

THEMATIC SURVEY OF PUPIL REFERRAL UNITS AND SIMILAR PROVISION



...Rhagoriaeth i bawb... ...Excellence for all...



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1. Introduction

1.1 Purpose

The purpose of this report is to provide advice in accordance with Estyn's remit from the Welsh Assembly Government. The advice contributes to raising standards and quality in education and training and supports the Welsh Assembly Government's commitment to social inclusion and equal opportunities as set out in 'The Learning Country' in August 2001.

The report:

- identifies and evaluates the education that local education authorities (LEAs) provide in their pupil referral units (PRUs) and similar, but unregistered, units for pupils who do not attend school full-time;
- compares the provision in Wales with that in England;
- makes recommendations for improving provision in Wales; and
- contributes information to the Welsh Assembly Government's review of circular 3/99: Pupil Support and Social Inclusion.

1.2 Key questions

The report answers the following key questions:

- What arrangements do LEAs make to educate pupils who do not attend school full-time in registered PRUs and in other provision that is not part of a school or college?
- How well do the learning experiences in PRUs and unregistered units meet pupils' needs and interests?
- How well are pupils in PRUs and unregistered units cared for, guided and supported?
- How well do LEAs manage PRUs and unregistered units?
- How well do LEAs track pupils without a school place to ensure that they receive their full educational entitlement and that their welfare is safeguarded?

1.3 Evidence base

This advice is based on information drawn from the following sources:

- Estyn's position paper to the Welsh Assembly Government on PRUs, dated 26 November 2002;

- information gathered by HMI in the period 1999-2001 about LEA units not registered as PRUs;
- published reports of section 10 inspections of PRUs;
- statistical information published by the National Assembly for Wales;
- Estyn's evaluation of the impact of GEST funding for attendance and behaviour;
- Estyn's evaluation of the impact of alternative curriculum provision in Wales;
- information from Ofsted's inspections of PRUs and unregistered units in England;
- Estyn's advice on the effectiveness of arrangements for implementing personal education plans for looked-after children, key stages 1 to 3;
- Estyn's advice on LEAs' provision for the education of pregnant teenagers and young parents; and
- a survey of all the PRUs and other out-of-school units in Wales in the summer term, 2004.

For this survey, every LEA in Wales provided written details of the authority's PRUs and of unregistered units that they manage directly. They gave information about the number, age, gender and needs of pupils on roll in May 2004 and also about the staffing of their units. This information was followed up in discussions in each LEA between LEA officers and Estyn's District Inspector for the LEA. The discussions focused on aspects of the management, planning, resources and curriculum of PRUs and unregistered units.

2. Main findings

2.1 Registration and inspection of units

- LEAs are maintaining registered PRUs and unregistered units on 81 different sites.
- Units on 30 of these sites are registered as PRUs with the Welsh Assembly Government and have been inspected in the period 1998 to 2002.
- LEAs designate the units on a further 20 sites as PRUs. However, these sites are not on the Welsh Assembly Government register and, as a result, they have not been included in section 10 inspections.
- LEAs do not designate the units on the remaining 31 sites as PRUs, even though almost all match the legal definition of a PRU. These units are unregistered and, as such, fall outside the scope of section 10 inspections.
- LEAs provide full-time or part-time education for 1601 pupils in PRUs and unregistered units. Two thirds of these pupils are placed in the 50 units that LEAs regard as PRUs. The rest are taught in the 31 units that are not designated as PRUs.
- LEAs make some additional provision in PRUs and unregistered units for pupils in key stage 4 requiring an alternative curriculum. Some of this provision is contracted-out to external providers, usually as part of the Youth Access Initiative.

2.2 Needs of pupils

- Pupils who are placed in PRUs and unregistered units are often those who face significant educational and social disadvantages. Some have been permanently excluded from schools; many of the rest are at risk of exclusion.
- Four-fifths of pupils in units are boys, most of whom could be described as disaffected.
- A high proportion of pupils have a poor level of attainment in basic skills. One-fifth of pupils in PRUs have a statement of special educational needs.
- Few pupils make an early return to school from a PRU. Older pupils more often transfer to college or training placements than to schools.

2.3 Quality of provision

- The curricula in PRUs and unregistered units have a number of good features, but also some important shortcomings. In this respect, the findings in Wales are very similar to those in England.
- PRUs and unregistered units provide good learning opportunities for pupils in key stage 4 who wish to make a transition to college vocational courses or to work-based training instead of returning to school.
- The shortcomings in the curricula and learning resources of PRUs and unregistered units place pupils in key stages 1 to 3 and some pupils in key stage 4 at a disadvantage in relation to pupils in schools and limit their opportunities for progression in some subjects.
- The curriculum and support available in many units do not always meet pupils' special educational needs.
- Within PRUs and unregistered units, pupils generally receive good care, guidance and support. However, there are shortcomings in health and safety practice, and in policies to promote equality of opportunity.

