



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

**A report on**

**Ty Dysgu**

**Alexandra Avenue  
Merthyr Tydfil  
CF47 9AF**

**Date of inspection: September 2022**

**by**

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

**This report is also available in Welsh.**

## About Ty Dysgu

Name of provider	Ty Dysgu
Local authority	Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council
Language of the provider	English
Type of school	Pupil Referral Unit
Residential provision?	No
Multi-site provision?	Yes
Number of pupils on roll	39
Pupils of statutory school age	39
Date of previous Estyn inspection (if applicable)	
Start date of inspection	27/09/2022
<p>Ty Dysgu is a Pupil Referral Unit (PRU) maintained by Merthyr Tydfil local authority. It educates pupils from the ages of 5-16 with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties.</p> <p>The provision operates out of two sites. One for pupils aged five to eleven, Ty Dysgu Dowlais, the other Ty Dysgu Homfray for pupils from eleven up to the age of 16.</p> <p>There are currently 39 pupils on roll. Twenty-four pupils attend the secondary provision and fifteen attend the primary. Very few pupils are looked after by the local authority or have English as an additional language. Most pupils are dual registered with a mainstream school. Just over half of the pupils are entitled to free school meals.</p> <p>The PRU has not been previously inspected and was opened in September 2018 with foundation provision added in 2019.</p>	

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](https://mylocalschool.gov.wales)

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

## Overview

Pupils at Ty Dysgu PRU have a wide range of social, emotional and behavioural difficulties. Many pupils arrive at the PRU with a history of poor attendance and have frequently missed a considerable amount of education prior to starting at the PRU. As a result, they have gaps in their learning, and may present as having little confidence in their own ability as learners. In addition, managing their own behaviour acts as an additional barrier to their learning.

During their time at the PRU, only a minority of pupils who attend regularly make suitable progress from their individual starting points in line with their needs and ability. Overall, most pupils respond appropriately in lessons. Pupils' literacy development is limited and too slow due to the lack of opportunities for them to use these skills across the curriculum. A minority of pupils develop their numeracy skills suitably. Across all ages there are limited opportunities for pupils to develop their ICT skills progressively over time.

During their time at the PRU, most pupils develop strong working relationships with staff, and this helps them to feel safe and secure. A few pupils with challenging behaviour which include mental health issues are on part-time bespoke timetables and only attend the PRU briefly during the week. Plans for these pupils to transition back to the PRU on a full-time basis are in place. However, a very few have begun this transition process and as a result, this limits their progress. Around half of the pupils with a poor record of attendance from their previous school make limited progress during their time at the PRU.

Overall, the PRU does not provide a sufficiently broad and balanced curriculum to meet the wide and diverse needs of the pupils. The PRU is in the early stages of preparing for Curriculum for Wales. The range of learning experiences for all pupils is too narrow across the PRU.

Staff collect a suitable range of pupil assessment information. These assessments focus on pupils' literacy, numeracy and well-being skills. However, this is not well established, and staff do not use these assessments effectively enough to track and monitor pupil progress. These assessments do not inform future planning well enough to deliver appropriate interventions to meet the needs of individual pupils.

The PRU does not currently have robust processes in place to track and monitor pupils' progress and well-being, including attendance and behaviour, as they move through the PRU. As a consequence, they do not reliably identify and respond to relevant issues and challenges early enough.

Leaders do not have a strategic and clear enough vision that is shared with the remainder of the staff for developing the PRU and raising standards. Self-evaluation process are ineffective and underdeveloped by leaders. Most staff are unclear what the priorities for improvement planning are at the PRU. Processes for assuring the quality of provision for pupils' progress are ineffective. The safeguarding policy is detailed and provides useful referral information. However, the implementation of the policy is inconsistent across the PRU. Leaders have failed to identify and address many safeguarding concerns at the PRU.

## **Recommendations**

- R1 Strengthen the management of safeguarding and address the shortcomings identified during the inspection
- R2 Strengthen the quality of strategic leadership to ensure that the PRU's self-evaluation systems identify priorities for improvement that are aligned to raising standards of learning and well-being
- R3 Develop effective processes to track, monitor and evaluate pupil progress
- R4 Strengthen the curriculum offer for all pupils
- R5 Improve pupil attendance

## **What happens next**

In accordance with the Education Act 2005, HMCI is of the opinion that special measures are required in relation to this PRU. The PRU will draw up an action plan to show how it is going to address the recommendations. Estyn will monitor the PRU's progress on a termly basis.

