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Context

In January 2019, there were 23 registered pupil referral units (PRUs) in Wales. This is the same number as in January 2018. There were approximately 820 pupils receiving their main education in PRUs in January 2019 (Welsh Government, 2019k, p.10).

This year we inspected four PRUs. Two of these are all-age PRUs providing for pupils across the primary and secondary phases, one provides solely for primary age pupils and the other only for secondary phase pupils to age 16. Three of these PRUs are multi-site and the other is on a single campus. All of the PRUs we inspected this year are for pupils experiencing social emotional and behavioural difficulties, with one PRU also providing support for pupils with mental health issues. The findings from all inspections have informed this report.

Sector summaries:

Pupil referral units

Standards

Standards in two of the four PRUs inspected this year are excellent. They are good in one and adequate in the other.

Where standards are excellent, over time and with skilled support, most pupils make exceptional progress in improving their learning and behaviour. They respond very well to the sensitive and supportive approach of staff. With this support, they come to understand the reasons for their challenging behaviour and how to manage it effectively so that they can concentrate on their learning. The positive response of almost all of these pupils enables them to improve their self-esteem, focus on learning and make remarkable progress in achieving the targets in their individual education plans.

In the three PRUs where standards are good or better, most pupils develop their literacy and numeracy skills well and make assured use of them in their learning across the curriculum. For example, working in pairs during personal and social education, pupils combine improved vocabulary with attentive listening skills to provide instructions to a partner on how to tie a shoelace while blindfolded. In all four PRUs, older pupils gain a wide range of recognised skills and vocational qualifications with several attaining GCSEs, mostly in the core subjects. Most pupils continue their learning in further education or work-based learning when they leave the PRU.

In one PRU, a minority of pupils do not make enough progress in developing their numeracy skills, and the overall standards reached by a few pupils are not high enough. Across all of the PRUs inspected, pupils do not develop their Welsh language skills well enough.

Wellbeing

In the four PRUs inspected this year, wellbeing and attitudes to learning are good or better, and excellent in two PRUs. This outcome is notably stronger than for PRUs inspected during this inspection cycle so far.

Although most pupils have experienced considerable disruption in their education, over time they build strong and trusting working relationships with staff and develop important skills in tolerance, resilience and respect. They feel safe and benefit from opportunities to be themselves and develop successfully.

Many pupils improve their attendance significantly and develop positive attitudes to learning. They settle to structured activities quickly, sustain high levels of concentration and complete tasks successfully. Most pupils engage enthusiastically with a range of community, creative and sporting activities. For example, pupils maintain flowerbeds in the local area, make pinch pots to fundraise for charity, and participate in the daily mile challenge. These activities have an extremely positive impact on pupils' physical, social and emotional wellbeing and extend their life skills considerably.

In two PRUs, there is too much variation in attendance, especially that of older pupils.

Sector summaries:

Pupil referral units

Teaching and learning experiences

In three of the four PRUs, the overall teaching and learning experiences are good or better, and excellent in two. These PRUs provide pupils with high-quality learning experiences that meets pupils' needs particularly well and develop their interests and skills across an important range of learning areas.

All of the PRUs provide a broad, balanced and stimulating curriculum that is relevant to the needs and abilities of pupils. For example, most pupils who retain part-time mainstream placements follow their mainstream curriculum closely to ensure continuity in their learning. The PRUs have taken early steps in preparing for the new Curriculum for Wales.

The four PRUs provide a valuable range of opportunities for pupils to develop their skills and apply them assuredly in different contexts across the curriculum, particularly their literacy skills. However, the provision for developing pupils' Welsh language skills, especially for those transferring from Welsh medium schools, is limited.

In all PRUs inspected, where teaching is consistently good or better, staff use their knowledge of their pupils skilfully to plan and provide engaging activities that challenge pupils. They have high expectations of pupils and use their individual targets to help inform lesson objectives and provide appropriate challenge. The pace of lessons is well balanced, with skilful use of timing and resources such as visual prompts to hold the attention of pupils. Support staff reinforce and extend pupils' learning particularly well.

