
Pupil Referral Unit management committees

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Introduction

This report is in response to a request from the Welsh Government in the Minister for Education's remit letter to Estyn for 2018-2019. The report evaluates how well management committees in pupil referral units (PRUs) carry out their roles and responsibilities. In particular, it considers how management committees have responded to the Welsh Government's (2018a) 'A Handbook for Management Committees of Pupil Referral Units' to support improvement.

The report is intended for the Welsh Government, PRU management committees, teachers-in-charge, and staff in PRUs, local authorities and regional consortia. It may be of interest to other organisations such as mainstream schools and governors, health bodies, and social services.

The findings of the report are based on a range of inspection evidence. Inspectors also held telephone interviews with chairs and members of management committees, as well as with teachers-in-charge of the PRUs, to explore their views.

Background

The Education Act 1996 (section 19) states that 'each local authority shall make arrangements for the provision of suitable education at school or otherwise than at school for those children of compulsory school 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' (Great Britain, 1996). Section 19 of the act defines a PRU as a school established and maintained by a local authority to provide suitable education for children and young people who, by reason of illness, exclusion or otherwise, may not receive such education (Great Britain, 1996). The term 'education other than at school' (EOTAS) refers to education delivered in settings outside of mainstream schools where local authorities fund individual placements. PRUs are the most frequently used education setting for pupils whose main education is other than at school.

Over recent years, the number of PRUs has reduced from 39 in 2010 to 23 in 2019. This is due partly to the amalgamation of several PRUs to create 'portfolio' PRUs on a number of sites. Three local authorities do not currently operate PRUs but arrange for EOTAS as part of a special school or in partnership with another local authority. In 2018-2019, 820 pupils were enrolled at PRUs as their main education provider, which accounted for 43.5% of all EOTAS educational enrolments. Around three-quarters of pupils registered at PRUs were boys. The number of pupils registered at PRUs increases with each age group from age 11 to age 15. Since 2013-2014, PRUs are used more frequently to educate EOTAS pupils than other provisions, such as local authority commissioned providers (Welsh Government, 2019b).

In 2011, the Welsh Government (2011) undertook a 'Review of Education Otherwise than at School and Action Plan'. At the time of this review, establishing a management committee was considered good practice rather than a statutory requirement. It was recognised that the majority of PRUs in Wales had some form of a management committee. The review concludes that the effectiveness of PRUs improves by having a management committee to challenge and support the delivery of education. One of the review recommendations was for the Welsh Government to make management committees statutory in Wales and to issue guidance on how they should function.

In 2011, the Welsh Government commissioned the University of Edinburgh to examine the process of excluding pupils from schools in Wales. The report comments on the effectiveness of management committees and the need for improved training and development opportunities for their members (Welsh Government, 2013).

Management committees

In 2014, the Education (Pupil Referral Units) (Management Committees etc.) (Wales) Regulations were laid before the National Assembly for Wales. The regulations came into force from October 2014, with a requirement for local authorities to establish management committees for all PRUs by February 2015 (National Assembly for Wales, 2014). The intention was for management committees to play an important role in the governance of their PRU. The Welsh Government issued statutory guidance for local authorities and PRUs in line with the regulations (Welsh Government, 2014). The guidance gives management committees responsibility for the conduct of their PRU, and set out the respective terms of reference for management committees, local authorities, and teachers-in-charge.

The guidance states that management committees fulfil an advisory role as well as having statutory responsibilities for specific functions or tasks. They should be actively involved in most decisions to ensure that their PRUs are effective and provide a suitable education for pupils (Welsh Government, 2014, p.11).

Management committees have joint statutory responsibility with their local authorities in the exercise of some functions, for example the curriculum on offer and in deciding the times of school sessions. In relation to exclusion, they have a similar role to school governing bodies, in terms of confirming or rejecting these exclusions (Welsh Government, 2014, p.12).

