

A report on

Pembrokeshire Learning Centre

**St Clements Road
Neyland
Milford Haven
Pembrokeshire
SA73 1SH**

Date of inspection: November 2025

by

Estyn, His Majesty's Inspectorate for Education

and Training in Wales

About Pembrokeshire Learning Centre

Name of provider	Pembrokeshire Learning Centre
Local authority	Pembrokeshire County Council
Language of the provider	English
Multi-site provision?	Yes
Number of pupils on roll	159
Pupils of statutory school age	159
Date of previous Estyn inspection (if applicable)	08/05/2017
Start date of inspection	03/11/2025

Further information

Pembrokeshire Learning Centre (PLC) is a pupil referral unit (PRU) maintained by Pembrokeshire County Council. The Centre was established in 2015 following the deregistration of the previous PRU. It provides education for up to 163 pupils aged 5 to 16, with 159 pupils currently on roll.

The Centre operates across three sites: Neyland, Penally, and Pembroke Dock.

Pupils attending the PRU have a wide range of social, emotional, and mental health difficulties (SEMH), as well as other additional learning needs. The Centre supports pupils who have been permanently excluded, are at risk of exclusion, or whose needs cannot be met within a mainstream setting. In addition, the Centre provides education for pupils whose anxiety or mental health needs prevent them from attending mainstream school.

Nearly all pupils have additional learning needs and hold a local authority-maintained Individual Development Plan (IDP). Pupils are grouped according to their age, stage, and level of need.

Just under half of the pupils are eligible for free school meals, and a few are looked after by the local authority. Very few pupils come from ethnic minority backgrounds, and currently, no pupils speak Welsh as their first language at home.

The current headteacher was appointed in Autumn 2021.

Data reported is sourced from the latest available Pupil Level Annual School Census. These figures may be slightly different to those observed during the inspection.

Further information is available from the Welsh Government My Local School website:
mylocalschool.gov.wales

- a. The term 'additional learning needs' is being used to describe those pupils on the SEN/ALN register of the school.

Summary

Leaders at Pembrokeshire Learning Centre articulate a clear vision prioritising pupils' well-being, underpinned by a trauma-informed approach. The vision is shared suitably with staff, pupils, and parents. However, leadership oversight across all sites is inconsistent, and a few staff remain hesitant to adopt new processes. Further, in a few cases there are fractured relationships amongst staff, which negatively impacts on the well-being of staff and leaders. Many of the pupils who attend regularly report feeling safe due to strong staff-pupil relationships.

The quality of teaching and learning is variable. In most lessons, expectations are too low, planning is inconsistent, and pupils are insufficiently challenged, limiting their progress. In a minority of lessons, teaching is effective, well-planned, and engaging, leading to strong progress in learning and well-being. Generally, support staff contribute positively to learning, but their effectiveness varies in supporting teaching and learning.

Pupils make strong progress where teaching is effective, but overall planning does not ensure sustained skill development across the curriculum.

Overall curriculum planning and delivery are underdeveloped, with no overarching schemes of work and inconsistent planning across subjects and areas of learning experience. Assessment processes are at an early stage of development, and feedback and marking are inconsistent, restricting pupils' understanding of their progress.

Provision for literacy and numeracy is improving but remains variable. As a result, the progress that pupils make is inconsistent. Opportunities for pupils to develop social, independent, and physical skills are limited.

Behaviour management is inconsistent, fixed-term exclusions are high and learning environments are sometimes unsafe. Attendance remains low, and Pastoral Support Plans for pupils on reduced timetables are not consistently applied. Safeguarding systems are generally robust, and staff understand their responsibilities.

Provision for pupils with additional learning needs (ALN) is variable. Individual Development Plans are not always implemented effectively, limiting support for individual needs. Recent leadership changes and targeted interventions, particularly in literacy, are beginning to improve support.

Opportunities for pupils to influence the life of the PRU are developing, such as through the Pupil Parliament, but this is at an early stage.

Monitoring and evaluation systems are developing but are inconsistently applied, and over time leaders have not made sufficient progress in addressing the recommendations from the previous inspection. Leadership capacity has been strengthened, with clear roles and professional development opportunities. Financial management is appropriate, but the impact of funding on pupil outcomes is not robustly evaluated.

