



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

**A report on the specialist college provision of**

**Coleg Plas Dwbl**

**Mynachlogdu  
Clunderwen  
Sir Benfro  
SA66 7SE**

**Date of inspection: May 2023**

**by**

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

**This report is also available in Welsh**

## About Coleg Plas Dwbl

Name of provider	Coleg Plas Dwbl
Proprietor	Ruskin Mill Trust
Local authority	Pembrokeshire County Council
Language of the provider	English
Type of provider	Independent specialist college
Residential provision?	Yes
Number of learners on roll	16
Date of previous Estyn inspection (if applicable)	07/02/2022
Start date of inspection	22/05/2023

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 condition, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, and social and emotional 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 16 learners aged 16 to 25 years attending the college. Of these, around half of learners have residential placements, and around half attend as day learners. The majority of learners are placed by Welsh local authorities with a minority placed by local authorities in England. Around half of learners live in the college's residential houses situated locally.

The college bases its educational philosophy on the founding principles of the philosopher and scientist Rudolph Steiner, the polymath John Ruskin and the arts and crafts figure William Morris. 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 forge, the farm, craft workshop and the kitchen.

Since the last monitoring visit in February 2022, the college has appointed a new principal. The leadership team is supported by eight tutors, around 14 support staff, an additional learning needs co-ordinator, occupational therapist and speech and language therapist.

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

## Overview

Coleg Plas Dwbl provides a calm and peaceful environment that promotes learners' well-being effectively. Staff work together closely to provide high levels of support for learners and promote an inclusive ethos that celebrates diversity.

As a result of the care and support they receive, learners feel safe and enjoy coming to college. Many learners attend regularly, and develop positive attitudes to their learning. Over time, many make steady progress in their learning and personal development. Many learners make particularly strong progress in developing their social and independence skills.

The college provides a broad curriculum where learners benefit from a stimulating range of learning activities set in the extensive grounds of a working farm. These activities provide learners with valuable opportunities to develop a wide range of skills that prepare them well for adult life. However, teaching is not always matched closely enough to learners' individual needs, and tutors do not plan consistently to develop learners' skills progressively. In addition, the use of communication strategies by staff is at an early stage. As a result, learners with more complex communication needs do not make the progress they are capable of.

College leaders have a secure understanding of the college's strengths and priorities for development. Since the last monitoring visit in February 2022, they have provided strong leadership to bring about beneficial improvements in a short period of time. For example, they have implemented improvements to the college site and buildings and strengthened the specialist support available to learners. However, many of these initiatives are at an early stage and it is too soon to evaluate their impact.

In addition, since the last core inspection in 2015, there have been six changes in the leadership of education at the college. This has meant that, despite the pace of recent improvements, the overall rate of progress against recommendations from previous monitoring visits has been too slow.

## Recommendations

- R1 Consolidate the recent progress against the recommendations from the monitoring visit of February 2022
- R2 Improve the quality of teaching and assessment
- R3 Improve the use of communication strategies to meet the needs of all learners across the college

## What happens next

Estyn advises the proprietor to amend its current development plan to show what actions the college intends to take in response to the recommendations. It is also advisable to circulate this plan, or a summary of it, to all parents/carers at the college.

## Main findings

### Learning

Over time, many learners make steady progress in their learning and personal development. They develop a range of beneficial skills that prepare them well for the next stage in their lives. Many make worthwhile progress against targets in their personal plans. However, approaches to planning for the progressive development of learners' skills are at an early stage of development. This means that learners do not make consistent progress in developing their literacy, numeracy and digital skills in particular.

Many learners make suitable progress in developing their communication skills. These skills enable learners to engage with each other, make choices, and express themselves appropriately. In sessions they listen attentively and respond suitably to instructions and guidance. A minority of learners express their ideas and thoughts articulately. For example, in the student council meeting, learners share confidently ideas for their graduation ceremony, and many engage assuredly with visitors to the college. However, the use of signing or symbol communication systems by staff is at an early stage, and means that learners with more complex communication needs do not make the progress they are capable of.

During their time at the college, learners develop their social skills particularly well. Many are respectful and enjoy the company of others. They interact well and with good humour with their peers and staff. They work effectively in small groups and pairs. They follow routines successfully, which facilitates their transitions during the day and strengthens their ability to manage their own safety in college.