The 2014 guidance stipulates that the local authority must delegate to management committees specific functions. These are:

- overseeing the running of the PRU
- dealing with complaints relating to the curriculum
- establishing and reviewing discipline policies
- appraisal of teaching staff (Welsh Government 2014, p.12)

Management committees should play a strategic and advisory role in exercising their functions, and any functions delegated to them by the local authority. In particular,

they should work closely with the local authority and set up a strategic framework for the PRU. This should include:

- setting out appropriate aims and objectives
- identifying and including policies, targets and priorities
- setting out arrangements for monitoring and reviewing aims and objectives, and whether policies, targets and priorities are being achieved (Welsh Government, 201, pp.12-13)

The teacher-in-charge of the PRU is responsible for the internal organisation, management, and control of the PRU, and for implementing the strategic plan. In particular, teachers-in-charge should develop aims and objectives, policies and targets for the management committee and the local authority to consider (Welsh Government, 2014, p.13). In some PRUs, the term 'headteacher' is used interchangeably with 'teacher-in-charge'. In this report, the term 'teacher-in-charge' is used throughout, in line with regulations.

PRUs have delegated budgets, but the requirement to delegate does not extend to the following functions:

- the local authority's intervention powers
- control of school premises
- direction by the authority concerning health and safety
- appointment, suspension or dismissal of teaching and non-teaching-staff
- spending of the local authority's money (Welsh Government, 2014, p.12)

In 2018, the Welsh Government (2018) published 'A Handbook for Management Committees of Pupil Referral Units'. The Handbook provides additional guidance and information to support management committee members to improve the effectiveness with which they carry out their roles.

The Draft Additional Learning Needs Code for Wales (Welsh Government, 2018b) proposes further delegation of functions to management committees. The additional functions of the Code give management committees greater responsibility for pupils with additional learning needs (ALN). This includes preparing and maintaining individual development plans (IDP) as well as for securing the additional learning provision (ALP). The majority of consultation responses are generally in favour of these proposals providing the PRU Management Committee receives the necessary support, funding and training needed to fulfil these functions.

Main findings

- 1 A PRU management committee works best in partnership with its local authority and when they share a common vision for the PRU. This shared understanding usually leads to strong working relationships and to clear expectations for learner outcomes.
- 2 Around half of management committees understand their roles and responsibilities well. Management committees are effective when the roles and responsibilities of committee members for improving their PRU are clear. In the best cases, members make good use of the 'Handbook for Management Committees of Pupil Referral Units' (Welsh Government, 2018b). A minority of management committees are unaware of the Handbook or do not use it well enough. The lack of awareness of this useful publication contributes to inconsistent practice across PRU management committees.
- 3 Where management committees have a detailed understanding of their PRU, members are able to challenge and support the leadership of the PRU well. Successful management committees have a membership that reflect the needs of their PRU, as well as meeting regulatory requirements. The breadth and experience of members strengthen the committee's understanding of the needs of their pupils. A minority of management committees are actively encouraging pupils to participate in their work, and this helps staff to support pupils and their wellbeing better.
- 4 Many PRUs find it difficult to recruit a broad range of members to their management committees. This impacts on the breadth of knowledge and experience available to the committee and makes delegating specific responsibilities difficult. Securing parental representation in particular is one of the more challenging recruitment issues.
- 5 Regulations set out a joint responsibility for the local authority and the management committee to develop a relevant curriculum for the pupils. Successful PRUs and management committees work well with the local authority on this aspect. Where the local authority is working strategically with the PRU management committee, this supports the PRU to be more responsive to the needs of its learners. The most effective practice is based on a collaborative working relationship.
- 6 The training and development of management committee members are the responsibility of the local authority. In the most effective management committees, the local authority and regional consortium work closely with committee members to provide relevant, consistent and worthwhile training opportunities, but this practice occurs only in a few PRUs. Appropriate training and support are needed for the changes proposed in the Draft Additional Learning Needs Code for Wales (Welsh Government, 2018b) to be implemented successfully.

