

**A report on**  
**Pengwern College**

**Sarn Lane  
Rhuddlan  
Denbighshire  
LL18 5UH**

**Date of inspection: November 2025**

**by**

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

## About Pengwern College

Name of provider	Pengwern College
Proprietor status / ownership of the college	Cambian, a subsidiary of CareTech Holdings PLC
Date of Principal / Head of Education appointment	July 2023
Number of learners enrolled at time of inspection	41
Details of the provider's locality including campuses	The college is located in a rural setting in Rhuddlan within an estate that extends to 23 acres and includes a horticulture area, a small farm and woodlands.
Background and circumstances of learners	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A few learners are looked after (CLA)</li> <li>• A majority of learners are funded by Welsh local authorities and a minority are funded by English local authorities</li> <li>• Many learners attend as day learners</li> <li>• A minority of learners are resident in the on site care home</li> </ul>
Percentage of learners who speak Welsh or identify as Welsh speakers	7%
Number of learners from minority ethnic backgrounds	A few learners are from minority ethnic backgrounds
Number of staff by role	195

Significant changes since last inspection, e.g. change in name of provider or campuses	None
Date of previous Estyn inspection (if applicable)	13/02/2023
Start date of inspection	17/11/2025

## Additional information

Cambian Pengwern College is an independent specialist college situated in a rural location in Rhuddlan, North Wales. The college is operated by The Cambian Group. Since March 2019, the college has been owned by CareTech Holdings Ltd.

The college is registered to provide education for up to 60 learners aged 16 to 25 years with moderate to profound and multiple learning difficulties, physical difficulties and autistic spectrum condition. Nearly all have an individual development plan (IDP) or an education, health and care plan (EHCP).

There are currently 41 learners attending the college. The majority of learners are funded by the Welsh Government and local authorities in Wales and a minority are placed by local authorities in England. A minority have residential placements and the majority attend as day learners.

The principal was appointed in 2023 and has worked at the college since September 2017. The principal oversees all aspects of the college, including the educational, residential and estates management.

The head of education has responsibility for the day-to-day running of education provision and is supported by an assistant head of education, day student manager and two day student team leaders, and team of around 10 tutors and 35 learning support workers (LSWs). These staff support learners who attend the college on a day basis. Further, staff from the care homes attached to the college support residential learners in their lessons.

A clinical team provides speech and language therapy, occupational therapy and nursing care to support learners at the college.

## Overview

Pengwern College is a caring and supportive place where nearly all staff know learners' emotional needs and interests very well. As a result, learners feel safe, happy and engage in their learning.

Learners follow one of two pathways, either exploring independence or exploring work. The curriculum supports learners to build their independence skills or prepare for work through a wide range of practical, creative and real-life learning experiences.

Most learners engage positively in a broad range of activities that support the development of their personal, social and vocational skills. For example, many learners, access a range of beneficial on site and off site work experience opportunities

Where teaching is most effective, teaching staff plan varied activities that are well matched to learners' needs, for example when developing fine motor skills through making coil pots or when developing gross motor skills through cycling.

Where teaching is less effective, learning strategies are not aligned appropriately to learners' needs and abilities. Further, in a minority of sessions, the delivery of accredited learning units and the completion of worksheets limits tutors' abilities to make sessions stimulating, productive and challenging.

The majority of staff use appropriate communication strategies, for example signing, visual timetables and symbols. However, this is not consistent across the college.

The college has recently introduced a new target setting process. However, it is too soon to evaluate the impact of this.

Nearly all learners demonstrate positive attitudes to learning and positive behaviour in sessions and around the college.

The 'student council' effectively empowers learners, enhancing their decision-making and involvement in college improvements through regular meetings, which includes attendance at governance meetings.

The college provides a range of professional learning opportunities for all staff. For example, through the learning support worker training program and opportunities for staff to complete level 5 qualifications.

Leaders undertake suitable activities to monitor the quality of teaching. However, quality assurance activities to inform self-evaluation are not robust. Further, leaders' strategic planning is limited.

Leaders are developing a culture of teamwork. However, a minority of staff do not always feel valued or supported by their line managers.

Leaders have established a secure safeguarding culture at the college.

## **Recommendations**

We have made three recommendations to help the college continue to improve:

- R1 Improve strategic leadership at all levels to inform and effectively evaluate practice at the college
- R2 Review and refine the curriculum to ensure that it appropriately meets the needs of all learner cohorts
- R3 Ensure that the college's policies include appropriate reference to the Welsh context of the college and to Welsh Government legislation and guidance

## **What happens next**

The provider will have a monitoring visit to follow up on recommendations from this report.

## **Main evaluation**

### **Teaching and learning**

Pengwern College provides learners with a caring environment. Relationships between learners and staff are warm, respectful and characterised by sensitivity to learners' individual needs. This is a strength of the college. Nearly all tutors and support staff know learners' social and emotional needs and interests extremely well. They use this knowledge effectively to support participation in learning activities and emotional regulation.

