



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

**A report on**  
**Powys Pupil Referral Unit**

**Powys County Hall  
Spa Road East  
Llandrindod Wells  
Powys  
LD1 5LG**

**Date of inspection: May 2024**

**by**

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

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

## About Powys Pupil Referral Unit

Name of provider	Powys Pupil Referral Unit
Local authority	Powys County Council
Language of the provider	English
Type of school	Pupil referral unit
Residential provision?	No
Multi-site provision?	Yes
Number of pupils on roll	33
Pupils of statutory school age	33
Date of previous Estyn inspection (if applicable)	01/02/2016
Start date of inspection	20/05/2024

Following the de-registration of two pupil referral units in the county, Powys Pupil Referral Unit (PRU) was established in December 2014. It provides education for up to 60 pupils from 7 to 16 years old. Currently, there are 33 pupils on the roll across the primary and secondary age range.

The PRU has two sites, one in Newtown and the other in Brecon. Pupils who attend Powys Pupil Referral Unit have a range of social, emotional, and behavioural difficulties. The PRU caters for pupils who have either been permanently excluded from schools in Powys, or who are at risk of exclusion. The PRU also delivers medical tuition services and provides behaviour outreach to local schools.

There are very few pupils who come from ethnic minority backgrounds and no pupils speak Welsh as their first language. Just over half of the pupils are dual registered with a mainstream school. Six pupils currently have a part-time timetable and pastoral support plan in place. A very few pupils have returned to full-time mainstream education over the last three years. Just under half of pupils are eligible for free school meals. A very few pupils are known to be young carers and a very few pupils are in the care of the local authority. Most pupils are identified as having additional learning needs.

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](http://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

Over time, many pupils make appropriate progress from their initial starting points. Many pupils join the PRU following periods of disruption to their education. Many pupils settle in well, build constructive and trusting relationships with their staff and peers and engage well with their learning. For these pupils, this represents strong progress. However, attendance issues impact on the rate of progress of a minority of pupils across the PRU.

In most lessons, pupils develop their social and communication skills successfully. Many pupils develop their reading suitably and in line with their ability. Similarly, many pupils develop their writing skills appropriately. Many pupils develop their mathematical skills successfully. As pupils move through the PRU, they develop a comprehensive range of digital skills. Nearly all older pupils achieve an appropriate range of accreditation in core subjects.

Teaching is strong across the PRU. Staff in the PRU know their pupils' needs well and create a calm learning environment. Staff manage pupil behaviour well. In many cases, learning meets pupils' individual needs effectively.

The PRU provides a suitably broad and balanced curriculum which meets the needs of most pupils. There is a range of suitable qualification pathways in place, which allow older pupils to achieve well. The PRU supports individual pupils in experiencing a narrow range of vocational courses at the local college. However, this is not an established part of the curriculum offer at the PRU for all pupils.

The curriculum at the PRU offers valuable opportunities for pupils to develop their understanding of their 'cynffin'. However, the planning and tracking of progressive skill development across the PRU are inconsistent. For example, the curriculum offer for the progressive development of Welsh language at the PRU is underdeveloped.

Many pupils have been identified as having an additional learning need and have either a statutory individual development plan (IDP) or a statement of special educational needs. The systematic tracking of the progress that pupils make in relation to their IDP targets is at the very early stages of development.

Staff at the PRU support pupils on an individual basis in planning their next stage of learning. This includes advising on and supporting appropriate applications to further education and/or work experience placements. However, the use of work experience is not a well-established feature across the PRU.

There is a strong safeguarding culture at the PRU. The PRU's safeguarding guidelines and procedures are comprehensive, and all staff know their responsibilities for keeping pupils safe whilst at the PRU.

The local authority does not have a clear strategic vision or improvement plan for the PRU. As a result, leaders at the PRU are unclear of their roles and contribution within the local authority to support pupils accessing education other than at school (EOTAS).

Leadership arrangements differ across the two sites. At the Newtown site, there has been considerable change to the senior leadership team for a significant period of time. This negatively impacts the ability of leaders to effectively plan for improvement, provide sustained support for staff and establish processes and systems at this site.