2.4 Leadership and management

- LEAs face significant challenges in providing sufficient, appropriate places for pupils educated out of school. Demand for places always exceeds supply.
- LEA officers encourage schools and units to work closely together in order to plan suitable education for pupils and to enable pupils to return to school as soon as possible. This aim is proving very difficult to achieve in practice.
- Teachers in mainstream schools do not take enough interest in the progress of their pupils who transfer to PRUs and unregistered units.
- At present, there are not enough links between schools and LEA-maintained units. Where effective links exist, they are more often with mainstream primary schools than with secondary schools.
- LEAs do not do enough to monitor or to evaluate the quality of the provision that they make in PRUs and unregistered units, or of the provision that they purchase through a contract with an external provider.
- At least two thirds of LEAs do not have effective systems for tracking the educational provision and progress of pupils who are not on school rolls.
- Few authorities provide the full 25 hours entitlement for all excluded pupils.

3. Recommendations

3.1 The Welsh Assembly Government should:

- enforce the requirement for LEAs to register as PRUs all the sites where they maintain provision for pupils of school age other than in mainstream, special or nursery schools and to provide annual information about changes to this provision;
- provide Estyn with annual information about all the sites that LEAs register as PRUs;
- in partnership with LEAs, monitor and evaluate the educational outcomes for pupils educated otherwise than at school;
- review, with ACCAC, the statutory framework governing the curriculum requirement for PRUs in order to ensure that there is equality of learning opportunities for all pupils; and
- collect and analyse information about the special educational needs of all pupils receiving education otherwise than at school, and the provision that LEAs make to meet those needs.

3.2 Local education authorities should:

- register with the Welsh Assembly Government all sites where they maintain provision for pupils of school age other than in mainstream, special or nursery schools;
- keep the Welsh Assembly Government informed about changes to this provision;
- clarify the purpose of PRUs and their place in relation to other provision, including alternative curriculum strategies that may involve external providers;
- monitor and evaluate the quality of education that PRUs provide;
- monitor and evaluate the quality of the provision that is made under contracted-out arrangements with external providers;
- work in partnership with schools to provide all pupils with full-time education;
- develop effective systems for tracking pupils without a school place;
- implement a policy of dual registration so that pupils in PRUs retain a link with their schools;

- encourage schools and PRUs to work more closely together to monitor and evaluate the progress that pupils make;
- provide PRUs with the necessary administrative, technical and curriculum support and resources;
- ensure that their school improvement work includes clear strategies to reduce the number of pupils with SEN who are excluded;
- ensure that PRUs can fully meet pupils' special educational needs;
- review the health and safety practice in PRUs, making sure that appropriate risk assessments are in place;
- ensure that PRU staff have access to a full range of training opportunities, particularly in child protection; and
- ensure that PRUs have the required policies to promote equal opportunities in relation to race, gender and disability.

3.3 Schools should:

- retain on roll, and monitor the progress of, pupils who transfer to PRUs;
- provide PRUs with better information about the learning needs of pupils when they transfer;
- in partnership with the LEA, monitor and evaluate the quality of the provision that they make for their pupils by contracted out arrangements with external providers; and
- improve the links between teachers in schools and in PRUs.

3.4 Estyn should:

- ensure that the inspection programme includes all sites that LEAs register as PRUs; and
- review the training needs of inspectors in light of the anticipated increase in the number of PRUs to be inspected.

4. Background information

The scope of the survey includes all the units that LEAs manage directly in order to provide full-time or part-time education for pupils. Some of these pupils are not on the roll of any school, while others are dual-enrolled.

The survey asked for details of all registered PRUs and other unregistered units.

4.1 Legal framework

Section 19 of the Education Act 1996 deals with the exceptional provision of education in PRUs or elsewhere.

Section 19(1) states that:

Each local education authority shall make arrangements for the provision of suitable education at school or otherwise than at school for those children of compulsory age who, by reason of illness, exclusion from school or otherwise, may not for any period receive suitable education unless such arrangements are made for them.

Section 9 of the Education Act 1997 places a duty on LEAs to set out in a Behaviour Support Plan the arrangements for the education of children otherwise than at school. In addition, LEAs must have regard to the guidance in the National Assembly for Wales Circular 3/99: Pupil Support and Social Inclusion.

Since September 2002, LEAs have been required to ensure that all pupils excluded from school for more than 15 days receive full-time and appropriate education.

