



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

**A report on**

**Flintshire Portfolio PRU**

**Plas Derwyn, Dee View, Shotton, Flintshire  
CH5 1TR**

**Date of inspection: October 2022**

**by**

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

## About Flintshire Portfolio PRU

Name of provider	Flintshire Portfolio PRU
Local authority	Flintshire
Language of the provider	English
Type of school	Pupil Referral Unit
Residential provision?	No
Multi-site provision?	Yes
Number of pupils on roll	136
Pupils of statutory school age	130
Date of previous Estyn inspection (if applicable)	24/02/2015
Start date of inspection	17/10/2022

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](https://mylocalschool.gov.wales)

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

## Overview

Flintshire Portfolio pupil referral unit (PRU) is in Queensferry and provides education for children and young people from 3 to 16 years old. There are currently 136 pupils on roll, with a very few dually registered at a mainstream school.

In September 2021, there was an amalgamation of four of the PRU sites to the purpose-built Plas Derwen site. The Plas Derwen site caters for pupils from Year 4 to Year 11 with a range of social, emotional and behavioural difficulties (SEBD). Canolfan Enfys is on a separate site and caters for pupils with more complex needs from ages three to seven.

The PRU also registers pupils in the local authority's Fresh Start provision. This provision was not included in this inspection.

Since September 2022, the new headteacher has significantly improved staff working relationships and developed a team approach across the PRU. The new leadership team have a clear vision for the PRU and work well with staff to create a calm and nurturing environment where pupils feel safe and valued. Staff know the needs of their pupils well and are skilful in supporting them to make progress.

The majority of pupils make worthwhile progress from their initial starting points whilst at the PRU, particularly in relation to their social and emotional skills. However, opportunities for pupils to develop their numeracy, digital and Welsh skills progressively are underdeveloped. Younger pupils with very complex needs make limited progress in developing their communication skills as a result of the inconsistent use of practices such as signing and the use of symbols.

The ability to effectively plan for the support and teaching needs of the pupils is impeded by a lack information about the pupils prior to their placement at the PRU. The PRU has begun to capture basic baseline information to support this planning. However, arrangements to secure up-to-date information on pupils prior to admission require strengthening.

Flintshire PRU is beginning to provide a wide range of worthwhile opportunities for pupils to plan for their pathways to further education or employment. However, leaders have appropriately identified the need to broaden the curriculum and the range of accreditation opportunities for pupils.

There have been steady improvements in the attendance of pupils over recent years. However, overall attendance across the PRU remains too low.

The PRU has a valuable outreach team who provide effective support for mainstream schools to meet the emotional and learning needs of pupils who are at risk of exclusion.

In the short period of time since the change in leadership, appropriate arrangements for quality assurance and self-evaluation processes are being developed. These changes have been significant; however, they are in the early stages of implementation. Progress prior to September was limited. For example, many of the recommendations from the 2015 inspection remain as priority areas for improvement.

## Recommendations

- R1 Provide clarity on the roll of the PRU, including the management of provision for pupils excluded from other schools in the authority
- R2 Ensure that all pupils receive a curriculum that is broad, balanced and well matched to their individual needs
- R3 Strengthen arrangements to secure up-to-date information on pupils before they are placed at the PRU
- R4 Continue to strengthen arrangements to quality assure the work of the PRU including the degree of support and challenge provided by the management committee and other bodies
- R5 Improve attendance

## What happens next

The PRU will draw up an action plan to show how it is going to address the recommendations. Estyn will work with the local authority to review the PRU's progress.

## Main findings

### Learning

Overall, the additional learning needs and abilities of pupils across the PRU vary considerably. The majority of pupils make adequate progress from their initial starting points. They listen suitably to staff and to their peers and engage willingly with learning activities. A few younger pupils with more complex learning needs generally develop their communication skills suitably and in line with their ability. For example, they use symbols to choose snacks and drinks at break times. However, not all pupils develop necessary communication skills in signing, for example, and as a result they do not progress well enough.