Across both sites self-evaluation processes require strengthening. The strategic tracking and purposeful analysis of data is underdeveloped. This limits leaders' ability to make robust decisions when identifying areas for improvement.

The role of the management committee requires strengthening. Whilst members are supportive, their role to effectively challenge leaders to improve is underdeveloped. As a result, they are not adequately holding leaders to account.

“Cynefin” is a Welsh term defined by Curriculum for Wales as 'the place where we feel we belong, where the people and landscape around us are familiar, and the sights and sounds are reassuringly recognisable.

## Recommendations

- R1 Leaders work with the local authority to establish a strategic vision for the PRU
- R2 Stabilise and clarify the roles and responsibilities of leaders at the PRU
- R3 Improve quality assurance procedures, self-evaluation and improvement planning across the PRU
- R4 Improve attendance

## What happens next

In accordance with the Education Act 2005, HMCI is of the opinion that this PRU is in need of significant improvement. 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 about 12 months after the publication of this report.

## Main findings

### Learning

Many pupils join the PRU following periods of disruption to their education. Over time, many pupils settle in well, build constructive and trusting relationships with their staff and peers and engage well with their learning. For these pupils, this represents strong progress. However, attendance issues impact on the rate of progress of a minority of pupils across the PRU.

In lessons and over time, many pupils make appropriate progress from their initial starting points and against their personal targets. In relation to their needs, they make progress in a range of areas that support their learning and personal skill development. These skills prepare pupils well for their future lives.

In most lessons, pupils develop their social skills and a range of valuable communication skills successfully. They work well alongside their peers, support each other's learning and enjoy each other's company. For example, pupils develop useful teamwork skills by building towers made of straws and lollipop sticks. Most pupils listen and respect the views of other pupils and staff. Many pupils confidently present new knowledge and understanding. For example, they share information about literacy techniques, how electricity is generated or how to use coding to produce a digital game. In addition, they respond politely in conversation with visitors at the PRU. At break and lunch times, most pupils socialise happily and confidently with their peers and staff.

In lessons, many pupils develop their reading suitably and in line with their ability. Younger pupils approach unfamiliar words confidently and have a good understanding of the strategies needed to determine meaning. They develop an enjoyment of reading by listening to the class teacher read stories. They join in enthusiastically and read short sentences aloud confidently with fluency and expression. Many older pupils skim and scan texts and can locate information effectively. For example, they demonstrate appropriate comprehension skills in response to their reading of articles about local castles and legends.

Many pupils develop their writing skills appropriately. Younger pupils begin to write simple words and phrases. For example, they create tickets to board the Titanic or produce joke books for their peers to enjoy. Older pupils write effectively in sentences and paragraphs with an appropriate degree of accuracy. They develop stories with characters and descriptions to add interest to their writing. Many older pupils write for a variety of different purposes. They successfully write factual pieces of text, structured appropriately and using correct subject terminology, for example to explain how a nuclear reactor works. Many pupils have a clear understanding of the purpose of their writing, for example when writing persuasive letters to the local MP making suggestions for improvements at the PRU.

Many pupils develop their mathematical skills suitably. Younger pupils add, subtract and double numbers competently. Older pupils use addition, subtraction, multiplication, and division with increasing confidence and can explain their methods and their reasoning. Older pupils analyse data to calculate wave speed and successfully produce a range of graphs from different data sets including climate and census data.

Nearly all pupils develop suitable creative skills. For example, younger pupils experiment with a range of materials to produce paintings of Bannau Brycheiniog and colourful models of rockets. Older pupils construct attractive flower displays made of car hub caps and build planters displayed across the PRU.

Many pupils develop their physical skills suitably. Younger pupils show increased control and balance during their play. They develop a range of ball throwing skills and develop their gross motor skills by balancing on narrow beams. Older pupils build on

these skills to develop proficient skills in sports such as table tennis and using the local gym. Older pupils evaluate each other's skills well to improve their technique.

As pupils move through the PRU, they develop a comprehensive range of digital skills. This is a notable feature at the PRU. Younger pupils use publishing programmes to produce digital logos for perfumes and potions that they create. Older pupils successfully manipulate images and text to produce interesting magazines on National Parks. Younger pupils support their peers to use coding to produce computer games. Older pupils successfully programme robotic spheres to model the orbits of the inner planet systems and programme micro-bits to create pedometers.