The college provides a broad range of learning experiences to support learners' development of skills. Learners follow one of two distinct pathways, exploring independence or exploring work. This approach enables learners to access a range of accreditation, work-related learning and enrichment activities.

Where teaching is most effective, tutors plan effectively to meet learners needs. In these sessions, learners benefit from varied activities that develop their thinking skills, reinforce prior learning and develop new knowledge. For example, in pottery where learners create coiled pots or when working with the animals on the college's farm.

Where teaching is less effective, learning strategies are not aligned appropriately to learners' needs and abilities. As a result, the development of learners' skills is limited.

Further, in a minority of sessions, the delivery of accredited learning units and the completion of worksheets limits tutors' abilities to make sessions stimulating, productive and challenging.

Across the college, the majority of staff make effective use of visual timetables, symbols and signing to support learner understanding and transitions. Nearly all staff in practical subjects, provide resources which are structured to promote learners' independence. Tutors use clear and structured routines that help learners understand expectations and settle quickly to tasks. Where used well, these communication approaches contribute strongly to learners' engagement and understanding. However, across the college, practice is inconsistent and the use of signing or other communication support strategies is underdeveloped. As a result, opportunities for learners with communication needs to fully access the curriculum and engage with others is limited.

The college identifies medium and long term goals for learners to achieve. However, in a minority of cases, targets are not specific, measurable or time bound. As a result, targets are not consistently accessible to learners and staff. This limits learners' and staffs' ability to recognise the progress they have made. The college has very recently reviewed its target setting process and introduced a new learner target-setting system. However, it is at too early a stage to evidence its impact.

Nearly all learners experience a wide variety of multi-sensory activities that promote creativity, physical development and sensory exploration well. In music and art-based sessions, learners make meaningful choices, explore instruments and materials freely and express themselves creatively.

During their time at the college, many learners develop their physical skills well. Many learners develop their gross motor skills and mobility in a structured and supportive environment through cycling, swimming and chair yoga.

Nearly all learners develop their numeracy and literacy skills. For example, in essential skills, learners develop their understanding of how to use money through preparing for a shopping task at the local supermarket, or when visiting or serving in the on-site tuck shop. Further, learners in independent living sessions measure out ingredients, further reinforcing practical numeracy skills.

A few learners demonstrate competent digital skills with relevant, real world application. For example when using animation software to produce videos and posters. In these sessions, learners demonstrate independence and problem-solving skills.

A majority of learners develop their communication skills suitably. For example, where appropriate, learners confidently share their views and experiences, participate in class discussion and, in line with their abilities, a very few learners make college podcasts.

Most learners engage positively in a broad range of activities that support the development of their personal, social and vocational skills. For example, where appropriate, many learners, access a range of beneficial on site and off site work experience opportunities. Examples include working at an animal sanctuary, National Trust venues, local cafes and within the IT department onsite. However, the measuring of learner progress against the achievement of work-related targets is underdeveloped.

To improve teaching and learning further the provider should:

- and adapt the curriculum offer to ensure that learners are given every opportunity to develop the skills they need for their post-college adult lives.
- Strengthen the consistent use of preferred communication methods, such as signing, across the college

### **Well-being, care, support and guidance**

Nearly all staff across the college have the well-being of learners as a high priority. They understand the needs of learners extremely well, and build positive and trusting relationships, treating them with dignity and respect. This is a strength of the college. As a result, learners are happy, engage well in sessions and feel safe.

Nearly all learners demonstrate positive attitudes to learning. They show enthusiasm, engagement and enjoyment across a wide range of activities. Nearly all learners demonstrate positive behaviour in sessions and around the college. Nearly all staff effectively use praise and positive behaviour support for learners, which contributes to the calm learning environment.

Most learners engage positively within the communal areas of the college, greeting visitors with enthusiasm and demonstrating genuine kindness and respect towards one another. This is reflected in everyday actions, for example independently supporting peers who may need additional assistance and offering to make drinks during tea breaks. This creates an inclusive and caring college community. Learners are proud to be members of the college.

Where appropriate, learners take on worthwhile leadership roles, giving them a sense of pride. The student council, voted for by learners, meet regularly and make valuable contributions to college life. For example, making a welcoming induction video for new learners, an anti-bullying video and more recently presenting to senior leaders to request specific equipment to enhance their learning experience. Additionally, members of the student council attend governance meetings and present their views and updates on their work. As a result, their views are understood and considered by leaders from the wider organisation.

Leaders have established a secure safeguarding culture at the college. Nearly all learners are supported effectively to participate as active members of the community and they have good attendance. Further, the college provides opportunities for learners to understand the needs of others, how to maintain healthy relationships and to make positive choices. Where appropriate, learners benefit from outside speakers to discuss key topics. For example, a very few learners were recently taught about radicalisation by the local police officer.

Learners participate in a wide range of enrichment and community-based activities that contribute effectively to their well-being. For example, supporting the local community through participation in regular beach cleans, where learners find out about the environmental impact of plastic pollution in oceans. Additionally, participating in fundraising activities such as a charity bike ride where staff and learners collaborated to complete a 65Km bike ride from Bangor to Rhuddlan.