Recommendations

Management committees should:

- R1 Use the Handbook for Management Committees of Pupil Referral Units to improve their work
- R2 Work closely in partnership with their local authority, regional consortium and other stakeholders to develop a common vision for their PRU

Local authorities and regional consortia should:

- R3 Provide an annual programme of training and development opportunities for PRU management committee members
- R4 Ensure that local authorities and regional consortia officers understand the role and function of their PRUs fully so as to improve their joint working with management committees

The Welsh Government should:

- R5 Raise awareness among all management committees of the Handbook for Management Committees of Pupil Referral Units

1 Roles and responsibilities

- 7 Local authorities are required to ensure that management committees have a suitable membership and are supported appropriately to help members fulfil their roles. The Welsh Government (2014) guidance outlines the required membership of management committees and recommends a limit of 12 members. An exception would be PRUs that have more than one setting across multiple sites. Of the total number of management committee members:
- at least one but no more than one fifth must be parent members
 - at least one but no more than one third must be staff members this includes the teacher-in-charge
 - at least one but no more than one third must be authority appointed members
 - at least one but no more than two may be sponsor members. This person has given or is giving substantial financial assistance to the PRU; has provided or is providing substantial services to the PRU or represents the interest of an organisation or business that has provided sponsorship. The Welsh Government also recommends that management committees encourage pupil participation in the committee so that the learners' views are represented in the decision-making process (Welsh Government, 2014, p.6).
- 8 The number of community members must outnumber all the other members listed in subparagraphs (a) to (d). These members represent community interest, for example local schools, social services, Child and Adult Mental Health Services (CAMHS), educational charities, local colleges of further education and alternative education and training providers (Welsh Government, 2014, p.8). The local police and sector youth organisations can also be community members.
- 9 Effective management committees are clear about the roles and responsibilities of the members and of the local authority. In these PRUs, the management committee makes a valuable contribution to strategic leadership, for example through self-evaluation processes that identify areas for further development. These committees provide effective challenge and support to the delivery and monitoring of improvement planning.

In **Swansea PRU**, the management committee contributes to the self-evaluation process through regular visits to the PRU. The visits have strengthened the members' understanding of the evidence base for the self-evaluation process. For example, pupil outcomes, attendance rates across the PRU and pupil reintegration information provide members with comparative figures and allow informed discussion on the progress the PRU is making across such aspects. This in-depth understanding allows members to provide better support and challenge to senior leaders to help improvement.

- 10 Where management committees understand their functions fully, they demonstrate a strong understanding of their PRU. This enables members to challenge and support the leaders of the PRU. There is a thorough understanding of the responsibilities delegated by the local authority. Members are actively involved in decision-making processes, including curriculum design, to ensure that their PRU is effective and provides suitable education for its pupils.
- 11 Between 2013-2014 and 2018-2019, Estyn inspected 26 PRUs, and six received recommendations to improve the effectiveness of the management committee. These recommendations focus mainly on ensuring that management committees and local authorities work effectively together. A few recommendations also highlighted the need for management committees to take a more active role in monitoring and in challenging the performance of the PRU. Inspection reports since 2017 identify improvements in management committee arrangements and their positive impact on PRU leadership.

In **Y Daith PRU**, in the Vale of Glamorgan, the management committee is strengthened by the appointment of members who have specialist expertise. For example, members include a headteacher of a local special school, a parent, and a school nurse. The PRU benefits from the contributions members such as these offer leaders. Members gain a clear insight into the PRU's strengths and areas for development. They use this information to work with the teacher-in-charge and other senior leaders in setting the strategic priorities for the PRU.

- 12 Successful management committees have a membership that reflects the needs of the PRU and meets regulatory requirements. The breadth and experience of committee membership strengthen members' understanding of the needs of the pupils who attend their PRU. These management committees include representation from parents, staff, local authority, and community members. Community members reflect the profile of the PRU. For example, this may include representation from social services, CAMHS, and youth organisations. In a very few cases, PRUs have sponsor representation. However, this is recognised as good practice rather than a requirement.

In the **Bridge Achievement Centre**, in Newport, sub-committees provide positive opportunities for members to share their expertise with the PRU and involve external agencies. For example, a management committee member uses her expertise to train staff to improve the provision of Welsh across the curriculum. As a result, leaders report an improvement in teachers' confidence to deliver Welsh in lessons and an increase in incidental Welsh used by all staff members. Leaders now report that in a few cases pupils are beginning to demonstrate an improved confidence in their use of Welsh phrases during the school day.