During class discussions and when questioned, the majority of pupils at the Plas Derwen site respond suitably, using short sentences and subject specific vocabulary. A very few more able older pupils develop their use of extended language appropriately. They give confident presentations such as on the reasons for becoming a vegetarian, or use literary techniques such as alliteration and personification to describe a river and woodland scene.

Many pupils develop effective social skills through a range of activities. In lessons, they work well alongside each other. They take turns, play games and celebrate in each other's successes. During break times, pupils play team sports successfully and manage winning and losing well. For many pupils, this represents strong progress from their starting point.

Many pupils develop suitable reading skills. This ranges from recognising and understanding symbols on a daily timetable, to locating information and summarising information from a text to identify different features of a volcano. Many pupils at Plas Derwen enjoy their independent reading sessions. They choose books that suit their interests well. More able pupils use higher order skills such as inference and deduction suitably. For example, they draw conclusions on their analysis of poetry such as of *The Witch* by Mary Coleridge.

Over time, the majority of pupils develop their writing appropriately in line with their ability. This ranges from younger pupils developing pre-writing skills such as mark making to older pupils writing for a range of purposes, for example writing an extended article about local flooding.

When given the opportunity, pupils apply their numeracy skills suitably in a range of authentic contexts. More able younger pupils use addition skills soundly to work out how many days are left until Christmas. Others calculate temperatures on a thermometer, which include negative numbers. They identify which cities are coldest on a map of the world. More able younger pupils understand basic map co-ordinates. For example, they can locate treasure on a treasure map. However, overall, pupils across the PRU do not progress well enough in developing their numeracy skills.

A majority of pupils make suitable progress in their information and communication technology (ICT) skill development. For example, with appropriate support, younger pupils with more complex needs enjoy operating programmable floor robots to solve

puzzles. Older pupils make basic use of ICT to research rivers and mountain ranges in Wales. However, overall, pupils do not develop their ICT skills progressively to support their learning across the curriculum.

Many pupils develop their creative skills appropriately. For example, they engage enthusiastically during technology and art lessons. They produce attractive leaf print paintings. In music sessions, they play chords on a keyboard to accompany familiar songs and demonstrate increasing confidence in their performances.

Many learners improve their physical skills suitably, which helps them to keep fit and motivated. These activities include rock climbing, go karting and using the local gym.

Younger pupils with more complex learning needs develop their fine motor skills suitably. For example, they practise threading and picking up objects with large tweezers. Older pupils at Plas Derwen successfully develop their gross motor skills in activities such as using mountain bikes on and around the site.

Many pupils develop important life skills such as cookery and independently washing dishes. They prepare healthy meals and snacks. Older pupils benefit from learning about careers and the world of work in sessions with Careers Wales.

Pupils' understanding and use of the Welsh language is underdeveloped.

In the academic year 2021-2022, many pupils from Plas Derwen had an identified destination and progressed into education, training or employment. Although a very few pupils achieved qualifications in English, mathematics and numeracy, this represents a very narrow range of accreditation.

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

Many pupils feel safe at the PRU. Nearly all pupils know who to turn to if they are concerned, upset or worried and are confident that staff will deal appropriately with their concerns.

Many older pupils speak enthusiastically about the various off-site learning opportunities where pupils engage in a variety of practical activities such as construction, animal care and volunteering in local shops. Many pupils at Plas Derwen also value the opportunities to participate in a range of weekly physical activities such as swimming, football, gym and climbing. Many pupils also enjoy taking part in creative and conservation activities. For example, they create a large bug hotel out of natural materials such as sticks, moss, conkers and straw.

Pupils take seriously their role on the newly established school council. This is beginning to have a positive impact on pupils' life at the PRU. School council members have worked with peers to identify priorities and are starting to plan for how to develop the site. For example, they successfully highlighted to leaders the need for more outdoor play equipment and have also been allocated a significant budget to improve the facilities for teaching independent living skills on the site.