Behaviour Support Plans include information about the provision that the LEA makes outside mainstream schools, including pupil referral units, home tuition and education for pregnant girls and young parents. This provision is collectively known as education otherwise than at school (EOTAS).

The provision for individual pupils may include a combination of:

- part-time attendance at a mainstream school;
- tuition in a PRU or similar unit;
- provision made by voluntary organisations;
- placement in an FE college;
- work placement; and
- home tuition.

LEAs are able to make provision for pupils with special educational needs as part of EOTAS provision. The SEN Code of Practice for Wales, paragraph 8.92, states that:

Section 319 of the Education Act 1996 empowers the LEA to arrange for some or all of a pupil's special educational provision to be made otherwise than at school. Such arrangements would include education in a pupil referral unit, home tuition or education that reflected key stage 4 flexibilities.

4.2 Pupil Referral Units

Section 19(2) of the Education Act 1996 defines a PRU as any school established and maintained by an LEA which is specifically organised to provide education for children who, by reason of illness, exclusion from school or otherwise, may not for any period receive suitable education and which is not a county (community) school or a special school.

Under section 29(1) of the 1996 Act, LEAs must inform the Assembly whenever a new PRU is set up or an existing PRU is closed, but there are no formal procedures for opening or closing PRUs. The Assembly maintains a register of PRUs. In January 2003, there were 30 registered PRUs in Wales. (National Assembly for Wales: Schools in Wales, General Statistics 2003.)

The Assembly's letter to LEAs in October 1999, stated that:

'The Assembly's view is that any unit which brings such children together for the purpose of providing part-time education (of whatever duration) should be listed as a PRU. Such units may include any which bring together children in receipt of home education for a short period each week or which cater for a particular category of pupil such as pregnant schoolgirls or teenage mothers.'

Joint provision, such as a hospital class or school, is not considered to be a PRU, neither are schemes specifically funded, for example, under the Youth Access Initiative.

PRUs are intended to provide short-term placement as a contingency and, as soon as practicable, pupils should return to a primary, secondary or special school, or be prepared for transition to further education or employment. In practice, the average stay is usually longer than the intended short-term placement. Permanently excluded pupils in key stage 4 rarely re-integrate successfully into a mainstream school and there are significant problems with younger pupils.

4.3 Excluded pupils

The information published by the National Assembly for Wales, in SDR 20/2004: Exclusions from Schools in Wales, 2002-03, shows that certain groups of pupils are more often excluded from schools than other pupils. These groups of pupils are therefore more likely than others to receive education otherwise than at school, including placement in a PRU or similar unit.

- Boys account for 80% of all permanent and fixed-term exclusions.
- Special schools have an exclusion rate that is twice as high as that of mainstream secondary schools and four times higher than the national figure.
- Pupils with special educational needs in mainstream schools account for 40% of permanent exclusions and 30% of all fixed-term exclusions.

The National Assembly for Wales Circular 1/2004: Exclusion from Schools and Pupil Referral Units provides guidance that is based on regulations made under Section 52 of the Education Act 2002. These regulations give all pupils aged 11 years and more who are excluded from schools and from PRUs the right to be notified formally of their exclusion and to appeal. These rights do not extend to pupils excluded from other types of educational provision.

4.4 Pupils in PRUs

Gender

As expected from the exclusion data, boys significantly outnumber girls in PRUs.

The three-year trend in the number of pupils that local authorities notify to the Assembly as being on roll in PRUs is summarised in table 1 below.

Date	Single registered boys	Dual registered boys	Total boys	Single registered girls	Dual registered girls	Total girls	Total
Jan 01	348	387	735	87	119	206	941
Jan 02	374	354	728	106	99	205	933
Jan 03	331	451	782	80	137	217	999

Table 1: Three-year trend in pupils on roll in PRUs

Source: National Assembly for Wales: Schools in Wales, General Statistics 2002 and 2003

Special educational needs

Again, as expected from the exclusion figures, a high proportion of pupils placed in PRUs have special educational needs. In January 2003, 21% of pupils (24% of the boys and 11% of the girls) who were on roll in registered PRUs had statements of special educational needs. This is significantly higher than the national figure of 3.4% for all pupils with statements.

There is no published information about the number of pupils in PRUs who have special educational needs for which provision should be made by “school action” or “school action plus”. Nor is there any analysis of the types of special educational need of pupils in PRUs. However, it is likely that behavioural, emotional and social difficulties are a significant aspect of the special educational needs of most of these pupils.

4.5 Inspection of PRUs and unregistered units

Section 10 inspections

The following categories of school are inspected under Section 10 of the School Inspections Act 1996, as amended by more recent legislation:

- community schools;
- foundation schools;
- voluntary aided schools;
- maintained nursery schools;
- special schools; and
- pupil referral units.

