

Pupil Referral Units

Schools

22

No. of schools 2024

22

No. of schools 2023

21

No. of schools 2022

Pupils

1,077

Single registered pupils
2023-2024

969

Single registered pupils
2022-2023

857

Single registered pupils
2021-2022

Follow-up

No. in FU September 2023

SM: 1 SI: 1 ER: 1

No. removed 2023-2024

SM: 0 SI: 1 ER: 1

No. went into FU after core
inspection 2023-2024

SM: 0 SI: 1 ER: 0

Total in FU August 2024

SM: 1 SI: 1 ER: 0

Engagement visits

No. of visits/calls: 2

Core inspections

No. of inspections: 3

Welsh-medium:

Bilingual:

English-medium: 3

Case studies

No. of case studies requested: 0

Welsh-medium:

Bilingual:

English-medium: 2

Overview

In the 2023-2024 academic year, 2,597 pupils accessed education outside of school (EOTAS)¹[Pupils educated other than at school: September 2023 to August 2024 \(revised\) \[HTML\] | GOV.WALES](#). That is 5.5 of every 1,000 pupils in Wales which is up from 5.1 of every 1,000 pupils in 2022/23.

There are 2,279 EOTAS pupils mainly educated outside school. That is 4.9 of every 1,000 pupils in Wales which is up from 4.0 of every 1,000 pupils in 2022/23 and the highest rate since data has been calculated in 2009/10.

The number of EOTAS pupils mainly educated outside school appears to be trending upwards, having doubled proportionately since 2009/10. The percentage of EOTAS pupils mainly educated outside school is 87.8%, up from 42% in 2009/10.

In 2023/24, there are, proportionately, significantly more pupils with SEN or ALN mainly educated outside school than in the general pupil population. The largest number of pupil enrolments (44.7%) are in pupil referral units, followed by independent schools (18.4%) and individual tuition (16.0%).

This year, three PRUs were inspected: two under a new pilot inspection framework, all serving multiple sites. Two PRUs supported pupils aged 11-16, and one served ages 7-16, with pupils registered ranging from 33 to 76.

Summary

Where teaching is effective, pupils make good progress in their learning from their initial starting points in PRUs. The high quality of care, support and guidance available to pupils in PRUs impacts positively on their social, emotional, behavioural and mental health needs well. Where leadership is effective, leaders, the management committee and local authority have a clear vision for the role of the PRU in the local authority.

Follow-up

This year, two PRUs were removed from follow-up categories due to strong progress, while one remains in statutory follow-up. One out of the three PRUs inspected this year was placed into significant improvement.

Teaching and learning

In the most effective PRUs, the curriculum offered was broad, balanced, and tailored to the specific needs and interests of the pupils. These PRUs had well-established plans for delivering Curriculum for Wales, with a strong emphasis on pupil well-being and the integration of the four purposes of the curriculum into both planning and teaching. This approach provided pupils with enriching educational experiences. The flexibility of the curriculum allowed for individualisation, which resulted in most

pupils making significant progress from their starting points, with a few making exceptional gains. However, there were inconsistencies in the quality and impact of Curriculum for Wales development across different PRUs.

The curriculum in many PRUs was relevant to pupils' diverse needs, ages, and abilities, addressing important social issues such as understanding Black, Asian, and minority ethnic communities, as well as LGBTQ+ people. Most PRUs effectively identified and provided targeted interventions and support for pupils with additional learning needs, ensuring that all pupils could access the curriculum effectively. A strong emphasis on developing pupils' social and life skills was also evident, preparing them well for their future steps. For example, at [Gorwelion Newydd](#), many pupils engaged well with a range of lunchtime clubs, including fantasy strategy games and music, and with an after-school gaming club once a week.

In the most effective practices, there was a well-embedded development of pupils' skills across the curriculum, with clear pathways for progression. However, the development of digital and Welsh language skills was variable. For older secondary pupils, PRUs offered a valuable range of qualifications and vocational pathways, tailored to individual needs. These PRUs also maintained strong links with Careers Wales, helping pupils to understand their future opportunities.

The most effective PRUs had robust tracking systems to monitor and evaluate pupil progress, using detailed baseline information on pupil attainment and well-being well to inform learning opportunities and address additional needs. Despite this, there was variability in the quality of assessment across PRUs, limiting staff's ability to accurately identify progress and effectively target interventions.