Many of the pupils who attend the Plas Derwen site are polite and able to relate appropriately towards others. They demonstrate respect for their peers. For example, pupils hold doors open for visitors and say please and thank you when collecting

food from the dining room. A very few pupils in Canolfan Enfys welcome visitors with basic greetings and are happy to continue their activities when visitors are present.

Across both sites, many pupils interact suitably with each other in groups. For example, a few pupils on the Plas Derwen site regularly enjoy playing football at break times, celebrating the success of peers. Younger pupils with more complex needs at Canolfan Enfys sit appropriately in small groups at reading time.

In lessons in Plas Derwen, many pupils display positive attitudes towards their learning, engage well with teachers and support staff, and take pride in their work. Over time, they successfully develop the confidence and skills they need to work in lessons with increasing independence.

Many pupils learn to manage their own behaviour in lessons during their time at the PRU. They understand the thresholds of acceptable behaviour in class, and generally respond suitably to the skilful guidance and support from the staff team.

A very few pupils re-integrate into their mainstream schools from the PRU. The number of fixed-term exclusions is declining and there have been no permanent exclusions in the past academic year.

A minority of pupils increase their attendance whilst at the PRU. For many of these pupils, parents believe that this represents a significant improvement from their attendance in their previous schools. Although pupils are attending more regularly this year compared to last year, the persistent absence of a minority of pupils has a negative impact on their standards and well-being. Overall, attendance at the PRU remains too low.

### **Teaching and learning experiences**

Staff at the PRU develop positive and caring relationships with pupils and are positive role models for pupils. Support staff provide an invaluable role in supporting pupils' learning and well-being. Nearly all staff demonstrate high expectations of pupils in relation to their behaviour and use praise to engage and motivate pupils.

Where teaching is most effective, staff support pupils in their learning and provide appropriate and sensitive encouragement. When creating paintings of the local landmark, Moel Famau, inspired by the work of Welsh artist Kyffin Williams, staff worked alongside pupils and successfully modelled colour mixing and composition. As a result, many pupils produced paintings which captured the mood of the landscape well.

On the Plas Derwen site, many teachers make effective use of questioning to support pupils' understanding and develop their thinking. In these lessons, there is appropriate pace and challenge. For example, in a cookery lesson, staff question pupils effectively on how to roll their Welsh cakes in order to ensure that they cook evenly.

Across the PRU, assessment systems are in the very early stages of development. Teachers have limited baseline information on pupils and internal tracking systems are under-developed. The PRU is in the early stages of producing individual

education plans (IEPs) for all pupils. As a result, target setting for individuals, based on their needs and abilities, is underdeveloped.

Overall, assessment for learning is inconsistent across the PRU. In a few examples, self-assessment is used well, and pupils make relevant improvements to their work.

The PRU does not provide a sufficiently broad and balanced curriculum to build systematically on pupils' existing knowledge and understanding. The PRU is in the early stages of preparing for the Curriculum for Wales. It has recently begun to work with other schools and agencies to ensure that the curriculum offer is more suitable and better matched to the needs of pupils. For example, Canolfan Enfys has established links with a local special school to provide advice and training for staff. It is too early to evaluate the impact of these links on the planning and delivery of the curriculum within Canolfan Enfys.

Currently, there is limited evidence of appropriate and consistent curriculum planning for 14 to 16-year-olds at Plas Derwen. Older pupils access a narrow range of subjects and have too few opportunities to gain suitable qualifications. This limits their choices when they leave.

The PRU has recently introduced a structured approach to supporting the development of pupils' social and emotional skills. For example, pupils in Years 5 and 6 are sensitively supported by staff to decide who the important people were in their lives. Many pupils confidently discuss friends and relatives and make decisions about who is important to them.

Across the PRU, there are too few planned opportunities for pupils to develop their literacy, numeracy and digital skills progressively across the curriculum. The development of pupils' skills across the PRU does not build on their previous experience well enough. Planning for the teaching of literacy, numeracy and digital skills is in the early stages of development. In addition, inconsistency in staff's use of signing to support pupils' communication needs means that pupils with more complex needs do not always develop their communication skills well enough.