Where there are shortcomings in teaching, this is largely because planning and activities do not meet the needs of all pupils well enough. As a result, in one PRU, a few pupils do not always make suitable progress.

Care, support and guidance

In all four PRUs inspected, care, support and guidance are good or better, and in two they are excellent.

Across PRUs and sites, tracking systems for recording pupils' attendance, academic progress and behaviour are mostly robust and effective. Staff use this information well to identify pupils who require support and to plan interventions such as one-to-one support. Each PRU has also developed partnerships with a range of multi-agency professionals to meet the needs of pupils in a joined-up way. Effective links with educational psychologists and agencies such as the NSPCC, Barnardo's, Action for Children and other organisations support provision for pupils particularly well.

Where provision is excellent, this includes exceptional flexible working and communication with parents. For example, in addition to daily diaries and regular phone calls, staff work with other agencies to provide highly effective parenting programmes to help them understand and manage their children's needs. In one PRU, these partnerships, together with successful strategies for working with mainstream schools, have been key to supporting pupils' reintegration back into mainstream education.

Tai Educational Centre

A pupil-led curriculum is embedded at the Tai Education Centre to help pupils re-engage with education successfully. Pupil voice is a driving force to build a curriculum that is exciting and relevant, whilst parents are involved with invitations to courses and events.

For more information, please read our **case study**



Sector summaries:

Pupil referral units

All PRUs inspected have comprehensive programmes of personal and social education to encourage pupils effectively to develop healthy lifestyles and behaviours. Staff frequently support pupils in learning how to stay safe and take responsibility for themselves and their actions. This approach builds pupils' confidence and helps them to develop secure values.

Leadership and management

Leadership and management are excellent in two of the four PRUs inspected, good in one and adequate in the other.

Where leadership is excellent, the PRU's senior leader works successfully with staff to establish a powerful vision for their work. This vision places the needs of pupils at the core of all of the PRU's work and fosters a distinctive nurturing and supportive environment in which pupils flourish. In one PRU, the promotion of this vision and extremely strong partnership working with parents and mainstream schools support almost all pupils in returning to their mainstream schools and to maintain their placement there over time.

In the two PRUs where leadership and management are excellent, senior leaders set high expectations and model and promote professional values and behaviours such as mutual respect, openness and a willingness to learn. This approach contributes significantly to strong team working, trust and collaboration among staff. The passionate commitment of these leaders for promoting professional learning opportunities for all staff has contributed significantly to the progress and wellbeing of pupils. For example, staff are highly motivated to try out new approaches to improve outcomes for pupils. Staff also share aspects of their PRU's practice with other schools, including mainstream, special and PRUs, at local, regional and national events.

Three PRUs have developed comprehensive arrangements to evaluate the quality of their work and to plan for improvements. Information from processes such as lesson observations, work scrutiny, and gathering pupils' and parents' views is effective in providing a clear picture of the quality of provision at each PRU and priorities for improvement.

Where leadership and management require improvement, self-evaluation processes are not sharp enough or information is not evaluated thoroughly enough to identify suitable targets as part of improvement planning.

Follow-up activity

This year, we identified one PRU as requiring Estyn review. During the year, we removed two PRUs inspected in the previous academic years from Estyn review. Another PRU made enough improvement and no longer requires significant improvement. These PRUs have benefited from working collaboratively with other PRUs and schools, and with local authority officers and their regional consortium. For example, the helpful support that one PRU had from a special school enabled it to improve the way it monitors pupils' progress over time. At the end of this year, one PRU remains in special measures and two remain under Estyn review.

Denbighshire PRU

Denbighshire PRU's outreach team is integral to forming strong and effective links with mainstream schools. The PRU also has an open door policy, which encourages school-based staff to visit and observe best practice.

For more information, please read our **case study**



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