## Main findings

### Learning

Pupils attending Ty Dysgu Pupil Referral Unit (PRU) have a range of social, emotional and behavioural difficulties. Nearly all pupils have a history of poor school attendance. A few have been out of education for a considerable time. During their time at the PRU, only a minority of pupils who attend regularly make suitable progress from their individual starting points in line with their needs and ability.

Overall, most pupils respond appropriately in lessons. However, teachers do not always ensure that the learning objectives provide sufficient challenge to stretch pupils well enough throughout the entire lesson.

A minority of pupils make steady progress in developing their social and communication skills, in line with their needs and individual starting points. For example, they listen, follow instructions, take turns and co-operate with teaching staff and with each other. They deal with their anxieties and gradually develop their ability to talk to other pupils, staff and visitors to the PRU. However, a minority of older pupils are less willing to engage with visitors or their peers. Further, they do not engage well with their learning and do not listen well enough to staff or when their peers are talking. This is having a negative impact on their progress.

A minority of younger pupils develop their reading skills appropriately. For example, they use decoding strategies to help them read unknown words such as “ache”. A minority of older pupils write appropriately in a narrow range of genres and structure their writing suitably, using simple and compound sentences. For example, they practise extended written work as part of examination preparation by describing aspects of the “Great Escape” However, their literacy development overall is limited and too slow due to the lack of opportunities for them to use these skills across the curriculum. A majority of pupils across the PRU do not have a strong enough grasp of basic spelling, punctuation and grammar rules and make the same errors repeatedly. Pupils’ improvement over time in comprehension and spelling is limited.

A minority of pupils develop their numeracy skills suitably. In mathematics lessons, pupils use the concepts of angles to calculate missing values correctly to solve problems. Across the curriculum, pupils demonstrate sound use of practical numeracy, for example when using a balance in science to measure a required amount of powder and a measuring jug to add a specific volume of water. A few older pupils apply multi-step processes to calculate the answers to a mathematical problem. However, a majority of pupils across the PRU make limited progress in formal numeracy assessments over time due to the lack of opportunities to use these skills consistently across the curriculum.

A minority of pupils make appropriate use of information and communication technology (ICT) to support their learning. Across all ages there are limited opportunities for pupils to develop their ICT skills progressively over time.

Overall, nearly all pupils across the PRU make limited progress in developing their Welsh language skills.

A majority of pupils are over reliant on staff support to direct their learning and do not develop age-appropriate independent learning skills.

It is not appropriate to compare the standards that pupils achieve at the PRU with national averages or to analyse the performance trends of groups over time because of the nature of the pupils' behavioural, social and emotional needs.

Nearly all pupils leave the PRU with at least one nationally recognised qualification in courses that are generally appropriate to their needs and abilities. These include qualifications in a narrow range of work-related courses, including construction, cooking skills and personal finance.

In 2021-2022 academic year, all pupils leaving the PRU went on to further education, training or employment.

### **Well-being and attitudes to learning**

During their time at the PRU, most pupils develop strong working relationships with staff, and this helps them to feel safe and secure. A majority of primary pupils and a very few secondary pupils report that they enjoy attending the PRU at least some of the time. However, a majority of pupils are over reliant on staff support to direct their learning and do not develop age-appropriate independent learning skills. As a result, these pupils do not always have the resilience to cope when they find something difficult or get something wrong in their work.

In lessons, a majority of pupils settle appropriately to work, follow instructions suitably and persevere with effective support from staff. A majority of pupils show respect for each other and listen to staff and peers and take turns. However, a minority of pupils do not show sufficient interest in their work and often leave lessons unchallenged by staff. This regular loss of learning time has a significant impact on their progress.

Younger pupils take their role on the recently reinstated school council seriously and work collaboratively with staff on several activities. For example, they cleaned and tidied the outdoor areas and garden planters, organised a jubilee party celebration and decided on end of year trips for peers. Many older pupils are confident in their ability to share ideas and interests with familiar staff. For example, pupils feel that they are listened to during their well-being sessions and that staff give them a choice in their learning. However, they do not participate in formal pupil voice activities and therefore do not develop their reasoning and leadership skills well enough by engaging in discussions involving the PRU community.