Unregistered units cannot be inspected under Section 10 of the 1996 Act.

All schools must be inspected within six years of the end of the school year in which they were last inspected. Inspections must be conducted by teams of inspectors, each led by a registered inspector, and must result in a written report. Registered inspectors must report on:

- the educational standards achieved by the school;
- the quality of education provided by the school;
- the quality of leadership in and management of the school, including whether the financial resources made available to the school are managed efficiently; and
- the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils at the school.

Area inspections

The Education Act 2002 enables Estyn to undertake area inspections of provision for learners aged 14 and over, including the effectiveness of the provision that LEAs make in PRUs and unregistered units.

Local authority inspections

Section 38 of the Education Act 1997 enables Estyn to inspect any local authority. Such an inspection 'shall consist of a review of the way in which the authority are performing any function...which relates to the provision of education for (a) persons of compulsory school age (whether at school or otherwise) or (b) for persons of any age above or below that age who are registered as pupils at schools maintained by the authority'.

In addition, after consulting with the local authority, the Chief Inspector may inspect the local authority's youth or adult education provision under the Learning and Skills Act 2000. Such an inspection may take place at the same time as an inspection under Section 38 of the Education Act 1997.

Inspections of the work of local authorities to support access, inclusion and provision for pupils with special educational needs, and of the work of Young People's Partnerships, may include visits to the authority's PRUs and to unregistered units.

5. Current provision in PRUs and unregistered units

5.1 Pupil referral units

The written information that LEA officers provided for the May 2004 survey identified at least 81 different sites in Wales where pupils receive education otherwise than at school, either part-time or full-time.

LEA officers described 50 of these sites as PRUs, a figure that significantly exceeds the 30 that were registered with the Assembly in January 2003.

The 20 PRU sites that were considered to be PRUs but that were not registered with the Assembly were either:

- new sites added to existing registered PRU provision to cater for additional demand;
- units that had been open for some time but only recently registered; or
- changes of address for established PRUs.

Some authorities, notably Flintshire and Denbighshire, had registered several sites together as one 'portfolio' PRU.

5.2 Unregistered units

31 of the sites identified by authorities in this survey are not regarded as PRUs and have not been registered with the Assembly. The unregistered units maintained by some authorities appear to make very similar provision to that made in registered PRUs elsewhere. Many of the unregistered units clearly match closely the legal definition of a PRU.

Unregistered units typically provide:

- 'home tuition' for groups of pupils;
- part or all of the alternative curriculum at key stage 4; and
- education for pregnant girls and young parents.

5.3 Range of provision

Many of the PRUs and unregistered units cater for pupils in more than one key stage. Overall there is provision for pupils in:

- key stage 1 in 11 units;
- key stage 2 in 21 units;
- key stage 3 in 60 units;
- key stage 4 in 57 units; and
- the post-16 age group in one unit.

Seventy-eight units make provision for both boys and girls, although boys significantly outnumber girls on roll. One unit caters for boys only, and two of the registered PRUs make discrete provision for pregnant girls.

5.4 Purpose of provision

Authorities use their PRUs and other units to provide education for pupils who:

- have been permanently excluded from school;
- are considered to be at risk of exclusion;
- are disaffected;
- have social and behavioural difficulties;
- have emotional and/or mental health problems, notably anxiety and school refusal;
- are pregnant or young parents; or
- have special medical or therapeutic needs.

The criteria for placement in PRUs and unregistered units vary from one authority to another. In some LEAs, units have pupils on roll who would be in special schools or in specialist medical care in other LEAs.

LEAs often use their PRUs and similar units to provide some of the alternative curriculum for pupils in key stage 4. In some cases, LEAs use centrally held funding in collaboration with schools to develop activities that include the provision of additional support in these units and joint activities involving the Youth Access Initiative.

For some pupils, a PRU is an unsuitable placement. For example, when a pupil excluded from a special school is placed in a PRU, the specialist support listed in the pupil's statement of special educational needs is unlikely to be available.

Estyn's survey of provision for pregnant girls and young mothers found that, whereas placement in a separate unit was often beneficial to them, there were no advantages and several disadvantages to placement in a general PRU or other unit that catered for pupils with a range of other difficulties.

5.5 Pupils

The statistical information provided by LEAs to the Assembly in January 2003 shows that 999 pupils were being educated in PRUs, of whom 411 were singly registered in PRUs and 588 were dually registered in a PRU and in a school. The published information does not show how many dually registered pupils actually attend a school as well as a PRU. However, it is likely that the majority of dually registered pupils receive most or all of their educational provision at the PRU.