Nearly all older pupils achieve an appropriate range of accreditation in core subjects in addition to areas that reflect their abilities well.

Over the last three academic years, nearly all Year 11 pupils leaving the PRU progressed into education, training, or employment.

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

Nearly all pupils have positive attitudes to their learning. They remain in class for the duration of lessons, settle quickly and stay on task. Many pupils undertake their work willingly and become more confident individuals during their time at the PRU. Pupils are polite and courteous and nearly all pupils show respect for their classmates. They are not overly distracted when their peers struggle to control their emotions and behaviour. Nearly all pupils are respectful of staff and many pupils listen to staff and follow their instructions first time. Those that don't, with sensitive and skilful support from staff, eventually engage.

Over their time at the PRU, most pupils develop strong and trusting relationships with the staff team. This supports them to know who to turn to for support and guidance. Pupils are treated fairly and with respect. Pupils are safe at the PRU and say that they are free from bullying and verbal and physical harm.

Over time, most pupils learn to understand and regulate their emotions. As a result, the behaviour of nearly all pupils across both sites is exemplary. Over recent years, the number of fixed-term and permanent exclusions remains low. The PRU has very recently compared exclusion information for each pupil prior to, and since joining, the PRU. Overall, for many pupils, there has been a significant reduction in exclusions and just over half of pupils have not received any exclusions since joining the PRU. This is a significant achievement for pupils.

Many pupils improve their attendance at the PRU compared to their attendance at their previous school. For these pupils, this represents significant progress. However, a minority of pupils do not attend regularly enough, which has a negative impact on their learning. In addition, a few pupils who struggle to attend the PRU regularly are on part-time bespoke timetables and only attend lessons for short periods during the week. For a very few pupils, transport arrangements have not been provided and this impacts negatively on their ability to attend the PRU.

Many pupils learn to work well with their peers in small groups when playing games and engaging in learning activities. Pupils enjoy the beneficial weekly enrichment

experiences provided by the PRU. For example, pupils work in small groups as part of a geocaching navigation activity at Bannau Brycheiniog. They increase their confidence and resilience and work well as a team within their peer groups.

Around half of pupils at the Brecon site engage enthusiastically in their leadership roles as ambassadors. Pupils take these roles seriously and actively bring about changes, for example improvements to the PRU grounds and changes to their uniform. These experiences give pupils a voice, which in turn has a positive impact on their self-esteem and self-worth, and helps them feel valued. Formal arrangements for pupils to develop leadership roles in the Newtown site are underdeveloped.

## **Teaching and learning experiences**

Across many lessons teaching is strong. Staff are enthusiastic and passionate about teaching and learning. Staff in the PRU know their pupils' needs well and create a calm learning environment. They manage pupil behaviour well. In nearly all cases, staff have strong working relationships with pupils and work hard to foster and develop these to ensure that this impacts positively on pupil outcomes.

The learning experiences for many pupils within the PRU across both sites are strong. Many pupils enjoy a range of learning activities where staff are creative in finding stimulating ways to engage the pupils. For example, during the recent topic on water, pupils used virtual reality headsets to experience rowing on the river Wye. At each of the sites, staff work well together to share ideas and collate resources for lessons. However, staff have limited opportunities to share effective practice between the sites or with other providers.

In many cases, learning is pupil-centred and meets pupils' individual needs effectively. Over the last year, there has been an increased focus on developing pupil voice and this is beginning to show in the experiences that pupils receive within the PRU. Exploding questions are used by pupils at the start of each topic. For example, the exploding question 'where does ink comes from' led to pupils investigating the history of ink, and how ink is made.

Many staff skilfully provide feedback to pupils which is clear and coherent. Pupils respond well to verbal feedback to improve their next steps in learning, be it positive or challenging. Overall, staff written feedback reflects the marking policy well.

A wide range of baseline assessments and tracking processes are in place across the PRU. However, the strategic use of this data to analyse and develop a consistent approach to evaluate pupil progress by teachers is underdeveloped. As a result, teachers do not consistently make best use of the data available to monitor the progress pupils make during their time at the PRU.