A few pupils at Ty Dysgu use their creative skills appropriately to make produce such as coasters and tree decorations to sell as part of an enterprise activity at Christmas. A very few older pupils contributed to an innovative project to support young people in the area. They created a useful information booklet on how to access support for important aspects such as mental health, bullying, managing social media and being a young carer.

Many pupils develop a suitable understanding of how to stay safe online and are confident discussing this with staff and visitors.

Nearly all pupils within the PRU understand and follow the behaviour policy and value the rewards that are available for the achievement over time. As a result, this

helps pupils to understand how to regulate their behaviour so that it does not impact negatively on their learning.

During the inspection, the behaviour of nearly all pupils attending the PRU was generally appropriate. It is not possible to comment on trends or patterns in behaviour over time. However, the level of fixed term exclusions within the PRU remains high.

At the time of the inspection, no pupils aged 15 to 16 access their mainstream partner school. However, all pupils aged 5 to 7 and a very few pupils aged 8 to 14 attend their mainstream schools at least one day per week. As a result, pupils' opportunities to successfully reintegrate full-time to mainstream education, where appropriate, are limited.

A few pupils with challenging behaviour are on part-time bespoke timetables and only attend the PRU briefly during the week. Plans for these pupils to transition back to the PRU on a full-time basis are in place. However, a very few have begun this transition process and as a result, this limits their progress.

Around half of the pupils with a poor record of attendance from their previous school make limited progress during their time at the PRU. Where older pupils attend the PRU consistently, many demonstrate resilience and commitment to their education by travelling independently to the site. However, the high and persistent absence of a majority of pupils has a negative impact on their progress, achievement and well-being. Overall, attendance at the PRU remains too low following the pandemic.

### **Teaching and learning experiences**

Overall, the PRU does not provide a sufficiently broad and balanced curriculum to meet the wide and diverse needs of the pupils.

The curriculum has an appropriate focus on developing individual pupils' literacy, numeracy and social skills. However, pupils' ability to apply these skills across the curriculum is under developed. The PRU is in the early stages of preparing for Curriculum for Wales. There is limited provision for Welsh and too few opportunities for pupils to develop their ICT skills progressively across the curriculum.

The range of learning experiences for all pupils is too narrow across the PRU. Older pupils have opportunities to take part in physical education regularly at the local community centre and suitably planned personal, social education (PSE) sessions which support pupils' well-being and mental health positively. In addition, the pupils benefit from these experiences which help develop their understanding of healthy lifestyle and behaviours. The PRU provides a limited range of opportunities for a minority of older pupils to deepen and develop their understanding of literature. For example, Cirque Du Freak. This also successfully introduces pupils to a range of artists such as Murakami, Dada and American pop artists to encourage pupils to make cultural links to the story.

Staff across the PRU provide appropriate support for the development of pupils' social and emotional skills across the curriculum. Nearly all staff develop strong working relationships with the pupils and understand them well. Nearly all support staff meet the needs of pupils in a sensitive and timely manner. Overall, staff provide positive role models for the pupils.

Staff collect a suitable range of pupil assessment information. These assessments focus on pupils' literacy, numeracy and well-being skills. However, this is not well-established, and staff do not use these assessments effectively enough to track and monitor pupil progress. These evaluations do not inform future planning well enough to deliver appropriate interventions to meet the needs of individual pupils.

Secondary teaching staff have strengthened the beneficial links with a local school to support subject development. For example, through science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM). As a result, pupils are beginning to have opportunities to develop their thinking and problem-solving skills through a range of practical experiences.

Most teachers have a secure subject knowledge. In the most effective lessons, teachers plan suitably to capture pupils' interest and engage them in learning. However, the planning for the development of skills across the PRU is at an early stage. Most teachers give suitable verbal and written feedback to pupils to let them know how to improve their work. However, pupils do not always act on this feedback consistently and often repeat the same errors, which limits their progress. Most teachers make effective use of questioning to develop pupils' thinking and check their understanding. For example, when comparing items of clothing and choosing their favourite, pupils consider the cost and functionality.

Annual reports to parents and carers provide appropriate information on their child's progress and the next steps in their child's learning.

### **Care, support and guidance**

Staff at the PRU provide pupils with a caring environment so they can explore their social, emotional and learning strengths. They know the pupils well and are empathetic to their individual needs.