In the present survey, LEAs reported that, in May 2004, they were educating 1601 pupils out of school. Of these pupils, 1065 were receiving some or all of

their education in registered PRUs, or in units that LEAs designated as PRUs but had not registered with the Assembly. The other 536 pupils were in other units that LEAs did not consider to be PRUs, and had not registered with the Assembly.

In addition, 605 pupils were attending Youth Access projects in three authorities. In one authority, the provision for 52 of these pupils was directly managed as part of a registered PRU. However, in the other two authorities the authority made the provision through a contract with an external provider.

6. How well do the learning experiences in PRUs and unregistered units meet pupils' needs and interests?

6.1 Curriculum requirements

The Education Act 1993 requires the curriculum in PRUs to be balanced and broadly based. However, PRUs are not required to provide pupils with access to the full National Curriculum. Related legislation and statutory guidance have established that the curriculum for pupils in key stages 3 and 4 should include:

- careers education;
- work experience;
- religious education; and
- sex education.

The most recent guidance is contained in the National Assembly for Wales Circular 1/2004: Education Otherwise Than At School. This states that:

Curriculum flexibility enables LEAs and schools to ensure that more time is spent on activities aimed at addressing pupils' individual needs. However, every effort should be made to ensure that all pupils receive sufficient education to maximise their opportunities to acquire formal accreditation. Delivery of this education should take into account the need for diverse learning styles, differentiation and/or a modified curriculum.

For some pupils, extra time spent on improving literacy and numeracy competencies will be beneficial. This will help them to learn more effectively in a mainstream setting, and in due course, access a wider curriculum. The curriculum should include English, Welsh for pupils educated in a Welsh medium school, mathematics and, for pupils in Key Stages 1 to 3, science.

For pupils at all key stages consideration should be given to ensuring that the curriculum is as broad as possible and includes elements such as art, drama, design and technology as well as some form of physical education. Consideration should also be given to providing a balance between individual and group work and adapting this as far as possible to the individual pupils' needs.

The Assembly has very recently published guidance relating to the curriculum for learners aged 14 to 19 years: National Assembly for Wales Circular 37/2004: Learning Pathways 14-19 Guidance.

The guidance states that learners aged between 14 and 19 years are entitled to a curriculum, through an individual learning pathway, that includes a balance of formal learning, wider choice, flexibility and a learning core, together with a unique blend of support to meet learners' needs.

Circular 37/2004 states that the curriculum for learners aged 14 to 16 years in any setting (unless formally disapplied) should, from September 2004, include:

- English;
- Welsh (as a first or second language);
- mathematics;
- science;
- physical education;
- religious education;
- careers education and guidance;
- personal and social education; and
- work-related education.

6.2 Inspection findings

Wales

During the period 1998 to 2002, Estyn conducted Section 10 inspections of 28 PRUs. In these PRUs, inspectors found the breadth and balance of the curriculum to be a good feature of the provision. Common weaknesses were:

- shortages of accommodation and specialist resources, especially in practical, creative and aesthetic subjects;
- few units offered suitable provision in music;
- little teaching of Welsh as a second language;
- the limited scope of work in history and geography; and that
- few PRUs taught religious education.

Estyn has no Section 10 inspection evidence relating to units that are not registered as PRUs, or for registered PRUs that authorities have only recently notified to the Assembly.

Estyn's survey entitled 'Developments In The Alternative Curriculum For Pupils In Key Stage 4' found that curriculum modifications are least effective where LEAs are unclear about the relationship between revised curriculum programmes, the provision in PRUs and special education needs strategies. Inspectors also found weaknesses in the teaching of basic skills in some alternative curriculum projects.

A survey of LEA Provision for Pregnant Teenagers and Young Parents (Estyn, 2003) reported that provision in a discrete PRU or unit for young mothers is particularly popular with young women who were not motivated to continue with their education even before becoming pregnant. Few of these units can provide a broad and balanced curriculum of uniformly high quality. However, many of the young women like attending units that are tailor-made to suit their circumstances.

England

Inspection findings in England are very similar to those in Wales.

In the Ofsted (2003) report entitled “Key Stage 4: towards a flexible curriculum”, HMI in England evaluate the provision for pupils aged 14 to 16 years in 14 PRUs and ‘centres managed by LEAs which have the characteristics of pupil referral units but are not formally registered as such’.

Inspectors found that the curriculum offered in the units and centres was generally limited and often pupils were not working towards recognised qualifications. When they were, attitudes to learning were markedly better and achievement was higher. Careers education and guidance was often late, narrowly defined or fragmented.

The learning opportunities in registered PRUs, particularly in those that catered for pregnant girls and young mothers, were generally better than those available in unregistered centres.

