

The Bridge School

Chadwick Road, Astmoor Industrial Estate , Runcorn, Cheshire WA7 1PW

Inspection dates 31 January–1 February 2013

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|--------------------------------|----------------------|-----------------------------|----------|
| Overall effectiveness | Previous inspection: | Outstanding | 1 |
| | This inspection: | Requires improvement | 3 |
| Achievement of pupils | | Requires improvement | 3 |
| Quality of teaching | | Requires improvement | 3 |
| Behaviour and safety of pupils | | Requires improvement | 3 |
| Leadership and management | | Requires improvement | 3 |

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement. It is not good because

- Achievement is improving but not at a fast enough rate. Some of the students do not make enough progress in mathematics. The girls make good progress in writing but some boys make too little progress in the quality and quantity of their writing.
- Although attendance is improving for the majority of students, it remains too low for a small minority of students. Also, punctuality in the morning is a challenge for some of the students, due to transport difficulties.
- The proportion of good teaching and learning is not high enough to enable all students to make expected or better progress. Homework is not set and therefore the students are not prepared for their return to mainstream.
- The extensive range of students' performance data is not used effectively to promote good progress. Also, the pace of learning is too slow in some lessons.
- There are elements of behaviour that require improvement although there have been no exclusions this year.
- The procedures for gaining an accurate view of its performance and checks undertaken on the work of the unit are not sufficiently rigorous, because the acting headteacher has no deputy headteacher. The management committee know the unit well but do not have systems for checking the quality of work in subjects, including English and mathematics.

The school has the following strengths

- The students make good progress in their reading, speaking and listening and in science. Students in the pupil support group make consistently good progress in their examination courses.
- Teaching is improving with most teachers having raised their expectations and having good subject expertise.
- The unit's capacity to improve is enhanced by staff's shared determination to improve. The acting headteacher is helping to provide stability and continuity. The number of students on role has increased.
- The staff work well with other agencies to help provide good levels of care and support for those students whose circumstances may make them vulnerable. Students feel safe in the unit and form positive relationships.
- The staff work well as a team and the teaching assistants often provide a good balance of support and challenge, to help promote students' progress.
- Parents greatly appreciate the improvements made in the learning and attitudes of their children. Their responses to questionnaires and during meetings with the inspector were overwhelmingly positive.

Information about this inspection

- The inspector observed teaching and learning in five lessons, taught by two teachers and a teaching assistant. He also visited a lesson to listen to students read. The inspector scrutinised the students' previous work and teachers' planning.
- The inspector spoke with students in lessons and during their breaks. He joined them for lunch on both of the inspections days.
- The inspector took account of three responses to the online Parent View questionnaires as well as the responses from parents collected at review meetings. The inspector also met with two parents. Questionnaires completed by six staff were analysed and considered.
- Meetings were held with staff, the Chair of the Management Committee and the local authority officer responsible for overseeing the unit.
- Telephone conversations took place with the member of the management committee responsible for safeguarding, the person responsible for the alternative provision used by the unit and the School Improvement Partner. The inspector also discussed students' attendance with a representative from the local authority.
- The inspector scrutinised a range of documentation including: the unit's own data, the unit's self-evaluation, the improvement plan, minutes of management committee meetings, safeguarding policies, behaviour policies and behavioural records and documents relating to setting targets for teachers to improve their work.

Inspection team

David Smith, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- The Bridge is a referral unit for Key Stage 3 students. It provides for full-time students who are permanently excluded from local mainstream schools. A second group, who are at risk of exclusion from their mainstream school, attend the unit full-time. The aim is to return these students to mainstream schools after a short stay at the unit. They also provide a base for the pupil support group for Key Stage 3 and 4 students who remain the responsibility of their mainstream schools. The students continue their mainstream work with the help of a teaching assistant employed by the unit; their examination entries are managed by the mainstream schools.
- There are twice as many boys than girls on roll. Most students are known to be eligible for free school meals. Two students are in the care of the local authority. The unit receives the pupil premium which is additional government funding for children in local authority care, those from services families and those known to be eligible for free school meals.
- All students are supported at school action plus but none of the students have a statement of special educational needs.
- The staff run a breakfast club for the students that attend the unit.
- The Bridge accesses the alternative provision offered by Diversity, Training and Learning for a small number of their students. Also, Year 9 students have accessed a range of alternative provision activities.
- All of the students are of White British heritage.
- The unit has an International Schools Award and Healthy Schools status.
- The deputy headteacher is currently the acting headteacher, to cover for the long-term absence of the headteacher.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching so that it is always good or better by:
 - increasing the opportunities provided for boys to extend the quality and quantity of their writing
 - ensuring that available data is used more effectively in teachers' planning, to check on progress and provide good levels of support and challenge for all students
 - ensuring that the pace of learning is brisk in all lessons
 - introducing homework to help boost progress and prepare students for their return to mainstream schools.
- Improve the students' progress across all subjects with a particular focus on mathematics and boys' writing to close the gap with the achievement of their mainstream peers.
- Ensure that the improvements in students' attendance and behaviour and safety continue by:
 - enriching and extending the curriculum to more effectively engage the students in lessons
 - quickly resolving the transport arrangements for the students that are late due to traffic congestion in the mornings by, for example, the earlier collection of the students from their homes using the unit's minibus.