Learners benefit from opportunities to learn about their own and other cultures and history. For example, they participate in celebrations for example the 80<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Victory in Europe day, celebrations of the emergency services and an in house Eisteddfod to recognise Welsh culture. Additionally staff and learners participated in a cultural day promoting social inclusion and a sense of belonging for the learners.

Learners benefit from therapeutic input from a speech and language team and an occupational therapist. These staff work appropriately to support learners' needs. However therapeutic strategies used within the classroom and by staff are not followed consistently. Additionally are not always effectively reviewed to assess the impact they are having on learners' development and progress.

In order to improve the provider should:

- Embed and review therapeutic strategies to ensure they effectively meet the needs of learners across the college.

## **Leading and improving**

Leaders are committed and dedicated and are driven by a strong desire to improve the life opportunities of all learners at the college. The principal is supported by a head of education and assistant head of education. The principal is largely focused on developing leadership capacity amongst middle and senior leaders, and this limits their ability to operate strategically.

Whole-college improvement planning focuses suitably on the areas for improvement identified through self-evaluation activities. Leaders plan a suitable range of actions to address these aspects. However, they do not always set precise enough success criteria and timescales to enable them to track progress rigorously.

Leaders have suitable processes to evaluate the quality of teaching. However, these do not focus well enough on the progress learners make in lessons. In a majority of cases, information from lesson observations does not provide sufficient evidence to be useful for quality assurance and improvement purposes at individual learner, staff and whole college level.

A performance management process is in place for all staff. However, actions identified by line managers are not specific and measurable and do not link well enough to college priorities.

Nearly all staff across the college participate in a range of professional learning opportunities to meet the complex needs of learners. The education team have recently introduced tailored training for learning and residential support assistants to enhance the effectiveness of learning support within the classroom and close gaps identified through self-assessment. Further, this is now a feature of the college's induction for newly appointed staff. As a result, learning and residential support workers understand their roles and responsibilities well and many effectively support learners in the classroom. Additionally, staff have the opportunity to complete level 3 teaching qualifications and level 5 qualifications in leadership and management.

Leaders have established a secure safeguarding culture at the college. Staff undertake regular safeguarding training and safer recruitment processes are robust.

Over time, leaders have developed a strong sense of teamwork at the college. Staff work collaboratively and diligently to support learners. However, a minority of staff do not always feel valued or supported by their line managers, for example, when managing staff well-being.

The college maintains a strong community focus, with active partnerships enhancing learning experiences. The college has developed strong links with the local community

which has enabled the creation of work experience opportunities and visits to and from the college by a variety of organisations. For example, the college held an armed forces day where the Welsh Guards, Royal Air Force and Royal Navy visited and spoke with learners about the military and included a fly past from the local RAF base.

The parent company has provided a significant investment to enhance the learning environment. The college is currently undergoing a comprehensive programme of refurbishment and improvements to the education facilities.

The wider organisation provides suitable processes to provide support and challenge for the leadership team at the college. The regional lead for education visits regularly, undertaking quality assurance activities and acts as a critical friend to the principal. The regional lead has a secure understanding of the strengths of the college and its priorities for development.

At organisational level, leaders do not evaluate and review the college's policies and documentation robustly to ensure that they align with the college's Welsh context and Welsh legislation and guidance.

In order to improve the provider should:

- Improve the quality and impact of strategic leadership at all levels, including accountability and performance management arrangements.
- Ensure leaders at all levels evaluate their work accurately and robustly.

#### **Additional information**

The provider's arrangements for safeguarding young people and vulnerable adults do not give any cause for concern.

## Evidence base of the report

Before the inspection, inspectors:

- analysed the outcomes from the learner questionnaires and consider the views of teachers and support staff through their questionnaire responses

During the inspection, inspectors:

- met the chief executive, governors, senior and middle managers and individual teachers, instructors and support staff to evaluate the impact of the provider's work
- met learners to discuss their work, listen to them and gain their views about various aspects of their provider
- visited a broad sample of sessions, including classroom, workshop and online activities across the provision
- observed and spoke to learners outside of sessions
- looked closely at the provider's self-evaluation processes
- considered the provider's quality improvement plan and looked at evidence to show how well the provider had taken forward planned improvements
- scrutinised a wide range of provider documents, including information on learner assessment and progress, records of meetings of staff and the governing 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:

- reviewed 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

## Appendix 1: Numbers – quantities and proportions

The report makes references to different quantities and proportions e.g. '*most pupils...*' or '*very few pupils...*'. We use these terms to describe quantities and proportions as outlined in the table below:

nearly all =	with very few exceptions
most =	90% or more
many =	70% or more
a majority =	over 60%
half =	50%
around half =	close to 50%
a minority =	below 40%
few =	below 20%
very few =	less than 10%

## Copies of the report

Copies of this report are available from the college and from the Estyn website (<http://www.estyn.gov.wales/>)

The report was produced in accordance with the Learning and Skills Act (2000).

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