6.3 Survey findings

The current survey found that the curricula in PRUs and other units generally have a number of good features but also some important shortcomings.

Good features

- a high percentage of the curriculum is taught by qualified teachers;
- there are good arrangements for learners to gain accreditation at entry level, including Award Scheme Development and Accreditation Network (ASDAN) awards;
- many pupils in key stages 1 to 3 have access to almost all of the subjects of the National Curriculum;
- learning programmes for pupils in key stage 4 are often well-planned and meet pupils’ individual abilities and interests;
- there is good coverage of the core subjects of English and mathematics;
- pupils have good opportunities to improve their basic skills in literacy and numeracy;
- the good provision of PSE at key stages 3 and 4, sometimes in co-operation with youth workers, gives opportunities for pupils to improve their personal and social skills;
- learners have good opportunities for work experience and work-related education;
- pupils in key stage 4 have access to learning opportunities provided by FE colleges, work based training providers and the Careers Service;
- some units offer good opportunities for outdoor education, including Duke of Edinburgh awards; and
- one authority makes outstanding provision for pupils to work with community initiatives, and with artists and writers in residence.

Shortcomings:

- units generally lack the resources to deliver a broad, balanced curriculum;
- the focus on basic skills limits the time available for teaching foundation subjects;
- pupils do not have enough opportunities to work for GCSEs in a broad range of subjects;
- learning opportunities in science and design and technology are limited because there are insufficient resources for practical and experimental work;
- opportunities for pupils to improve their skills in using ICT are limited because of insufficient resources;
- there are few opportunities for pupils to learn through the medium of Welsh or to learn Welsh as a second language;
- the curriculum pays insufficient attention to Y Cwricwlwm Cymreig;
- pupils have very limited opportunities to learn a modern foreign language;
- units provide few opportunities for pupils to extend their spiritual or cultural understanding;
- units rarely teach religious education or organise acts of collective worship;
- units provide few opportunities for pupils to learn about sustainable development; and
- there is not enough use of homework to support learning and few opportunities for out-of-hours learning.

PRUs and other units are good at meeting the needs and aspirations of those pupils in key stage 4 who do not intend to return to school. These pupils have access to learning opportunities that prepare them well for transition to college vocational courses or to work-based training.

The shortcomings in the curriculum and learning resources of PRUs and other units place some groups of pupils at a disadvantage in relation to pupils in schools and limit their opportunities for progression in some subjects.

The needs and interests of pupils in key stages 1 to 3, and of some pupils in key stage 4, are best served by an early return to school. These pupils need access to the same range of learning opportunities as are normally available in schools. This should include the full National Curriculum, suitably differentiated to take account of pupils' individual learning needs, or, in the case of pupils in key stage 4, an appropriate learning pathway. At present, these pupils do not always receive their entitlement.

Pupils with statements of special educational need who attend PRUs and other units receive a more restricted curriculum than is available in a mainstream or special school. This is unsatisfactory.

7. How well are pupils in PRUs and unregistered units cared for, guided and supported?

7.1 Inspection findings

The section 10 inspections of PRUs in Wales in the period 1998 to 2002 found that support and guidance for pupils were good in half of the units and satisfactory in the rest. PRUs provided effective support to help pupils to improve their attendance and behaviour within the units.

The support for pupils to return to school was of variable quality. It was most effective where the pupils stayed on the registers of their home school, and where that school worked closely with the unit. Overall, links between secondary schools and units were too weak to support the return of most pupils.

In 2003, the Ofsted survey of PRUs and other units in England found that, in the best provision visited, pupils benefited significantly from the personal attention and support they received. Their attitudes, attendance and behaviour improved and they re-engaged with learning.

7.2 Survey findings

PRUs and similar units provide pupils with good care, guidance and support. Staff know pupils well and the pupils feel valued as individuals. Pupils receive carefully targeted personal support and guidance. In response, their attitudes, motivation, achievement and progress improve and they develop pride in their achievements.

Pupils appreciate the individual attention and encouragement that members of staff give. Many pupils are reluctant to consider returning to a mainstream school because they feel safe in units and fear that they would receive less personal support back in school.

The survey identified many good features that are typical of current practice:

- units have effective discipline and behaviour policies that pupils understand;
- members of staff are trained in listening to children and young people. They offer pupils effective advice and support;
- units have good induction programmes for new pupils. They review their progress regularly;
- there are good links with parents and carers. Some units offer direct support to parents to help them to improve their parenting skills;
- there is good monitoring of attendance and behaviour, with appropriate support from Education Welfare Officers (EWOs) where needed. Pupils know that they are expected to attend regularly and punctually;
- there are many examples of good support for individual pupils with specific needs, such as providing breakfast and a minibus to school;

- most pupils receive effective support from visiting specialists. This may include working with Educational Psychologists, for example, on issues related to bullying;
- pupils have better access to health care, information and advice than they received in their schools;
- there is effective support from Careers Wales that helps pupils to make informed choices; and
- units work in partnership with outside agencies to enhance the PSE curriculum. Many units provide specialist courses, such as anger management, that improve pupils' social skills and behaviour.