- 13 Many PRUs have difficulties in appointing members to the management committee, and this affects the delegation of responsibilities. In some cases, membership of the management committee does not meet the needs of the PRU. Many management committees are aware of these challenges and strive to appoint suitable members to support and improve their work. Appointing parent members remains one of the most challenging aspects of recruitment.

In the **Tai Educational Centre**, in Rhondda Cynon Taf, the PRU has appointed committee members that reflect the needs of this particular PRU well. This includes members of local primary and secondary schools, social services, a community support police officer and parent representation. The committee as a whole brings a great deal of expertise and experience to strengthen the effective functioning of the PRU management committee.

- 14 An increasing number of management committees actively encourage pupil participation as part of their role. For example, in a few PRUs, pupil eco-committee members attend meetings to present their requests to improve the local environment.
- 15 Around half of management committees understand their roles and responsibilities well and why they are required to carry out these duties. For example, they use the Handbook effectively to support and challenge self-evaluation processes to ensure that they contribute fully to the strategic leadership of their PRUs.

In **The Bridge Achievement Centre**, in Newport, the management committee use the Handbook successfully to shape the roles and functions of the management committee further. The chair reports that the Handbook is 'user friendly' and provides valuable guidance to ensure that the members fully understand their roles and functions as part of the PRU's management committee.

- 16 All PRUs have a management committee in place. Where management committees are successful, members make good use of the guidance and handbook to guide and inform their improvement. These management committees have members who reflect the needs of the PRU. They are fully involved in policy-making decisions and their meetings provide a balance of support and challenge to the PRU leadership. However, around half of management committees do not use the guidance or handbook well enough to inform how they operate.
- 17 Since the introduction of the Handbook in 2018, the most effective management committees use this guidance well to improve and develop their members' knowledge and understanding of their responsibilities. The Handbook strengthens the role of the management committee for their PRU. For example, a few management committees use the Handbook as part of their induction process for new members and others use it to provide rigour in their review of policies and documents. However, a minority of PRU management committees are either unaware of the Handbook, or do not to use it to support improvement well enough. The underuse of this practical guidance hinders the development of consistent and effective practice across all PRU management committees in Wales.

2 Strategic partnership working

- 18 The most effective strategic partnership working occurs when the local authority and management committee have a clear understanding of the purpose of the PRU, and its place in a graduated response to supporting pupils at risk of exclusion. When this is the case, management committees often have robust joint working relationships with local authority officers, and may include a local authority officer as a member of the management committee. This ensures that all members have a clear understanding of the local authority's expectations on pupil outcomes at the PRU. As a result, management committee members work strategically with the local authority and senior PRU leaders to ensure that the intended purpose of the PRU is realistic and achievable.

In **Bryn Y Deryn PRU**, in Cardiff, the teacher-in-charge has forged strong links with both the local authority and the consortium. The chair of the management committee meets regularly with the teacher-in-charge and challenge adviser to review the PRU's progress and to plan for further improvement. This positive working relationship supports a clear understanding of the purpose, challenges, and successes of the PRU for the local authority, management committee and teacher-in-charge.

- 19 In a minority of cases, local authorities include PRU senior leaders as part of their placement panels. This practice strengthens decision-making regarding placement processes and promotes positive working relationships between the local authority and the PRU.

In the **Swansea PRU**, the deputy teacher-in-charge chairs the local authority placement panel. The PRU has developed criteria for referral, and the expectations of the PRU for schools across Swansea are clear. This improved relationship has been beneficial for pupils attending the PRU or who are then more likely to return to mainstream settings.

- 20 When the local authority works strategically with the PRU management committee, it ensures that the committee has a suitable membership, and vacancies are minimised. In a few cases, local authority officers promote colleagues from social and health services to become management committee members. This adds valuable breadth of knowledge and experience to the management committee's membership.
- 21 The local authority is required to have at least one representative on the management committee. This is a critical role in developing strategic working practices between the local authority and the management committee. The most effective practice occurs when members feel confident enough to support and challenge the local authority decisions with a secure understanding of the strengths and areas for improvement within their PRU.