A minority of learners make suitable progress in developing their reading skills. They master appropriate strategies for reading new words and can locate relevant

information from a variety of texts. A few learners choose their own reading material and a few express their opinions about books with enthusiasm.

The majority of learners practise and consolidate their writing skills suitably. They form letters well, spell words correctly and can write short sentences about activities that they have undertaken. A few learners produce effective, extended pieces of writing such as sharing information about dolphin watching in West Wales.

Many learners practise their numeracy skills appropriately in a range of practical learning activities. They consistently use basic number skills accurately such as when comparing objects that are bigger or smaller than each other. Many learners make effective use of these skills across the curriculum to support their learning. For example, learners estimate how much the heaviest chicken egg ever recorded might have weighed. A few learners develop valuable data handling skills. For example, they collate a range of data to present information about daily rainfall on a bar chart and the daily wind direction on a frequency table.

Overall, more able learners develop relevant digital skills such as word processing and using the internet for research. They use functions such as text alignment and spell check successfully.

During their time at the college many learners develop their creative skills particularly well. For example, in craft sessions, they create attractive prints, and produce useful functional items at the forge such as garden tools and coat racks.

Most learners enjoy participating in activities which develop their physical skills well. For example, they develop their fine motor skills at the forge when they punch out a pattern on copper to create the impression of a Celtic knot. In addition, learners practise their gross motor skills successfully in activities such as cutting logs or pushing wheelbarrows. As a result, learners improve suitably their co-ordination and fitness.

Many learners develop their independent living skills well in a range of purposeful and valuable activities. For example, they learn to make their way around the college independently, they prepare healthy lunches for staff and peers, and look after themselves safely by developing an awareness of health and safety issues and managing their own safety in college. A few learners benefit from work experience at the college site as well as within the local community. These skills support learners well for the next stage of their lives.

Over the last three years, many learners have achieved units of accreditation in a range of qualifications which relate suitably to learners' individual needs, interests and abilities. This includes the accreditation of skills for living and work.

Over the last three years, the majority of learners who have left the college have progressed to suitably planned destinations that reflect their needs and abilities well, including supported work placements or other education placements.

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

The college provides a calm and peaceful environment that promotes learners' well-being and positive attitudes to learning effectively. Many learners enjoy attending

college and they feel safe in a range of settings while on site. They know who to talk to if they feel worried or unsafe while at college. They feel listened to, and know that their opinions are valued, for instance, while deciding to make kites during craft sessions to fly at the Whitsun festival.

Many learners demonstrate strong social skills in sessions, and during break and lunch times. They engage positively and respectfully with each other and the staff team. These strong social skills are evident on arrival at the college at the start of the day and as they transition between activities during the day. They engage confidently and politely with visitors, happily describing their work areas and the activities they enjoy most.

During their time at the college, learners form strong working relationships with staff. This impacts positively on their well-being and attitudes to learning, and means that they engage happily and confidently in college life. They are happy and comfortable in sessions, and they are excited to participate. A few learners transfer these positive attitudes to external work experience placements. While there, they listen closely, complete work independently, seek help where required and speak clearly about how they enjoy this role. They follow relevant routines successfully and manage their behaviour effectively.

Many learners attend regularly, arrive to sessions on time, are ready to engage and settle well into their activities. Learners work well alongside each another and work effectively in pairs or in small groups, for instance when accurately counting money raised from the sales of eggs on the farm. However, a few learners do not attend timetabled sessions consistently, and this impacts on the progress they make.

Around half of learners engage regularly in the college council sessions. During these sessions, learners play a worthwhile part in making decisions and sharing ideas that impact positively on their time there, for instance the planning of college trips and organising end of year graduation events. These learners exercise their responsibilities with pride and passion. However, only a few learners have suitable opportunities to take on leadership roles at college. Further, learners with more complex communication needs are underrepresented in council sessions, and there are limited opportunities for them to influence what and how they learn.

Learners make suitably healthy snack choices at break times and eat healthy meals together at lunch, from produce they grow on the farm and in the polytunnel. Learners play an integral part in the decision-making process about which snacks and meals are available to them throughout the day.

### **Teaching and learning experiences**

Coleg Plas Dwbl provides a broad and stimulating curriculum where learners benefit from a wide range of learning activities in meaningful and realistic settings, including a farm, horticulture area and forge. The college's extensive grounds and resources provide learners with valuable opportunities to develop a wide range of skills, including their independence, physical, creative and work-related skills.