Staff at the PRU liaise effectively with parents and carers on a regular basis. The ALNCo, alongside relevant professionals, establishes productive relationships with parents and carers by maintaining effective lines of communication, which include regular on-site meetings. This supports the parents well and enables them to raise any issues that may affect their child's learning and well-being. Formal reports to parents are produced annually and include useful update information to help them support their child's education.

The PRU has well established links with an appropriate range of external agencies. This includes the local community police and the educational welfare service as well as third sector organisations and the youth justice service. This multi-agency supports a joined up approach to supporting pupils and their families well. In addition, the PRU has suitable access to the careers service, which supports pupils' transition to further education, training or employment well.

The PRU provides limited formal opportunities for pupils to participate in worthwhile decision-making activities. Younger pupils have the opportunity to join the recently reintroduced school council and contribute purposefully to decisions that affect their life in the PRU. For example, the school council recently redesigned the outdoor space at the PRU. However, the school council is not fully representative of the population of the PRU as there is no school council on the secondary site. As a result, the ability of pupils to influence the work of the PRU is extremely limited.



Although the PRU reviews pupils' part-time timetables regularly there are no secure plans in place to ensure that all pupils attend full-time. The PRU does not currently have robust processes in place to track and monitor pupils' progress and well-being, including attendance and behaviour, as they move through the PRU. As a consequence, they do not reliably identify and respond to relevant issues and challenges early enough. Staff do not address these issues well enough through the provision of appropriate support and challenge; the use of intervention strategies and the mentoring or coaching of individuals or groups.

The PRU produces an appropriate baseline of pupil attainment and well-being on entry. Staff use this information well to develop suitable learning plans and to set appropriate targets for literacy, numeracy and well-being in individual education plans (IEPs). However, procedures to track and monitor pupil progress in achieving their targets are underdeveloped. Overall, the staff's understanding of how to track the progress that pupils make in subjects across the curriculum in order to provide appropriate challenge and to plan the next steps in their learning is poor.

The PRU produces useful behaviour support plans for pupils. Overall, these beneficial plans aid staff to support the pupils in managing their anxiety and behaviour. However, the sharing of these plans across the whole staff team is underdeveloped.

Arrangements to promote positive behaviour are clear and well understood. Most staff implement the school's behaviour policy consistently and the PRU records incidents relating to challenging behaviour appropriately. However, processes to monitor such incidents and identify particular patterns and trends are not in place. This limits the PRUs ability to demonstrate any progress pupils may have made in terms of improving their behaviour when planning opportunities for them to return to their mainstream schools.

Through the recently amended personal and social education (PSE) curriculum pupils are beginning to develop an understanding of their place in the world. Physical education lessons include the delivery of a variety of sport such as rugby and football skills, gym-based activities and pool. Younger pupils have the opportunity to take part in outdoor activities such as climbing. The PRU does not provide lunchtime and after-school opportunities for pupils. The facilities on the secondary site do not allow for pupils to play games with each other at breaktime. Equally facilities on the primary site are limited. As a result, opportunities for pupils to develop their physical and social skills such as sharing, waiting their turn and considering the views of others, outside the formal curriculum are underdeveloped.

There are appropriate safeguarding arrangements in place with two leaders identified as the designated safeguarding leads for the PRU. Most staff understand their responsibilities for safeguarding. However, a very few are not secure in their understanding of their roles and responsibilities, including a few members of the management committee. For example, when asked, a very few staff were not sure who they should report any safeguarding concerns to at the PRU. Appropriate annual safeguarding training is in place for all staff.

There is a suitably secure system in place to store all pupil safeguarding information which is accessible only to the designated safeguarding leads. Relevant information is shared with staff. The system allows the safeguarding leads to access information,

progress and track referrals to children's services and identify any trends and patterns in these referrals.

Partnership working with a wide range of agencies, for example social services and the police, is in place. This collaborative working successfully supports the needs of pupils. The designated safeguarding leads work together with the local authority safeguarding team to complete the annual safeguarding audit. This helps the PRU identify what is working well and areas for improvement.

The PSE curriculum reinforces and promotes pupils' understanding of how to keep themselves safe suitably. For example, pupils have lessons on mental health and well-being, which focus on challenging bullying, substance abuse and body image issues.

The safeguarding policy is detailed and provides useful referral information. However, the implementation of the policy is inconsistent across the PRU. In particular staff do not have suitable strategies to manage pupils' use of personal mobile phones during the day. Staff use their personal mobiles to access an App to record pupil work and share information. Several concerns in relation to traffic management and site security arrangements were also brought to the attention of the management committee and local authority.