Recommendations

We have made seven recommendations to help the PRU continue to improve:

- R1. Address the safeguarding concerns identified during the inspection
- R2. Strengthen leadership and governance arrangements
- R3. Improve the rigour and effectiveness of self-evaluation and improvement planning
- R4. Strengthen strategic leadership and provision for pupils with ALN
- R5. Improve pupil attendance including reducing the number of authorised absences
- R6. Strengthen the quality and consistency of teaching, learning and assessment, ensuring a clear focus on pupils' progress and outcomes
- R7. Continue to strengthen the curriculum offer, to meet the needs and interests of pupils

What happens next

In accordance with the Education Act 2005, HMCI is of the opinion that special measures are required in relation to this PRU. The PRU will draw up an action plan to show how it is going to address the recommendations. Estyn will monitor the PRU's progress usually every four to six months.

Main findings

Leading and improving

Leadership oversight across all sites at Pembrokeshire Learning Centre is inconsistent, and a few staff remain hesitant to adopt new expectations and processes. Further, in a few cases there are fractured relationships between staff. This negatively impacts on the well-being of staff and leaders.

All senior leaders are currently based at the PRU's main site and do not have a consistent presence across the other two sites. As a result, their oversight of key areas, such as curriculum planning and development, and the quality of teaching and learning, is not sufficiently robust or consistent. However, leaders at Pembrokeshire Learning Centre articulate a clear vision prioritising pupils' well-being, underpinned by a trauma-informed approach. The vision is shared suitably with staff, pupils and parents.

Following a period of considerable instability, including persistent high levels of staff absence, recent changes to the leadership and staffing structure are beginning to strengthen capacity and establish clear roles and responsibilities.

Many of the pupils who attend the PRU regularly, report that they feel safe. This is supported by strong, positive working relationships between staff and pupils. Many staff know and understand the needs of their pupils well. In the most effective practice, staff develop trusting relationships and provide nurturing learning environments that support pupils' well-being effectively.

The management committee brings a broad range of relevant expertise and skills which are well matched to different aspects of the work at the PRU. The local authority has very recently strengthened the membership of the management committee, and they are now in the early stages of developing their strategic oversight. The role of the management committee in gathering first hand evidence to inform their understanding of the strengths and areas for development of the PRU is underdeveloped. This means that they are not in a position to provide robust challenge. As a result, many important areas for development have not been identified by the management committee and therefore remain unaddressed, including the consistency and quality of teaching and learning and the progress that pupils make from their starting points.

Over time, leaders have not demonstrated sufficient impact in driving the improvements needed in the quality and consistency of teaching and learning, in raising pupils' attendance, and in ensuring robust evaluation systems and processes across the centres and sites. Recently, leaders are beginning to secure an improved understanding of the quality of teaching and learning, using a systematic monitoring, evaluation and review

process that includes learning walks. However, these systems are not applied consistently. Monitoring processes do not place sufficient emphasis on the progress that pupils make. Nevertheless, leaders have identified relevant priorities for improvement, which appropriately focus on strengthening teaching and learning and developing the curriculum to improve outcomes for pupils.

Staff benefit from a suitable range of professional learning opportunities. Leaders have invested in trauma-informed training for most staff. Partnerships with other PRUs and cluster schools, are beginning to extend opportunities for collaboration and staff development. However, the evaluation of professional learning and its impact on pupil progress, is at an early stage of development. Further, the implementation of professional development reviews is inconsistent. This means that important priorities have not been addressed consistently.

The headteacher is beginning to work effectively with the recently appointed school improvement partner to evaluate the work of the PRU and to determine its priorities.

Leaders have suitable financial arrangements in place. Leaders have made appropriate and targeted use of grants, including for pupils who are economically disadvantaged. For example, they use funding to improve staff understanding of trauma-informed practices, support opportunities for pupils to access activities such as water sports and to provide uniforms for all pupils. Currently there is not a robust process in place to effectively identify the impact of funding on pupil outcomes.

Over time, leaders at the Pembrokeshire Learning Centre have not made sufficient progress in addressing the recommendations from the previous inspection.

Teaching and learning

Overall, there is considerable variability in the quality of teaching and learning across sites.

In the minority of lessons, where teaching is successful, learning is well-planned, with exciting, practical, lessons that meet pupils' needs and interests well. Learning moves at pace and teachers provide an appropriate level of challenge. In these lessons, pupils make strong progress in their well-being and learning.

However, in the majority of lessons, teachers have low expectations of pupils, and learning does not always meet their individual needs and interests. The lessons lack pace and challenge, learning intentions are not clear and pupils are not engaged. As a result, pupils do make strong enough progress during these lessons.