Where teaching is most effective, pupils have engaging opportunities to write independently and at length. For example, they research historical figures such as Neil Armstrong and Katherine Johnson when learning about space exploration.

The provision for the Welsh language and culture is undeveloped.

The PRU provides a range of stimulating, well-resourced learning environments. On the Plas Derwen site there are welcoming nurture zones, a well-resourced design technology area, a science laboratory and a pupil kitchen. Many pupils use the kitchen very successfully to develop life skills.

Pupil reports contain a useful range of relevant information about pupil progress in literacy and numeracy. In addition, they provide appropriate information on their child's progress and how they can make further progress in the future.



## Care, support and guidance

Flintshire PRU is a calm and welcoming provision. Teachers and learning support assistants know the pupils well and over time develop trusting and highly effective working relationships with them.

The PRU is in the early stages of developing a suite of effective support and guidance for pupils to prepare them for their next steps in life. There is a suitable range of opportunities to support older pupils in preparing them for work and further education. For example, they develop valuable vocational skills in construction and animal care and through volunteering opportunities. In addition, work experiences and effective partnerships with local colleges of further education and Careers Wales support pupils suitably in their transition to post-16 pathways.

Systems to track and monitor the progress of pupils over time at the PRU are underdeveloped. The PRU does not consistently receive detailed information on pupils' additional learning needs (ALN), prior learning and well-being when they are placed at the PRU. This impedes the PRU's ability to effectively plan for the support and teaching needs of its pupils. The PRU has begun to capture basic information in relation to pupils' ALN, progress, attendance, and behaviour. Further, the PRU has recently introduced baseline assessments which are starting to provide useful information to support the planning and ensure that the needs of the pupils are appropriately met. However, the routine and systematic analysis of pupil data is at an early stage of development.

A majority of pupils have statements of special education needs (SEN) or individual development plans (IDPs). The PRU is in the early stages of ensuring that all pupils have appropriate education and behaviour targets. There are beneficial links with the speech and language therapy service to support pupils' specialist needs and develop appropriate communication targets. The PRU is in the early stages of ensuring that identified pupil targets are specific and measurable, and that they accurately reflect the needs of the pupil. However, it is too early to evaluate the impact of the new processes.

Nearly all parents appreciate the communication with the PRU and feel that they are kept informed of their child's progress. Communication includes regular informal contact from class teachers as well as an appropriate more formal written report. Many parents believe that the PRU responds appropriately when problems or issues are shared.

The newly developed personal and social education (PSE) curriculum is delivered alongside a multi-agency approach co-ordinated by the PRU and includes input from the police and a broad range of external providers. For example, visitors to the PRU deliver valuable sessions on drug and alcohol awareness. These approaches reinforce the messages delivered within the curriculum and are beginning to effectively support pupils to develop the skills they need to stay safe and make more informed choices.

The PRU has very recently strengthened arrangements to track and improve pupil attendance. Further, effective attendance monitoring of the Fresh Start provision has been implemented since the start of the academic year. The EWO is beginning to

work with the PRU to support pupil attendance. However, it is too early to evaluate the impact of this support.

Leaders and staff have established an ethos where pupils feel safe and are listened to. Processes for reporting concerns are clearly understood by all staff. A newly established electronic system provides a single point of reporting for staff. This allows the designated safeguarding leads (DSLs) to access information, progress and track referrals to children's services, and effectively monitor all concerns.

Staff have appropriate training in safeguarding children and keeping pupils safe from the dangers of radicalisation. DSLs have beneficial links with a range of agencies to support pupils' needs.

Safeguarding processes for the safe arrival and departure of pupils and staff on both sites are appropriate. Safeguarding procedures give no cause for concern.

### **Leadership and management**

The headteacher and the leadership team have created a clear vision and ethos for the PRU, which is communicated with all staff well. The senior leadership team demonstrate a strong commitment and have high expectations to secure improvements across the PRU. These high expectations are shared by all staff.

