planning to refine essential skills targets to ensure they support learners' long term goals is at an early stage of development.

### **Recommendation 2: Increase opportunities for all staff to observe and share good practice**

The college provides suitable opportunities for teaching staff to develop their expertise and share good practice. Formal training leading to recognised teaching qualifications for a few members of teaching staff ensures that these tutors develop a beneficial understanding of a range of teaching strategies.

Tutors and support staff have regular opportunities to meet with middle managers to discuss successes and challenges within their sessions. These meetings provide a valuable opportunity for ongoing professional dialogue and contribute to a shared understanding of the impact of teaching on learning. As a result, sessions include an appropriate focus on learners' skills development. However, the college has not accessed opportunities to visit other providers in the sector to develop their understanding of effective teaching beyond the college's own practice. This means that leaders do not have a clear understanding of the overall strengths and areas for development in teaching and learning.

### **Recommendation 3: Refine self-assessment processes to include specific evaluations of learners' progress during sessions and their overall achievement**

Since the last monitoring visit, the college has strengthened systems to collect information about the progress learners make during sessions. This includes data on the achievement of literacy, numeracy and short-term targets, as well as information on attendance, behaviour and the achievement of qualifications.

Leaders review individual learners' progress termly and share the outcomes of this with parents, carers and placing authorities. There are worthwhile processes for tutors to discuss learners' day-to-day progress and to identify issues regarding their support and wellbeing, including weekly meetings and daily briefings. The college uses this information suitably to ensure the educational programmes and support provided meet learners' needs well.

Overall, the college considers a wide range of information about learners' progress and achievements during their time at the college. However, it does not evaluate sufficiently the progress learners make as a whole, particularly in the achievement of their longer-term goals. This means that the college does not have a clear picture of the strengths and areas for development to inform its strategic planning in this area.

**Recommendation 4: Implement a suitable programme of personal and social education that includes sex and relationships education and online safety**

Since the last monitoring visit, the college has strengthened the provision to support learners in this area. For example, it has employed a counsellor, psychotherapist and speech and language therapist to assess learners' needs and develop staff knowledge and awareness. These staff respond to issues that have been raised by tutors, help plan the provision for learners and provide guidance for the education team. For example, the counsellor provides informal advice to learners on a range of worthwhile topics including elements of online safety, sexual health and personal hygiene.

The college uses tea-breaks, sessions and student voice meetings to gather information from the learners informally about their concerns. This approach enables staff to initiate discussion, share information and plan appropriate support. However, there is not a planned approach to identifying and addressing gaps in learners' knowledge over time. This means that the provision for learners to develop their understanding of issues in relation to sexual health and online safety in relation to their individual needs is inconsistent.

## Copies of the report

Copies of this report are available from the provider and from the Estyn website ([www.estyn.gov.wales](http://www.estyn.gov.wales))

The report was produced in accordance with Section 77 of the Learning and Skills Act 2000.

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