- 22 The regulations identify a joint responsibility between the local authority and the management committee to develop a relevant curriculum for pupils. Successful PRUs and management committees work well with the local authority on this aspect. Where the local authority shares a clear vision with leaders of the PRU and management committee members, the curriculum is well established; the PRU's provision supports the needs, abilities, and interest of the pupils and provides relevant learning pathways as part of a continuum of provision to promote positive outcomes for pupils.

3 Training and development

- 23 Training and development for management committee members is a local authority responsibility. In the most effective management committees, the local authority and regional consortia are working with committee members to provide worthwhile training opportunities. However, many management committees and local authorities do not have a strategic approach to identifying and delivering training based on an analysis of need. Where training occurs, there is limited evaluation of its effectiveness. The Welsh Government (2017a) report 'Analysis of Training and Development Needs of Pupil Referral Unit Management Committees' notes that a valuable approach for developing effective training materials for management committees is to examine what is currently available to school governing bodies. The report suggests the feasibility of tailoring these materials to meet the needs of management committees, but there is little evidence that local authorities and regional consortia have employed this approach.
- 24 The Handbook emphasises the importance of good quality training and professional development for committee members. It advises that training and support may be available for all members provided by the local authority and regional consortia. However, the approach to meet the training needs of management committees across local authorities and regional consortia in Wales is inconsistent.
- 25 In around half of PRUs, they make effective use of the skills and expertise of their management committee members to support training and professional development opportunities.

The **Bridge Achievement Centre**, in Newport, as well as receiving training from a management committee member with expertise in Welsh, makes effective use of safeguarding training support and advice from another committee member. This ongoing advice and training in safeguarding for all committee members assures the local authority that all committee members are aware of their roles and responsibilities in this area. It also allows members to challenge PRU leaders effectively on the processes and procedures in place at the PRU to safeguard pupils.

- 26 The Welsh Government's (2017b) EOTAS Framework for Action provides seven key proposals, one of which focuses on improving the support available for management committees. A medium-term goal calls for regional consortia to provide robust support and challenge for PRU managers. A further recommendation is for the Welsh Government to explore options for developing and delivery specific PRU training modules in liaison with public sector stakeholders, but this has not yet been actioned.

Appendix: Evidence base

The findings in this report draw on discussions with teachers-in-charge and chairs of management committees in the following PRU:

- Bridge Achievement Centre, Newport
- Bryn Y Deryn School and Student Support Unit, Cardiff
- Ty Gwyn Education Centre, Rhondda Cynon Taf
- Wrexham Pupil Referral Services, Wrexham
- Denbighshire PRU, Denbighshire

They also draw on a review of Estyn inspections and management committee comments for the following PRUs:

- Canolfan Addysg Nant-y-Bryniau Education Centre, Conwy (2013)
- Gyffin Education Centre, Conwy (2013)
- Canolfan Addysg Penmaenrhos, Conwy (2013)
- Ty Gwyn Education Centres, Rhondda Cynon Taf (2013)
- Glanynant Learning Centre, Caerphilly (2014)
- Flintshire Portfolio PRU, Flintshire (2015)
- Carmarthenshire Secondary Teaching and Learning Centre, Carmarthenshire (2015)
- Wrexham Pupil Referral Services, Wrexham (2016)
- Powys Pupil Referral Unit, Powys (2016)
- Ceredigion Pupil Referral Service, Powys (2016)
- Ty Glyn Alternative Tuition PRU, Torfaen (2016)
- Pembrokeshire Pupil Referral Service, Pembrokeshire (2017)
- Canolfan Bro Tywi, Behaviour Support Service, Carmarthenshire (2017)
- Bridgend Portfolio PRU, Bridgend (2017)
- Monmouthshire Pupil Referral Service, Monmouthshire (2018)
- Bridge Achievement Centre, Newport (2018)
- Denbighshire PRU, Denbighshire (2019)
- City & County of Swansea Pupil Referral Unit, Swansea (2019)
- Y Daith, Vale of Glamorgan (2019)
- Tai Educational Centre, Rhondda Cynon Taf (2019)

Glossary

ALN	Additional learning needs
ALP	Additional learning provision
EOTAS	Education other than at school
IDP	Individual development plan
LA	Local authority
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PRU	Pupil referral unit

Numbers – quantities and proportions

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%

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