Leaders of curriculum and assessment have recently reviewed the approach to curriculum planning at the PRU. They have provided effective support for all staff, through beneficial shared templates and guidance. In addition, regular teaching and learning meetings are beginning to develop a culture of collaboration, where staff share good practice and refine their planning approaches. However, overall, the quality and consistency of planning remains variable across the sites.

Generally, support staff contribute well to learning, particularly where they provide sensitive, individualised support that promotes regulation and confidence. In these lessons, pupils feel safe, engage well in their learning and make progress in developing important skills. However, the effectiveness of support staff across the PRU is too variable. This means that not all pupils receive the support they need to fully access the curriculum.

Assessment and feedback

Currently assessment processes remain underdeveloped. As a result, too many pupils do not make strong enough progress from when they join the PRU. The new strategic approach to assessment is developing well and provides a stronger basis for evaluating progress. This includes regular use of standardised assessments, as well as ongoing assessments. Leaders are beginning to use this information to identify pupils' needs and to inform provision and interventions suitably.

The quality of feedback varies across sites. This inconsistency limits pupils' ability to identify their strengths and to understand how to improve. Leaders have recently developed suitable processes and systems for marking and feedback. These are at an early stage of implementation

Pupils' attitudes to learning

Overall pupils' attitudes to learning are positive where teaching is effective and expectations are clear. In these settings, pupils engage well, demonstrate respect, and show enjoyment in learning. For example, in a few lessons, high expectations and well-paced activities lead to strong engagement and purposeful learning.

Progress and outcomes in skills

Overall, planning for the progressive teaching of skills across the curriculum is underdeveloped. As a result, too few pupils make the progress they need in developing these important skills to prepare them well for their future pathways.

Many pupils develop their communication skills suitably during their time at the PRU. For example, they share their ideas on climate change or speak with courtesy to visitors. However, the lack of clear planning to develop pupils' communication skills limits their progress.

There is a recent beneficial focus on improving skills in reading throughout the Pembrokeshire Learning Centre. Teachers choose a suitable story or novel to share and study with the pupils each half term. It is too early to judge the impact of this on improving pupils' reading skills. Where teachers demonstrate secure subject knowledge and provide robust levels of challenge, a few pupils make strong progress in developing their higher order reading skills. For example, a few pupils confidently discuss the difference between a protagonist and antagonist in the class novel.

The teaching of writing is inconsistently planned for and implemented. As a result, too few pupils make effective progress in the development of their written skills over time.

Overall, the development of most pupils' mathematics and numeracy skills is inconsistent. There are a few pupils who demonstrate confidence in higher order mathematical skills such as algebra and indices. However, there are many pupils who have not yet secured important mathematical knowledge. As a result of inconsistent planning, most pupils have made limited progress in these important skills over time.

Overall, opportunities for pupils to develop their social, independent, and physical skills are underdeveloped.

Leaders have begun to plan for Welsh language and culture theme days. However, across the PRU, the use of Welsh language skills by pupils and staff is underdeveloped.

Curriculum delivery

Overall, the current curriculum offer limits pupils' opportunities to make sustained progress, particularly in developing and applying literacy and numeracy skills across a range of contexts. This variability in provision contributes to inequitable pupil experiences and outcomes.

Curriculum and assessment leaders have set out purposeful actions to strengthen consistency, coherence, and subject-specialist delivery across the PRU. They have very recently begun to adapt the curriculum suitably to provide more purposeful, real-life learning opportunities. However, these changes are at an early stage of implementation.

Currently, the PRU does not have overarching schemes of work in place to guide curriculum delivery. As a result, planning for teaching and learning is largely driven by individual teachers rather than a consistent, centre-wide approach. For example, while teaching and learning in relationships and sexuality education (RSE) and religion, values and ethics (RVE) are generally purposeful, provision remains fragmented due to the absence of coherent planning. This limits leaders' ability to ensure appropriate coverage of knowledge, skills and experiences.

Overall, the accreditations and qualifications offer for older pupils has strengthened since the last inspection. The lead teacher for qualifications provides well-structured guidance to ensure that pupils follow appropriate pathways and achieve relevant accreditation aligned to their future aspirations. One-to-one guidance for pupils and improved transition planning, including through the local authority's engagement programme, support pupils effectively in moving to suitable next steps in education, training or employment. As a result, most pupils move on to their chosen destinations.

Safeguarding and behaviour

Overall safeguarding processes and systems for recording and reporting concerns are robustly in place across the centres. Nearly all staff are clear about their roles and responsibilities. Suitable links are in place with a range of partners to promote the well-being and safeguarding of pupils.