Tutors make effective use of the extensive and attractive environment. For example, learners develop their numeracy skills in practical activities such as weighing and

pricing handmade soap for sale, and measuring willow rods for their weaving activities. Tutors provide a range of purposeful learning activities that promote learners' independence and independent living skills suitably. For example, learners prepare healthy meals for staff and peers and practise their gardening skills in the horticulture area.

The college plans regular celebrations and events that enrich the core curriculum offer, for example through termly festivals, such as the Martinmas festival where all learners make and light their own lanterns. The college provides learners with an environment that acknowledges and celebrates its specific Welsh context and culture, for example through preparations for a college performance of 'y Mabinogi'.

The college has made recent changes to strengthen the curriculum. New courses including independent living skills, social enterprise and drama supplement the college's core offer. However, approaches to planning for the development of learners' skills are underdeveloped. Further, curriculum plans and schemes of learning across the college do not address the needs of the most complex learners well enough.

Partly due to disruption due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the work experience offer is underdeveloped. A few learners benefit from external work experience placements, such as maintaining the grounds at a local site of historical interest. These placements provide learners with valuable opportunities to transfer and develop their skills in relevant contexts and prepare learners well for progression to the next stage in their lives.

Staff at the college develop positive and caring working relationships with learners. They demonstrate a clear understanding of learners' additional learning needs. Tutors establish beneficial routines that help to create a calm learning environment. As a result, many learners engage purposefully with their learning. Link workers provide attentive support for learners. They promote learners' well-being and engagement successfully and lead learning activities effectively.

Where planning, teaching and assessment are effective, tutors plan creatively to engage learners in meaningful activities that meet their individual needs well. However, the quality of teaching across the college is too variable. In a few sessions, teaching is not matched well enough to learners' individual needs. In these cases, planning and teaching activities do not challenge and engage the learners well enough.

The recently established assessment systems at the college record learners' progress appropriately. These systems provide useful information to inform tutors' planning and assessment. However, overall tutors do not use this information well enough to inform their planning for the progressive development of learners' skills.

Tutors and link workers provide encouraging verbal feedback to learners, which engages and motivates them in their learning. Many staff provide clear instructions and use questioning appropriately to reinforce learning. This allows learners to think about their work and amend as appropriate. However, written feedback does not always meet the needs of learners and does not consistently identify next steps in learning.

## Care, support and guidance

The college aims to provide learners with a practical and therapeutic learning community to help them develop empathy, self-care and understand the rhythms of the seasons. The college's ethos and environment enable learners to develop their independence and well-being effectively.

Staff develop a strong knowledge and understanding of learners' needs and interests during their time at the college. They use this knowledge well to provide caring support and to guide learners sensitively, while also ensuring that they remain as independent as possible.

Since the time of the last monitoring visit, the college has strengthened its specialist support with the addition of occupational therapy and speech and language therapy. These therapists have guided the development of new support plans, which provide staff with helpful information and guidance to best support learners, for example with approaches to communication, well-being support and meeting learners' sensory needs. However, the implementation of these plans across the college is at an early stage.

The college reflects on and communicates about learner progress in a number of beneficial ways. There are termly meetings with external stakeholders to review learner progress, engagement and well-being, as well as regular reports to parents. In addition to this, the college holds regular 'student study' meetings. These meetings are a beneficial opportunity to share information about individual learners and provide staff with valuable opportunities to reflect on how to best meet learners' needs.

Leaders have implemented new systems to track key information about learners, such as behaviour, attendance, significant events and progress against targets. These systems are in the early stages of implementation. Further, plans to improve the attendance of a few learners who do not attend regularly are only recently established.

The college provides learners with valuable opportunities to share feedback with leaders to make changes. For example, through the college council, learner questionnaires or initiatives to develop the environment. However, current approaches do not consistently involve all learners and are not matched well enough to the needs of learners with more complex communication needs.

The college helps learners to develop a strong understanding of how to stay safe and healthy. Learners learn how to eat healthily as well as how to prepare healthy meals within the realistic context of a working farm. Further, learners learn how to manage risk well in a number of settings, for example how to use files and hammers safely in the forge. However, the college does not consistently provide opportunities for all learners to learn how to stay safe in other contexts, for example in the area of building healthy relationships and learning how to stay safe online.