The PRU provides a suitably broad and balanced curriculum which meets the needs of most pupils. Pupils across the PRU have the opportunity to learn through a tailored and engaging curriculum. There is a range of suitable qualification pathways in place, which allow older pupils to achieve well. The development of skills across the curriculum is in the early stages of development. The planning and tracking of progressive skill development across the PRU is inconsistent. The curriculum at the

PRU offers valuable opportunities for pupils to develop their understanding of their 'cynefin'. For example, the curriculum offer for the progressive development of Welsh language at the PRU is underdeveloped.

Pupils at the Newtown site access work experience placements that are beneficial. Where appropriate, the PRU supports individual pupils in experiencing a narrow range of vocational courses at the local college. However, this is not an established part of the curriculum offer at the PRU.

Relationship and sexuality education (RSE) is delivered through a range of suitable commercial schemes for older pupils and through specific planning for the younger pupils. The PRU provides valuable opportunities for pupils to work with and learn from a variety of outside speakers. For example, the school nurse provides information on subjects such as personal hygiene and sexual health.

Staff understand the importance of teaching personal and social education (PSE), within Powys PRU and the impact this can have on pupils. Staff are empathetic to the requirements of pupils in this area and plan work that reflects their ever-changing needs. Planning for PSE is stringent and is reflective of the issues affecting the pupils.

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

The positive and respectful relationships that staff have established with pupils is a strength of the work of the PRU. This contributes very positively to the care, support and guidance that pupils receive during their time at the PRU. This is significant considering that nearly all pupils have experienced difficulties in mainstream school including periods of exclusion or significant periods of time without any formal education.

The use of a series of relevant artwork and positive statements at the Newtown site, for example, helps to create an environment where pupils know that "change starts here", that "the only thing that matters is what you do now" and "the power of a second chance". These themes drive the work of the PRU, across both sites well.

Many pupils have been identified as having an additional learning need and have either a statutory individual development plan (IDP) or a statement of special educational needs. However, leaders are not clear why pupils without additional learning needs are placed in a specialist provision. The additional learning provision identified in pupils' IDPs very usefully contains a range of suitable targets that have been chosen, where appropriate, by pupils and staff. The systematic tracking of the progress that pupils make in relation to their IDP targets is at an early stage of development.

Staff at the PRU work effectively with a range of external partners to support the needs of its pupils. Staff at the PRU assess and track pupils' emotional well-being, and where there are concerns, refer to relevant partners. Staff use the information shared by other agencies to sensitively support pupils on issues that are relevant to their lives. Staff liaise regularly with professionals who may be supporting pupils and their families.



Relevant and personalised information on pupils' past adverse childhood experiences and trauma is used alongside useful strategies on how best to support pupils when they reintegrate to mainstream schools. A few pupils have successfully reintegrated over the past couple of years. A very few pupils are only registered to attend the PRU, this makes it difficult for the PRU to reintegrate these pupils to mainstream schools.

The PRU supports pupils from local special schools in studying for their GCSEs. This provides them with invaluable opportunities that might not, ordinarily, be available to them.

Many pupils are developing their understanding of fairness, equity, and sustainability, for example through various fund-raising activities. At the Brecon site, this includes events such as coffee mornings and an Arctic themed fayre selling products made by pupils.

In addition to the individual advice, support and guidance provided by staff, the PRU has effective provision to develop pupils' knowledge and understanding of a wide range of social and moral issues that are relevant to young people and society. These include accredited pathways in mental health, substance misuse and young people in the criminal justice system. Pupils explore these themes and consider the impact they have on individuals and society. As a result, myths are dispelled, they understand how to challenge stereotypes and they become better informed citizens in their communities.

Pupils at the Newtown site, where appropriate, are accompanied to the local gym. They follow training plans and use a range of equipment. In addition, pupils learn to box and comment on how the experience allows them to "get rid of my aggression" and allows them to "learn new boxing skills". As a result, pupils that access this provision have a clear understanding of the importance of exercise and the positive impact this has on their well-being. Following the support and opportunities provided by staff at the PRU, pupils have gone on to join local rugby teams and join a running club. Other off-site activities include archery and high ropes. These experiences take pupils out of their comfort zones and help to develop their confidence.