Where teaching was effective, learning was purposeful with clear intentions, engaging contexts, and successful skill-building over time. Highly organised planning and purposeful assessment practices supported effective progress tracking, ensuring that pupils made meaningful progress. In these PRUs, pupils gained confidence, re-engaged with education, and responded positively to high expectations, developing resilience, and a positive self-image as learners. At [Carmarthen Secondary Teaching and Learning Centre](#), many staff used questioning techniques skilfully to engage, challenge and support pupils.

In PRUs with a strong culture of pupil-centred practice, supported by collaboration with external agencies, staff developed a shared understanding of pupils' complex needs and used appropriate strategies successfully to support pupil progress.

Care, support and guidance and its impact on pupil well-being

In nearly all PRUs inspected, many pupils had experienced long absences from formal education, negatively affecting their attendance and engagement. However, staff developed strong, trusting relationships with pupils, making them feel safe and well-cared for. At [Powys Pupil Referral Unit](#), the positive and respectful relationships that staff had established with pupils were a strength of the work of the PRU.

Where pastoral support plans are used effectively, rigorous processes are in place to monitor their use. The return of pupils to full-time education is most effective when they actively participate in the processes and can identify the potential barriers they face.

Nearly all PRUs had robust safeguarding practices, fostering a positive culture that improved pupils'

behaviour and attitudes. Most pupils showed significant behavioural improvements, and exclusions and physical interventions were low, reflecting the success of tailored behaviour strategies.

Staff in PRUs were well-trained in addressing pupils' social, emotional, and mental health needs. Professional learning in these areas was prioritised, recognising the growing needs across pupils. Effective PRUs had strong processes for monitoring attendance, with pupils playing a central role in improving their attendance. Despite this, overall attendance rates remained a concern. The use of part-time timetables varied, with some pupils spending too long on reduced schedules.

The most effective PRUs employed skilled additional learning needs co-ordinators (ALNCOs) who identified and addressed pupils' learning needs, including an increase in pupils with autistic spectrum conditions. Effective PRUs also fostered a powerful sense of community and offered opportunities for pupils to engage in issues related to equality, diversity and inclusion. At [Gorwelion Newydd](#), of notable strength were the arrangements for school councils, but across all the PRUs inspected there was variability in how well pupils could express their views and influence their learning.

Reintegration rates into mainstream education were low, with few pupils returning successfully, particularly older pupils. PRUs effectively support pupils and families, minimising barriers like poverty and disadvantage, and maintained strong partnerships both with parents, carers and external agencies. These partnerships included communication, social events, and bespoke training to better manage the needs of pupils, leading to more joined-up service provision for families.

Leading and improving

In the most effective PRUs, leaders had a clear, co-constructed vision with the local authority, defining the PRU's role and function within the authority. Strong communication of this vision ensured well-established processes for pupil entry and exit, with mainstream schools understanding referral processes and their supportive roles. However, this clarity varied across local authorities.

Effective PRU leaders fostered robust communication, high expectations and strong working relationships among staff, who actively contributed to improvement planning. A strong culture of high expectations for learning, well-being and attendance was established, with clear communication of these expectations to pupils, staff, parents and carers. Professional development was prioritised, aligned with PRU development plans, and effectively monitored, although the quality of learning opportunities varied.

Nearly all PRUs had robust safeguarding procedures, with regular, relevant staff training. The curriculum was inclusive, focusing on safety and informed decision-making, helping pupils understand their rights and how to stay safe. Leaders also promoted strategies to address poverty, ensuring equitable curriculum access and minimising barriers for disadvantaged pupils through effective partnerships with external agencies.

In the most effective PRUs, leaders shared responsibilities across their staff team in line with their improvement priorities and all staff clearly understood their roles. For example, in [Gorwelion Newydd](#), the pastoral managers at each site significantly strengthened the working relationships with parents and carers to support their child.

Where practice was most effective, the management committee and local authority discharged their responsibilities securely. As a result, there was robust challenge and support, and leaders were held

to account well.

Overview of recommendations

In the 2023 - 2024 academic year, Estyn inspected three PRUs.

Two were given a recommendation to improve attendance.

Two were given a recommendation to clarify the roles and responsibilities of leaders.

Two were given a recommendation to work with the local authority, one to establish a strategic vision and one to improve the quality of the learning environment.