The headteacher, working with the local authority, has taken swift action to address gaps in the senior leadership team. Temporary acting deputy headteacher posts have been created. These arrangements are highly beneficial. Staff are clear about their roles and responsibilities, which builds on their existing strengths.

The headteacher is thoughtful in his approach to introducing change across the PRU. Leaders are strategic, focusing on identified priorities to secure improvement. For example, they work constructively with staff to swiftly introduce an assessment process to provide baseline pupil information at the start of the school year.

The headteacher, together with senior leaders, has comprehensively identified priorities for improvement in a timely manner with staff contributing positively to the process. The PRU's priorities are appropriately identified in the three-year development plan. These are an accurate reflection of where the PRU is currently, the improvements needed and the actions necessary to make these improvements.

Quality assurance and self-evaluation processes are at the early stages of implementation. Informal processes have been in place for the last six weeks to support the development of the key priorities for improvement planning. These have included listening to staff and reviewing with leaders areas of strength and development across the age groups. However, there have been no formal quality assurance or self-evaluation processes across the PRU over a number of years for the current headteacher to use as a baseline.

The annual calendar of the monitoring, evaluation and reporting cycle is in place this term. This development is welcomed by staff. A performance management system is recently in place and is at the very early stages of implementation.

Since September, the headteacher, together with a member of the leadership team, has had an additional role in the management of part of the local authority-led Fresh Start provision. The local authority plans to bring the Fresh Start provision fully under the management of the PRU, with a focus on improving the Fresh Start curriculum offer and increasing re-integration into mainstream schools.

The Canolfan Enfys provision provides education for pupils aged three to seven. These pupils have a range of highly complex needs and have been on the roll of the PRU for the last six years. There are significant concerns over the appropriateness of this provision being part of the PRU. These have been raised by the headteacher with the local authority. The local authority is responding to these concerns appropriately.

The management committee is highly supportive of the new leadership arrangements at the PRU and the increased communication and working relationships that have recently been established. The management committee recognises the need to strengthen its role to challenge and support leadership effectively and to secure improvement planning that is evidence-based.

The recently strengthened working relationship with the regional consortium is a positive development, which is beginning to allow for purposeful professional dialogue.

Over time, oversight of the PRU has been inconsistent. As a result, many of the recommendations from the last core inspection in 2015 remain as priority areas for improvement. Since September 2022, the headteacher has improved the relationship that the PRU has with the local authority and has identified clear priorities for improvement. For example, currently only a very few pupils at the PRU are dual registered with a mainstream school, which restricts the opportunity for pupils to return to their mainstream schools.

Designated safeguarding leads are beginning to develop a more robust safeguarding culture across the PRU. This is being strengthened, for example through the electronic recording and tracking system and increased safeguarding focus in curriculum planning.

Processes to identify, implement and evaluate professional learning opportunities for all staff are at the early stages of implementation. These processes are appropriately aligned to the development plan priorities and performance management process.

## Evidence base of the report

Before an inspection, inspectors:

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

During an inspection, inspectors normally:

- hold a meeting with parents to hear their views on the school/PRU and its effectiveness
- meet the headteacher, governors/management committee, senior and middle leaders (where appropriate) and individual teachers to evaluate the impact of the school's/PRU's work
- meet pupils to discuss their work, to listen to them read and to gain their views about various aspects of their school
- meet groups of pupils in leadership roles, such as representatives from the school 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 school to see pupils' learning
- observe and speak to pupils at lunch and break times and at a sample of after-school/PRU clubs, where appropriate
- attend assemblies and daily acts of collective worship
- look closely at the school's/PRU's self-evaluation processes
- consider the school's/PRU's improvement plan and look at evidence to show how well the school/PRU has taken forward planned improvements
- scrutinise a range of school/PRU documents, including information on pupil assessment and progress, records of meetings of staff and the governing body/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

## Copies of the report

Copies of this report are available from the school and from the Estyn website ([www.estyn.gov.wales](http://www.estyn.gov.wales))

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

Every possible care has been taken to ensure that the information in this document is accurate at the time of going to press. Any enquiries or comments regarding this document/publication should be addressed to:

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