There are shortcomings in some aspects of the provision to promote equality of opportunity and in health and safety practice:

- not all units have the required policy for racial equality;
- units have made little progress in promoting accessibility for disabled people;
- units rarely conduct systematic health and safety or risk assessments; and
- not all members of staff receive training in child protection procedures.

8. How well do LEAs manage PRUs and unregistered units?

8.1 Policy and planning

LEA officers have a clear and appropriate view of the links between their policies and strategic plans for PRUs and similar units, and their broader plans to promote the social inclusion of vulnerable pupils, including looked-after children. Although officers are beginning to work more closely with other local networks, including Young People's Partnerships, these links are under-developed.

Some authorities make good use of the expertise of members of staff in PRUs to provide targeted outreach support for younger learners, with the aim of preventing their exclusion from their mainstream schools.

LEAs report that they face significant challenges in planning sufficient, appropriate places for pupils who are educated out of school, and that demand for places always exceeds supply. A number of officers state that their local authority is not able to prioritise funding to provide the full educational entitlement and appropriate quality of education for all pupils in need of education otherwise than at school.

Several factors are likely to be associated with the increased demand for unit places, and therefore with the recorded rise in the number of registered and unregistered units and the rise in overall pupil numbers. These factors include:

- the requirement to provide 25 hours of education each week;
- the increase in numbers of pupils excluded for fixed periods of time from schools;
- the growth in demand for alternative curriculum arrangements at key stage 4; and
- the difficulty of moving pupils on from units into mainstream or special schools.

LEAs find it difficult to plan new provision of equivalent quality to that available in a school. Very few headteachers and governors of mainstream schools welcome proposals to open a PRU on the site of their school. As a result, LEAs make the necessary additional provision in other, often much less appropriate, locations.

As part of the development of alternative curriculum provision, some LEAs and schools are entering into contracts with organisations in the voluntary sector to make out-of-school provision for some pupils in key stage 4, including permanently excluded pupils. LEAs and schools do not do enough to monitor the quality of this provision or to determine whether it provides value for money.

8.2 Management structures

Almost all LEAs meet the requirement in Circular 3/99: Pupil Support and Social Inclusion to have management committees for the PRUs for which they are responsible and to ensure that they have a multi-agency focus. However, LEAs are not required to have equivalent arrangements in place for their unregistered units.

Management committees usually have an appropriate range of members who represent the local community, including headteachers and county councillors, although the voluntary sector is poorly represented. In those LEAs where PRUs occupy a number of different sites, some have appropriately arranged for a single committee to govern two or more of their PRUs.

In the great majority of LEAs, the senior LEA officer with overall responsibility for PRUs and similar units has a broad range of strategic management responsibilities in the area of pupil support and social inclusion.

Operational responsibility, including responsibility for managing pupil placements, funding and liaising with members of staff in units, usually rests with the officer responsible for behaviour support or EOTAS. Each unit has a designated head or teacher-in-charge who is responsible for its day-to-day running.

LEAs' policies and plans make strategic links between aspects of provision for different groups of vulnerable pupils, but their management structures do not always support cohesive service delivery. Common weaknesses are that too many people have responsibility for different groups of pupils, and that the links between behaviour support officers and school improvement officers are ineffective.

8.3 Staffing and external support

LEAs have ensured that all units, whether registered or not, have appropriately qualified staff. All units have at least one qualified teacher, supported by other members of staff with a range of job titles, including:

- learning support assistants;
- behaviour support assistants;
- youth workers;
- nursery nurses;
- key workers;
- project workers; and
- ancillary support workers.

LEAs provide pupils in their units with additional, targeted support from their central support services. The Education Welfare Service provides effective support for pupils' attendance and behaviour. Educational psychologists also

provide additional support for pupils, members of staff and sometimes for parents.

Two thirds of LEAs provide staff in units with effective support and training from curriculum advisers and school improvement officers that enable them to keep up to date with developments in mainstream education. This is good practice.

8.4 Links with schools

LEA officers and PRU staff aim to return pupils from units to mainstream education wherever possible. Because few LEAs have good pupil tracking systems, there is not enough detail available to support a full evaluation of their success in achieving this aim. Younger pupils usually move on from PRUs to mainstream or special schools, although this often takes too long to arrange. However, pupils in key stage 4 rarely return to school. Instead, these pupils move on to a college or to a training placement.