Staff at the PRU support pupils on an individual basis in planning their next steps. This includes advising on and supporting appropriate applications to further education and or work experience placements. Work experience placements provide pupils with a secure understanding of the requirements and rewards of working in, for example, the construction industry. Staff use the curriculum to develop pupils' understanding of the advantages and disadvantages of potential careers. Pupils assess for themselves the importance of good communication and time management skills and how these apply to their chosen career. However, the use of work experience is not a well-established feature across the PRU.

The PRU has broadly appropriate provision to support pupils' developing understanding of the importance of healthy living and eating. However, the PRU does not provide cooked lunches for pupils on the Newtown site.

There is a strong safeguarding culture at the PRU. The PRU's safeguarding guidelines and procedures are comprehensive, and all staff know their

responsibilities for keeping pupils safe whilst at the PRU. Safeguarding gives no cause for concern.

## **Leadership and management**

Across the PRU leaders have established an ethos that promotes strong working relationships between staff and pupils, which builds high levels of trust and respect. As a result, both sites provide a calm and safe learning environment.

Powys PRU has two sites, one based in Brecon and one in Newtown. Leadership arrangements differ across the two sites. Stability in the Brecon site senior leadership team contributes positively to improvement planning processes. At the Newtown site, there has been considerable change to the senior leadership team for a significant period of time. This negatively impacts the ability of leaders to effectively plan for improvement and establish processes and systems at this site. Despite the instability in leadership, nearly all staff at the Newtown site demonstrate resilience and a high commitment to pupils.

The local authority does not have a clear strategic vision for the PRU. As a result, leaders at the PRU are unclear of their roles and contribution within the local authority to support pupils accessing education other than at school (EOTAS). Local authority arrangements for pupil placement at the PRU have resulted in both sites having extremely low numbers for a significant period of time. Recent changes to the processes by the local authority are beginning to successfully support pupils to access placement in the PRU in a timelier way. As a result, since the start of the summer term there has been an increase in pupil numbers across both sites. Many of these pupils have not been in education for significant periods of time. This reduces the chance of pupils to be ready to return to full-time mainstream education following a 12-week placement at the PRU. Consequently, pupils remain at the PRU for long periods of time.

Across both sites, self-evaluation processes require strengthening. The current development plan has not been co-constructed to reflect the priorities for improvement at the Newtown site. Priorities have remained too similar over many years. This is as a result of limited processes to monitor the progress towards meeting identified priorities. As a result, the PRU has not embedded required improvements in a timely manner. Staff do not consistently contribute to the PRU development plan. As a result, leaders do not securely identify the most important priorities for improvement.

The strategic tracking and purposeful analysis of data is underdeveloped. This impacts leaders' ability to make robust decisions when identifying areas for improvement.

Performance management for PRU staff has not been consistently undertaken for a number of years. This has limited opportunities for staff to engage in professional dialogue with leaders and to agree relevant targets for staff to support achieving improvement priorities. Recently performance management has been reintroduced across the PRU supported by the local authority. This is at the early stages of development.

The range and availability of professional learning opportunities across the PRU are too variable. At the Brecon site, professional learning is beginning to be linked to the recent performance management meetings. Whole-staff training to support the social, emotional, and mental health needs of pupils has been in place over a number of years. At the Newtown site, professional learning requires strengthening. This has been impacted by the ongoing staff absences and lack of stable leadership.

The safeguarding culture at the PRU is secure. Leaders and staff know and understand the needs of their pupils and families well. Where potential barriers to learning, such as poverty or disadvantage are identified, leaders sensitively provide positive solutions. However, overall attendance figures for the PRU are too low.

The role of the management committee requires strengthening. Recent changes in membership bolsters the skill set of the committee. Members show a high commitment to their roles. Whilst they are supportive, their role to effectively challenge leaders and support improvement is underdeveloped. As a result, they are not adequately holding leaders to account.

Since the last core inspection in 2016, leaders have not sustained the progress made towards meeting three of the five recommendations.

The management of financial arrangements is appropriate. However, processes to monitor the impact of these resources are too variable across the sites.

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

Publications Section  
Estyn  
Anchor Court, Keen Road  
Cardiff  
CF24 5JW or by email to [publications@estyn.gov.wales](mailto:publications@estyn.gov.wales)

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