

Pupil referral units (PRUs)

Schools Data

22

No. of providers in 2025

Pupils Data

1,239

1,077

969

Single registered pupils in 2025

Single registered pupils in 2024

Single registered pupils in 2023

Follow-up Data

No. in FU September 2024

SM: 1

No. went into FU after core inspection 2024-2025

SM: 0 SI: 2

Total in FU August 2025

SM: 1 SI: 2

Inspection activity

No. of core inspections: 5

No. of interim visits: 3

Summary

Across the pupil referral unit (PRU) sector, staff consistently ensured that pupils' well-being underpinned their work. There was a marked rise in the number of pupils with social, emotional and mental health (SEMH) needs and all PRUs inspected faced challenges in meeting these demands. Inconsistencies in local authorities' entry and exit criteria, delays in pupils returning to mainstream provision and a lack of appropriate long-term specialist provision placed additional pressure on PRUs.

In PRUs where the curriculum offered an appropriate balance between well-being and high

expectations for learning, most pupils made highly effective progress from their starting points. In the most effective settings, staff demonstrated a deep understanding of the pedagogical approaches needed to support pupils to make good progress. They provided meaningful learning experiences that led to recognised qualifications. Pupils' involvement in directing learning further strengthened provision. As a result, pupil engagement was high, and behaviour was managed effectively to minimise the impact of any disruption.

In a majority of settings, leaders established strong processes for quality assurance and monitoring, and self-evaluation processes were effective. Leaders involved a wide range of stakeholders in self-evaluation, which further strengthened their improvement planning.

Teaching and learning

Many pupils made strong progress in learning and in developing their social, emotional, behavioural, and independence skills. Although attendance levels remained too low, many pupils improved significantly compared to their starting points and compared to their previous mainstream attendance figures. Strong, trusting relationships between staff and pupils enabled many to thrive and re-engage with learning. Read how staff at [**Canolfan Bro Tywi in Carmarthenshire**](#) develop relationships that enable pupils to develop confidence and improve their writing skills.

Where teaching was purposeful and made effective use of pupils' involvement and lived experiences, pupils engaged well in their learning. In contrast, in a minority of PRUs where assessment information was not used effectively to shape learning experiences, pupils' engagement suffered. Effective outcomes were most evident where teachers and support staff collaborated seamlessly, drawing on a strong understanding of individual needs. In these cases, teachers demonstrated secure subject knowledge and set high expectations. However, inconsistent teaching quality limited pupil progress, and difficulties in recruiting subject specialists further reduced the breadth of qualification pathways available to older pupils.

In the strongest PRUs, a broad and flexible curriculum supported effective person-centred planning. Professional learning helped staff to adapt provision to meet learners' needs, while partnership working embedded additional support into the curriculum, increasing its relevance and impact.

Provision for pupils from Welsh-medium schools to continue their education in Welsh was too inconsistent and did not support pupils to learn through their chosen language well enough.

Well-being, care, support and guidance

Most PRUs demonstrated strong levels of care, support and well-being. Pupils developed self-worth, felt listened to, and acquired effective strategies to self-regulate, manage their emotions, and develop as learners. Read about how [**Tai Educational Centre in Rhondda Cynon Taf**](#) supports pupils to develop their emotional intelligence.

Although many pupils' attendance improved after joining the PRU, overall attendance rates remained an area for improvement. Persistent challenges such as social emotional and mental health (SEMH) needs and educational gaps continued to contribute to low attendance figures.

In a minority of PRUs, too many pupils remained on part-time timetables for too long. The quality and use of pastoral support plans were inconsistent, limiting their effectiveness. Local authority criteria for

entry and exit to PRUs also lacked consistency, resulting in delays in returning pupils to full-time or mainstream education. The rising complexity of pupil needs often necessitated long-term specialist provision, which was not always available, meaning that most PRUs functioned as long-term special school settings for a proportion of their pupils.

Nearly all PRUs provided strong support for older pupils transitioning to further education, training or employment.

Leading and improving

Where leadership was strong, staff had clearly defined roles, shared a vision and modelled inclusive values. Many leaders demonstrated adaptability and responded effectively to challenges. At **The Bridge Alternative Provision in Bridgend**, leaders ensure an inclusive and equitable curriculum offer for all pupils.

Self-evaluation processes were well embedded in a majority of PRUs and involved all stakeholders. A reflective culture and strong quality assurance promoted continuous improvement. Strong partnership working arrangements contribute strongly to effective self-evaluation processes.

In most PRUs, professional learning was a high priority and created a skilled, pupil-centred workforce.

The effectiveness of management committees varied. In the strongest examples, members served as critical friends, demonstrating a strong understanding of pupil needs and active involvement in PRU life.

Where collaborative relationships existed between leaders, management committees and local authorities, the PRU's purpose was clearly defined and leaders felt well supported. However, this remained inconsistent in a minority of settings.

As a result of increased pupil numbers, in a majority of PRUs, learning environments were negatively impacted to meet capacity requirements. For example, quiet areas previously used to support pupils' well-being were redesignated to teaching areas.

Overview of recommendations from inspections

There were five providers inspected in the PRU sector during 2024-2025, four of which were given at least one recommendation.

Three providers (60%) were given recommendations related to **teaching and learning**, two of which were in a follow-up category:

- All three providers had a recommendation to improve the quality and consistency of teaching and learning to secure pupils' progress in learning

Two providers (40%) were given recommendations related to **well-being, care, support, and guidance**, both of which were in a follow-up category:

- Both providers had a recommendation to improve attendance, with the provider in follow-up to consider including access to full-time education for all pupils
- One provider had a recommendation to develop arrangements for pupils' leadership opportunities

to support pupils to become independent learners

Three providers (60%) were given recommendations related to **leading and improving**, two of which were in a follow-up category:

- Three providers received a recommendation to strengthen leadership at all levels
- Two received a recommendation to develop strategic leadership to ensure the effectiveness of self-evaluation and improvement planning