- Improve the unit's procedures for gaining an accurate view of its performance and the checks undertaken on its work by:
 - developing the role of the management committee, including contributing to the checks made on the quality of work in subjects, including English and mathematics
 - ensuring that there is an effective leadership structure, including the appointment of an acting deputy headteacher.
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Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils

requires improvement

- Students' progress in mathematics requires improvement. Performance data shows that students make less than expected progress towards their targets. A scrutiny of their previous work demonstrates that their progress requires improvement.
- Progress in boys' writing is not good enough. Some are reluctant to write and the excessive use of worksheets in some subjects limits the opportunities for extended writing. The available data demonstrates that there is not the same variation in the progress of boys and girls in the other subjects. The achievement of disabled students and those who have special educational needs (which means all of the students on roll) requires improvement. Students eligible for pupil-premium funding make the same progress as their peers in the unit.
- The very few students accessing alternative provision are developing a more appropriate approach to their learning. However, variations in their attitudes continue to limit their progress. The permanently excluded and students on short-term placements in the unit are in the same classes and there is no variation in their progress.
- Students make good progress in science. Their previous work is of high quality and it is clear that they particularly enjoy taking part in practical work. In science the students are aware of their current levels and know how to improve their learning.
- Students make good progress in reading. The assessment of their reading skills is thorough and is used to plan the students' reading programmes. Assessments are accurate and this was confirmed when the inspector heard a range of students read. The confident students read accurately and fully understand the text. They can correctly answer questions about the characters in the books. They enjoy the opportunities provided to read for pleasure and choose books that are sufficiently challenging. The less-confident readers are provided with support and challenge, including a specific programme using a phonics approach to boosting progress. The students also make good progress in speaking and listening and readily express their views when asked questions about their work.
- Students in the pupil support group make good progress in a range of accredited courses. Nearly half of these students are expected to pass five or more A* to C including English and mathematics in their GCSE or equivalent courses.

The quality of teaching

requires improvement

- Not enough of the teaching is consistently good or better, although it is good in the pupil support group and in science. Also, reading is taught well, although the promotion of writing and numeracy in other subjects requires improvement.
- In some lessons too much time is spent on managing behaviour at the expense of a focus on progress. The pace of learning is too slow, which lowers expectations and limits progress. Too much time is wasted, whilst students wait their turn to take part in activities. Teaching lacks inspiration and the students quickly become bored, which leads to negative behaviour. Homework is not set, which limits progress and fails to prepare students for their return to the demands of mainstream education.
- More effective teaching is informed by good subject expertise. Learning is well-planned and there are high expectations. Teaching is enthusiastic and this motivates the students to make good progress. The assessment information is used well to set challenging targets and students' progress is checked towards challenging targets. Progress data is used to direct support and challenge where needed, which helps to promote good progress. Members of staff work well as a team and the teaching assistants are able to focus on learning rather than behaviour

management.

- In a science lesson students were made fully aware of expectations and were keen to learn about the properties of air resistance. They were keen to ask challenging questions, which significantly extended their understanding of the topic. New technology was used well to promote discussions and provide opportunities for independent research. In an English lesson students made good progress in their creative writing because the topic captured their imagination and they worked for the full lesson. They were all keen to finish their work in the next English lesson. In a pupil support group lesson, students made good progress on their individual English and mathematics courses. The teaching assistant supported and challenged their learning particularly well.
- As all lessons do not provide a similar level of challenge and motivation then students do not make good or outstanding progress overall.

The behaviour and safety of pupils

requires improvement

- The negative attitudes to learning from a small minority of students limit their progress. This is demonstrated by their poor attendance and their erratic punctuality in the mornings. The heavy traffic in the morning can be a problem for the students travelling across the bridge from Widnes and this has a negative impact on their punctuality.
- A few students lack a positive attitude to their work. This is evident in the varied quantity and quality of their previous work and limitations in their recorded progress and, as result they fail to meet their targets.
- A small number of students are reluctant to attend lessons and this occasionally unsettles day-to-day life. Staff work hard to keep students in class but there is insufficient inspiration in the curriculum to keep these students engaged.
- The behaviour and safety of students who attend the alternative provision is closely checked. Students are clear that bullying is not an issue at the Bridge. They say that they feel safe at the unit and form friendships. They are made welcome at the breakfast club at the start of the day. The lunch breaks are positive social occasions where the students and staff eat together and occupy their time constructively. There is a strong and effective focus on health and safety during practical sessions. Students are made fully aware of the dangers of the inappropriate use of the internet. Parents agree that their child feels safe at the unit.
- During lessons most students work well in pairs and groups. This helps to prepare them for their return to mainstream schools.
- There have been no exclusions this year, which is a clear improvement. Also, the number of recorded behavioural incidents has reduced significantly since September 2012 when compared to the previous year. The number of students successfully returned to mainstream schools is increasing.
- Good support is provided for the students' emotional well-being. They relate well to the staff and form positive relationships very quickly. The pupil support group is provided with particularly good care. The students respond well to this, which helps them to make good progress in their learning. A parent commented that her son's behaviour has significantly improved at home.
- Students' attendance has improved this year when compared to the previous academic year. The attendance of a large majority of the students improves significantly at the Bridge, when compared to their previous placement. The unit works well with other agencies and parents to promote good attendance. When students attend well this is celebrated and rewarded and the consequences of poor attendance are managed well.