Once pupils have transferred to a unit, teachers in schools take very little interest in their progress. They do not usually provide assessment information when the pupil transfers to a PRU, and nor do they advise on an appropriate curriculum for the pupil. Teachers in schools generally have low expectations of these pupils.

Only four LEAs have developed convincing policies for encouraging communication between units and schools about the progress that individual pupils make. The rest do not do enough to promote two-way reporting between units and schools, or to encourage teachers in mainstream schools and in units to exchange information, to share good practice and to attend training courses together.

Where pupils are dual-registered in a school and in a unit, information about their attendance and achievements is not shared consistently between each setting. Pupils' achievements are not usually included in the overall data for their school.

In those authorities where the policy is for schools to retain pupils on roll during the time they attend off-site provision, the process of reintegration to school is usually easier. At present, there are not enough links between schools and LEA-maintained units. Units more often have effective links with primary schools than with secondary or special schools.

8.5 Monitoring and evaluation

LEAs do not do enough to monitor or to evaluate the quality of the provision that they make in PRUs and similar units, or of the provision that they purchase through a contract with an external provider.

LEAs do not usually keep good enough records of the achievement of pupils in units, or monitor the costs of placements.

Few units have effective systems for performance management. Units are at a very early stage in developing self-evaluation processes that are based on firm evidence of monitoring teaching and learning, and on the views of parents, pupils or feeder schools.

9. How well do LEAs track pupils without a school place to ensure that they receive their full educational entitlement and that their welfare is safeguarded?

9.1 Tracking pupils

It is essential that LEAs are able to track the educational provision that they make for pupils who have no school place. Such tracking helps the authority to ensure that all pupils receive their proper educational entitlement. It also enables the authority to fulfil its wider duties of care, particularly in child protection and well-being.

Ofsted reported in 2003 that none of the English LEAs inspected had a fully effective system for gathering information to enable them to track all pupils. Inspectors estimated that 9,000 pupils who had been on school rolls in Year 10 were 'missing' during Year 11.

The current survey found that at least two-thirds of authorities in Wales are unable to account systematically for the provision they make for, and sometimes for the whereabouts of, most of their pupils who are not on school rolls. Officers have particular difficulty in tracking some of their most vulnerable pupils, including children and young people in transient families and those who live in refuges.

Examples of good practice

Seven LEAs have set up systems that enable them to improve the tracking of the educational provision that they make for pupils who have no school place.

In many authorities, the Education Welfare Service plays a key role in finding 'missing' pupils.

Most LEAs collect and collate a good range of data on looked-after children, including records of their attainment in national tests and examinations. They also have detailed records of attendance, exclusion, statements of SEN and changes of placement. LEAs are starting to make better use of this data to inform planning for pupil referral unit provision and/or unit placements, the Behaviour Support Service, the Educational Psychology Service and the Home Tuition Service.

Despite the examples of good practice, overall it is a matter of concern that LEAs do not consistently track pupils who do not have a school place.

9.2 Entitlement

Very few authorities can show that they provide the full entitlement of 25 hours' weekly education for all excluded pupils. In some authorities, officers state that not enough funding is available to make this provision.

In May 2004, LEAs were providing education for 1601 pupils in their PRUs and unregistered units. Just over half of these pupils were given the opportunity to attend these units for 25 hours a week, although not all took up their full entitlement.

Eight authorities stated that they meet the requirement to provide 25 hours of education for all pupils in key stages 1 to 3 who are excluded for more than 15 days. These pupils may attend a unit full-time, or they may be dually-registered for part-time education in a unit and part-time attendance in their own school.

Pupils in key stage 4, and younger pupils in the remaining 14 authorities, do not usually receive full-time education whilst unable to attend school. For some pupils, a part-time unit placement is the only educational provision. For others, particularly those in key stage 4, it is part of an alternative curriculum programme that may include leisure, college or work activities.

In 2003, Estyn found that only two authorities make full-time provision for pregnant girls and young mothers. Inspectors recommended that discrete units for young mothers, where they exist, should offer full-time provision, in order to ensure continuity, progression and equality of opportunity.

Pupils who have committed criminal offences and who are excluded from school receive inadequate educational provision. Many of the children and young people receiving services from Youth Offending Teams have significant additional educational needs. Many of these pupils, including some aged as young as 13, have had no school place, or other satisfactory arrangement for their education, for considerable periods of time.

Part-time provision is appropriate for a few pupils, for example those whose physical or mental health needs require them to make a gradual return to learning. However, all other pupils should have access to full-time, appropriate education. At present, too many pupils do not receive this entitlement.

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