Safeguarding is a high priority for the college. Leaders have established a community where learners and staff feel safe. Since the time of the last monitoring visit, leaders have strengthened processes and policies in this area. Further, they have



implemented extensive quality assurance processes to oversee all aspects of safeguarding.

Leaders carefully assess the risks posed by radicalisation. Where required, they risk assess individual learners and use independent partners from within the trust to support, monitor and evaluate practice in this area.

## **Leadership and management**

At the time of the last monitoring visit in February 2022, inspectors reported that the college had experienced significant disruption to the management and strategic leadership of the college. This included the challenges provided by the pandemic, as well as a period during 2021 without a principal, when oversight of the college was provided by external staff from Ruskin Mill Trust.

Since that monitoring visit, leaders have provided strong leadership to bring about beneficial improvements in a short period of time. They have put in place a recovery plan for the college, ensuring that actions prioritised the safety and well-being of learners and staff. At the same time, they have taken appropriate steps to address recommendations from the previous monitoring visit. While many of these actions remain at an early stage of development, this progress means that the college is now a safe place to learn and work.

In addition, since the last monitoring visit, leaders have implemented beneficial improvements to the college site and buildings. They have improved signage around the college, and developed a coherent rationale for the location of the college reception area and the re-organisation of teaching spaces through the co-location of essential skills, therapy and independent living skills. As a result, the college provides an effective and welcoming learning environment. However, a few areas around the site remain in a poor state of repair and do not meet the needs of staff or of learners.

Senior leaders have a secure understanding of the college's strengths and priorities for development. They have appointed a team of middle leaders to support the work of the principal and assistant principal. Together, this team have strengthened arrangements to monitor and quality assure the work of the college. However, the use of data to evaluate this work is at an early stage of development. In particular, leaders do not evaluate sharply enough the progress in learning learners and groups of learners make, or the impact of teaching on this.

Leaders are visible and have valuable arrangements to promote communication across the college. Daily briefings provide staff with up-to-date information about learners' needs and well-being. Weekly staff meetings and student study meetings focus suitably on operational and strategic matters, and on the progress and well-being of learners. These arrangements ensure that staff work together closely to provide high levels of support for learners and promote an inclusive ethos that celebrates diversity.

The college benefits from a range of services provided by Ruskin Mill Trust in areas such as human resources, training, safeguarding and health and safety. There are regular visits from the trust's director of colleges, and other members of the trust's quality team, and the college principal attends regular meetings with the executive

team of the trust. As a result, trustees are developing a greater understanding of the needs of the college in Wales and are more able to provide relevant support and challenge.

Staff benefit from access to a wide range of valuable professional learning provided by the trust in areas that promote their understanding of learners' additional learning needs, as well as the college's approach to practical skills therapeutic education. Recent professional learning events have also begun to address directly the college's improvement priorities and are helping tutors to develop the skills and knowledge to support these. However, tutors and link workers have few opportunities to observe others in similar settings and to reflect on their own practice in relation to this.

College leaders take suitable account of Welsh Government priorities. They are committed to developing a distinctively Welsh provision that celebrates the Welsh language and culture, and that is securely located in its local community. They are beginning to build a network of partnerships with schools and colleges locally to benefit learners, strengthen progression routes and share practice. Much of this work is at an early stage.

Since the last core inspection in 2015, there have been six changes in the leadership of education at the college. This has meant that individual leaders have found it difficult to consolidate and sustain improvements from one monitoring visit to another. As a result, despite the recent pace of improvement, the overall rate of progress against recommendations from monitoring visits since 2015 has been too slow.

## Evidence base of the report

Before an inspection, inspectors:

- analyse the outcomes from parent/carer and learner questionnaires and consider the views of teaching and support staff through their questionnaire responses

During an inspection, inspectors normally:

- meet proprietors, college leaders and individual members of teaching and support staff to evaluate the impact of the college's work
- meet learners to discuss their work and to gain their views about various aspects of their college
- visit sessions and undertake a variety of learning walks to observe learning and to see staff teaching in a range of settings, including classrooms and in outdoor areas
- look closely at the college's self-evaluation processes
- consider the college's improvement plan and look at evidence to show how well the college has taken forward planned improvements
- scrutinise a range of college documents, including information on learner assessment and progress, records of meetings of staff and the supervisory body, information on learners' well-being, including the safeguarding of learners, and records of staff training and professional learning

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 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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