The leadership and management

requires improvement

- The acting headteacher is working constructively with the staff team to provide stability and promote continual improvement. A positive impact is evident in the improved progress made by the students this year, when compared to last year. The staff team is assisting the acting headteacher but an acting deputy headteacher has not been appointed. This hinders the possibility for gaining an accurate view of the unit's performance by limiting the opportunities to make checks on the quality of teaching and learning. In paired observations, the acting headteacher accurately identified the strengths and areas for development in teaching and learning.
 - Despite securing improvements in attendance for the majority of students, the unit has not been successful in boosting the attendance of a minority of students on roll. Links with parents are good and the unit works well with other agencies. However, the curriculum is not sufficiently stimulating or enriched to motivate all students to attend the unit. There are no after-school clubs or opportunities to take part in residential opportunities. Some students have requested after-school activities, such as gym classes, and staff have agreed to start a gym club. The recent introduction of the Duke of Edinburgh Award Scheme is a positive initiative.
 - Key policies, agreed by the management committee, are used consistently to inform day-to-day procedures. The literacy policy is having a positive impact on progress in reading but has yet to make a difference to boys' writing.
 - A significant amount of information is collected about the performance of individual and groups of students. However, leaders need to improve the way that this information is used by teachers to plan lessons and accelerate students' progress.
 - The Bridge is inclusive and ensures that the students are provided with an equality of opportunity and any discrimination is tackled.
 - Staff training is linked to their individual development needs and they are positive about the opportunities provided. All have accessed training in behaviour management, which has helped to improve, for example, the system for recording any physical interventions.
 - The local authority has provided a medium level of support to the acting headteacher to help her carry out her new role. Support for the science curriculum, along with the contribution of the acting headteacher, has had a positive impact and has helped to raise standards in the subject.
 - Safeguarding policies and procedures meet statutory requirements. Staff access relevant training and responsibilities for safeguarding are clear. Risk assessments are thorough, including the planning for off-site visits.
 - There is a strong emphasis on the promotion of the students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Displays around the centre focus on, for example, life in a diverse range of cultures and raising funds for charities. Personal, social and health education makes the students fully aware of how to keep themselves safe.
 - **The governance of the school:**
 - The members of the management committee know the unit well but have not developed procedures for making checks on the quality and outcomes of individual subjects, including English and mathematics. The management committee have good knowledge and expertise in safeguarding and ensure statutory requirements are met. Members have attended training to help hold the unit to account for safeguarding. Performance-management systems are used to set appropriate targets for leaders and teachers know about the link between the quality of teachers' work and arrangements for pay. The management committee is kept informed about the provision and progress of students, including those supported by pupil-premium funding. Their support includes one-to-one support for their reading. The impact of the additional money is checked during the students' individual reviews.
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What inspection judgements mean

| School | | |
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| Grade | Judgement | Description |
| Grade 1 | Outstanding | An outstanding school is highly effective in delivering outcomes that provide exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs. This ensures that pupils are very well equipped for the next stage of their education, training or employment. |
| Grade 2 | Good | A good school is effective in delivering outcomes that provide well for all its pupils' needs. Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education, training or employment. |
| Grade 3 | Requires improvement | A school that requires improvement is not yet a good school, but it is not inadequate. This school will receive a full inspection within 24 months from the date of this inspection. |
| Grade 4 | Inadequate | <p>A school that has serious weaknesses is inadequate overall and requires significant improvement but leadership and management are judged to be Grade 3 or better. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p> <p>A school that requires special measures is one where the school is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the school's leaders, managers or governors have not demonstrated that they have the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p> |

School details

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| Unique reference number | 134321 |
| Local authority | Halton |
| Inspection number | 403824 |

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

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| Type of school | Pupil referral unit |
| School category | Pupil referral unit |
| Age range of pupils | 11–14 |
| Gender of pupils | Mixed |
| Number of pupils on the school roll | 30 |
| Appropriate authority | The local authority |
| Chair | Mark Dennett |
| Acting Headteacher | Diane Ahearn |
| Date of previous school inspection | 13 July 2010 |
| Telephone number | 01928 581301 |
| Fax number | 01928 581306 |
| Email address | deputyhead.thebridgeschool@halton.gov.uk |

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