



Llywodraeth Cymru  
Welsh Government

PUBLICATION

# Equity of curriculum experiences for pupils who are educated other than at school (EOTAS): government response

What we plan to do in response to Estyn's report on equity of curriculum experiences for pupils who are educated other than at school.

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# Background

The Estyn report is a response to a request for advice regarding the Curriculum for Wales. The report provides an overview of the curriculum experiences for pupils attending EOTAS providers across Wales. It evaluates the equity of the curriculum offer for pupils placed in EOTAS provisions, including their access to a full-time or part-time curriculum offer. It also considers how well local authorities evaluate and improve the quality and impact of provision and reports on transition between EOTAS and schools or post-16 provision.

## Method

This report draws on a range of evidence collected during the latter half of the autumn term 2022.

The evidence included a survey to all local authorities to provide an overview of current EOTAS provision and practice. 17 responses were received. In addition to the survey, 19 face-to-face or virtual meetings were held with lead officers for EOTAS. In total, information was received from all but one local authority.

Meetings were held with representatives for the school improvement services across all the regional consortia to discuss their involvement with EOTAS.

Meetings were held with leaders of pupil referral units (PRUs), curriculum leaders and pupils in 8 PRUs. The PRU sample included single site and portfolio PRUs, and covered pupils aged five to sixteen. The sample also included PRUs who had agreed to roll out the curriculum for Wales from September 2022.

A range of documents including curriculum planning and qualification pathways during the PRU visits. In addition, we used evidence from nine PRU inspections

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carried out between January 2019 and December 2022.

## Summary of main findings

### Curriculum experiences

- In a few PRUs, the curriculum offer in the primary and younger secondary-aged phase is tailored to provide specific targeted interventions to support each pupil's needs and their return to mainstream school.
- In many PRUs, the curriculum breadth for older secondary-aged pupils to support transition to further education, training or employment is effective.
- There is a reported decline in the number of pupils leaving PRUs and becoming 'not engaged in education, training or employment' (NEET).
- There is limited evidence that mainstream schools are working closely with EOTAS providers to ensure curriculum continuity for pupils from their school, other than in a minority of PRUs. This remains an area for improvement.
- PRU leaders face challenges in appointing specialist subject teachers.
- Too many PRUs have limited access to specialist teaching facilities but an increasing number of local authorities are investing in improved settings which are fully equipped to support the full curriculum offer.
- Too many pupils have part-time education arrangements which are not agreed consistently with the local authority. Pastoral support programmes are not used effectively or monitored well enough.
- Few local authorities provide more than 10 hours education per week for EOTAS pupils receiving local authority home tuition services.
- Too few pupils in receipt of local authority home tuition services have access to a full curriculum offer.
- Where pupils have part-time education at a PRU or external EOTAS provider and mainstream school, many pupils do not attend their mainstream school when they should.

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- Overwhelmingly pupils prefer attending their PRU to mainstream school. Very few pupils missed or wanted to return to their mainstream school.

## Quality assurance processes

- The pandemic continues to have a negative impact with an increase in referral rates for EOTAS provision. As a result, EOTAS pupils are increasing in numbers and are waiting longer to access provision.
- In nearly all local authorities, there are no formal processes to evaluate and improve the curriculum offer delivered to EOTAS pupils.
- Too many pupils remain in EOTAS provision for too long, impacting on the ability of providers to deliver short-term interventions and return pupils to mainstream schools quickly enough.
- Most local authorities have improved their use of decision-making panels to determine the EOTAS provision required for individual pupils but the number and frequency of panels can result in delays in accessing placements.
- Too many local authorities do not clearly identify the expected duration of placement in EOTAS providers for pupils and review processes are underdeveloped.

## Transition between EOTAS and mainstream schools or further education, training, or employment

- Few EOTAS pupils successfully returned to mainstream school over the last four years.
- A barrier to the successful reintegration of pupils to mainstream schools is the complexity of pupils' needs.
- In many local authorities, PRUs are operating more in line with special schools due to pupil placements being long-term. Where practice is effective, there are clear plans in place to consider the duration that pupils are placed

in EOTAS provision. This process is less robust where local authorities commission external EOTAS providers.

- In a few PRUs, local authorities have more recently introduced additional small class provision specifically to target shorter-term intensive support for primary and younger secondary-aged pupils. Where these arrangements are in place, there is an increasing, but small, number of pupils returning to mainstream school with support.
- Opportunities for return to mainstream school for older secondary aged pupils remain an option, although this is less likely to be the pathway for most pupils. In nearly all local authorities, the curriculum offer for these pupils is focused on supporting a move onto further education, training or employment.

## Recommendations

The review report sets out the following recommendations for PRUs, mainstream schools, local authorities and school improvement services:

### PRUs and mainstream schools

1. Share practice with each other and work with local authorities, pupils, and parents to strengthen opportunities for pupils to return to mainstream education.
2. Monitor pupils' attendance closely to ensure they access their full provision and, in particular, to safeguard pupils where they access education part-time in a different provider.

## Local authorities and their school improvement services

3. Support more pupils to return to mainstream school where appropriate through:
  - strengthening short term intensive support in EOTAS provision
  - ensuring placement decisions are taken promptly and identify an agreed duration, clear roles and responsibilities and a review date.
4. Secure curriculum provision in PRUs which meets the needs of all pupils working with the management committee and teacher in charge.
5. Secure curriculum provision in EOTAS providers other than PRUs.
6. Strengthen the quality assurance and monitoring processes to ensure effective delivery of the curriculum offer in all EOTAS providers.
7. Robustly challenge and monitor the attendance of pupils across EOTAS providers including the appropriate use of part-time timetables and pastoral support programmes.

## The Welsh Government

8. Update and ensure delivery of the EOTAS Framework for Action including all relevant accompanying EOTAS guidance to reflect the recommendations of this report.

The Welsh Government accepts this recommendation. The recommendations made by Estyn align with the principles and actions contained in the Education other than at School (EOTAS) Framework for Action, which is currently being revised to reflect the findings of the Children, Young People and Education Committee.

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