As a result, the PRU's arrangements to keep pupils safe do not meet requirements and give cause for concern.

## **Leadership and management**

The senior leadership team at the PRU consists of the headteacher and two non-teaching assistant headteachers. Since September 2022, leaders have strengthened the distribution of leadership responsibilities and have provided clarity for staff on their roles and responsibilities across the PRU. In addition, leaders and staff have recently revised the PRU vision and values to better reflect the provision. However, these developments are very recent and have not had sufficient time to impact on key areas that require improvement such as the quality of teaching and learning, safeguarding and pupil attendance.

Leaders do not have a strategic and clear enough vision that is shared with the remainder of the staff for developing the PRU and raising standards.

Over time leaders have become too involved in day to day operational issues and lack a strategic approach to self-evaluation and improvement planning. As a result, processes and structures to ensure that the PRU can improve are significantly underdeveloped. This impacts the effectiveness of several aspects of the PRU, for example curriculum planning, and development is inconsistent and limits the capacity of teachers to plan for pupil progress robustly enough.

Self-evaluation processes are ineffective and underdeveloped by leaders. Most staff are unclear what the priorities for improvement planning are at the PRU. The development plan has many priorities and actions, which are detailed, but there is too much repetition. Staff do not have the opportunity to contribute to the PRU's development plan and therefore the leaders do not prioritise all the important elements that require improvement.

Processes for assuring the quality of provision for pupils' progress are ineffective. Although these processes include the collection and analysis of performance data, leaders do not know if pupils consistently make the progress they are capable of achieving, as they do not have secure data and information about pupils' standards. Lesson observations and scrutinising pupils' work across the curriculum are not formally in place across the PRU. As a result, self-evaluation does not give detailed enough attention to improving pupils' achievement, and procedures have not yet led to raising standards and improving the quality of provision.

Performance management for staff has not been established. As a result, staff do not have the opportunity for formal professional dialogue with leaders and to set relevant targets to support achieving the improvement priorities.

Staffing levels across both sites provide a high staff to pupil ratio. As a result, most pupils access one-to-one support throughout the day. A culture of staff collaboration is strong at each of the PRU sites. However, collaboration between primary and secondary staff is at the early stages of development. Currently there are limited opportunities for pupils to benefit from wider learning experiences that staff can provide, for example younger pupils benefiting from art activities delivered by specialist secondary staff.

Leaders have failed to identify and address many safeguarding concerns at the PRU.

Weekly staff meetings for teachers have recently been introduced. Support staff can attend these sessions, but they are too infrequent and inconsistent. It is too early to evaluate the impact of these meetings.

The range and quality of professional learning opportunities for staff are too variable. In addition, they do not align closely enough with the PRU priorities for improvement identified within the development plan.

The management committee, whilst demonstrating a commitment to supporting leaders, does not challenge the strategic leadership of the PRU well enough. The headteacher works collaboratively with local authority officers. However, the headteacher remains unclear about the role of the PRU within the local authority. This lack of clarity impedes the pace of progress at the PRU.

The headteacher meets half termly with the local authority finance officer to review the financial spend at the PRU. The allocation of financial resources is beginning to be more closely aligned with the development plan. However, this is at the early stages of development, and it is too early to comment on impact.

## Evidence base of the report

Before an inspection, inspectors:

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

During an inspection, inspectors normally:

- hold a meeting with parents to hear their views on the school/PRU and its effectiveness
- meet the headteacher, governors/management committee, senior and middle leaders (where appropriate) and individual teachers to evaluate the impact of the school's/PRU's work
- meet pupils to discuss their work, to listen to them read and to gain their views about various aspects of their school
- meet groups of pupils in leadership roles, such as representatives from the school 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 school to see pupils' learning
- observe and speak to pupils at lunch and break times and at a sample of after-school/PRU clubs, where appropriate
- attend assemblies and daily acts of collective worship
- look closely at the school's/PRU's self-evaluation processes
- consider the school's/PRU's improvement plan and look at evidence to show how well the school/PRU has taken forward planned improvements
- scrutinise a range of school/PRU documents, including information on pupil assessment and progress, records of meetings of staff and the governing body/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

## Copies of the report

Copies of this report are available from the school and from the Estyn website ([www.estyn.gov.wales](http://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 going to press. Any enquiries or comments regarding this document/publication should be addressed to:

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