The delivery of the curriculum to support and promote a safeguarding culture across the PRU is underdeveloped. Across the curriculum, the planned delivery of lessons to address specific issues around terrorism and radicalisation are inconsistently in place. The very recent introduction of daily well-being sessions is at an early stage of development. It is too early to evaluate the impact of these sessions. As a result, not all pupils receive an equitable curriculum offer to support and develop their understanding of important issues.

Many learning environments across the PRU are not fit for purpose. They negatively impact on the delivery of the curriculum and fail to provide safe learning environments. One of the centres is located on grounds which have public access. As a result, pupils have no access to a safe and secure outside learning environment.

Overall, the support for pupils' emotional regulation and the consistency of staff responses across the PRU are too variable. The Relationships and Behaviour Policy has recently been updated to reflect the increased focus on trauma-informed approaches to support improvement in pupils' emotional regulation.

Monitoring and analysis of pupil exclusion data are currently underdeveloped. In addition, rates of fixed-term exclusions remain too high and have doubled compared with the same period last year.

Attendance

Pupil attendance remains too low. Leaders are beginning to strengthen processes to record, monitor and track attendance. Although analysis of attendance data is still at an early stage, it is increasingly being used to inform targeted support and interventions based on individual pupil needs.

While a few pupils with reduced timetable arrangements have a Pastoral Support Plan (PSP), this practice is not yet consistent for all pupils who have a reduced timetable. As a result there is inconsistency in the quality assurance processes for pupils who have a part time timetable arrangement.

A very few pupils return to mainstream education. Increasingly pupils remain at the PRU long term.

Support for pupils with additional learning needs (ALN)

Overall, the co-ordination of support for pupils with additional learning needs is underdeveloped. Provision to meet the diverse needs of pupils is inconsistent across centres. Leaders do not yet have a secure understanding of the progress that pupils make towards their individual learning targets.

Local authority individual development plans (IDPs) contain a broad range of relevant and detailed information about how best to support each pupil's needs. However, the delivery of these plans is inconsistent. As a result, the support provided does not always match pupils' specific needs closely enough.

In the few examples of effective practice, individual targets are well planned, and staff demonstrate a secure understanding of how to support pupils effectively. In these instances, pupils are clear about what they need to do improve. Person centred practice is developing appropriately. Leaders continue to encourage pupils to participate in person centred meetings, although this work is at an early stage of development.

Recent changes to the leadership structure have strengthened capacity to support pupils with additional learning needs. There are effective strategies in place to identify pupils who require targeted support with literacy. Intervention groups have been recently reconfigured and are purposeful with a focus on improving pupils' literacy skills.

Pupil voice

Overall, opportunities for pupils to influence the life of the PRU across all centres are still at an early stage of development. However, there is a growing range of ways for pupils to contribute to their experiences, including through the recently established Pupil Parliament.

Additional information

The PRU's arrangements for safeguarding pupils give cause for concern

A site management concern was raised during the inspection, and the local authority has been notified

The PRU has appropriate arrangements for promoting healthy eating and drinking

Leaders and management committee manage the PRU's finances appropriately, including the use of the pupil development grant.

Evidence base of the report

Before an inspection, inspectors:

- analyse the outcomes from the parent/carer and pupil questionnaires and consider the views of teachers and the management committee through their questionnaire responses

During an inspection, inspectors normally:

- hold a meeting with parents/carers to hear their views on the PRU and its effectiveness
- meet the headteacher, management committee, senior and middle leaders (where appropriate) and individual teachers to evaluate the impact of the PRU's work
- meet pupils to discuss their work, to listen to them read and to gain their views about various aspects of their PRU
- meet groups of pupils in leadership roles, such as representatives from the PRU council and eco-committee
- visit a broad sample of classes, including learning support groups and undertake a variety of learning walks to observe pupils learning and to see staff teaching in a range of settings, including classrooms, support groups and in outdoor areas
- where appropriate, visit the specialist resource base within the PRU to see pupils' learning
- observe and speak to pupils at lunch and break times and at a sample of after-school clubs, where appropriate
- attend assemblies and daily acts of collective worship
- look closely at the PRU's self-evaluation processes
- consider the PRU's improvement plan and look at evidence to show how well the PRU has taken forward planned improvements
- scrutinise a range of PRU documents, including information on pupil assessment and progress, records of meetings of staff and the management committee, information on pupils' well-being, including the safeguarding of pupils, and records of staff training and professional development

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

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 school and from the Estyn website (www.estyn.gov.wales)

The report was produced in accordance with Section 28 of the Education Act 2005.

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