

Merit Pupil Referral Service

Willeton Street, Bucknall, Stoke-on-Trent, Staffordshire, ST2 9JA

Inspection dates 23–24 April 2013

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Satisfactory	3
	This inspection:	Good	2
Achievement of pupils		Good	2
Quality of teaching		Good	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Outstanding	1
Leadership and management		Outstanding	1

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school.

- The vast majority of pupils make a successful return to mainstream school. A few pupils successfully move on to other schools more appropriate to their needs.
- All pupils make good progress, and some make outstanding progress, in personal development. This enables them to re-engage with learning and prepares them well for the next step in their education.
- All pupils accelerate their progress in English and mathematics.
- Teaching is now consistently good and some is outstanding. The quality of teaching has been much improved since the last inspection.
- Pupils are welcoming and exceptionally well-mannered and polite. They are increasingly successful in managing their own behaviour and this is helping them to make good progress.
- Partnerships with other schools and with parents and families are outstanding, and parents say that the lives of their children have been turned around.
- The senior leaders are highly effective in raising the achievement of pupils by constantly improving teaching and directing the work of the unit. This has resulted in pupils learning at a faster rate since the last inspection.
- The management committee is very effective and focuses closely on the needs of the pupils. Members have asked searching questions and monitored the progress of the unit very closely. They know what they want the unit to achieve and how they can be involved in bringing this about.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Teaching and planning have not yet enabled pupils to make outstanding progress in English and mathematics.
- Pupils' progress in basic skills is not outstanding because the specific skills they need to develop in literacy and numeracy are not identified and promoted for each pupil in lessons other than those in English and mathematics.

Information about this inspection

- The inspector looked at the headteacher's reports to the management committee, the development plan, records of lesson observations and targets set for teachers. The inspector also looked at documents that track pupils' progress and documentation on how the unit gained a view of its performance. The inspector took account of the unit's procedures for safeguarding.
- The inspector observed five lessons, two jointly with the headteacher and deputy headteacher. The inspector examined pupils' work in books.
- The inspector held discussions with staff, the Chair of the Management Committee, as well as with a representative of the local authority.
- The inspector examined responses to recent surveys of the views of parents. There were no responses on the online questionnaire (Parent View).
- All of the teachers are new to the unit since the last inspection.

Inspection team

Pauline Hilling-Smith, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- This pupil referral unit is a short-stay centre where the majority of pupils stay for about two terms.
- There is one teacher based at the main hospital in the city.
- Home tuition is provided for all pupils in Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2. There were no pupils receiving home tuition at the time of the inspection.
- All pupils are supported at school action plus and a few have a statement of special educational needs.
- The vast majority of pupils are included on the register of both their mainstream school and the unit.
- The majority of pupils are White British and there are more girls than boys.
- There are no disabled pupils attending the unit.
- The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for the pupil premium, additional funding for pupils known to be eligible for free school meals, those in local authority care and children from service families, is above average.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Ensure that the quality of teaching is consistently good or better in order to raise attainment even further by:
 - ensuring that planning always identifies the opportunities to develop individual pupils' literacy and numeracy skills in all lessons
 - ensuring that pupils always respond to written feedback in books
 - making sure that training for teachers new to their roles enables them to improve their effectiveness rapidly.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils is good

- Usually, as a result of disruption to their learning, pupils are working below national expectations when they start at the unit. The vast majority of pupils accelerate their progress in English and mathematics and rapidly catch up with their peers in mainstream school. Pupils return to fulfilling their potential and achieve standards that are broadly average overall, although a few pupils achieve some remarkable results in some subjects.
- All pupils make good progress, and a few make outstanding progress, in their personal development. This enables them to begin to learn well and achieve their potential. For example, one pupil said that when she arrived at the unit her confidence was so low that she could not do anything without the help of the staff. Now, she was able to complete her work without support and this meant that she was successful on a placement in mainstream school.
- While pupils make good progress in English and mathematics lessons, they do not develop their literacy and numeracy skills as effectively in lessons in other subjects. For example, opportunities to apply and develop calculation skills in science are missed; likewise, opportunities to improve skills in spelling and punctuation are missed when pupils spend time writing in other subjects.
- Pupils make rapid progress in developing their reading skills because teaching is very well organised and pupils develop a love of books and reading. The vast majority of pupils make double the rate of expected progress and a few achieve more than this.
- Pupils for whom the unit receives the pupil premium funding make similar progress to their peers and any gaps in their attainment and that of pupils not in receipt of this funding are rapidly closing. This is because teachers make sure that the funding is spent on exactly the right resources and activities that make the most impact on these pupils' achievement. As such, this ensures equality of opportunity for all.
- Pupils in the hospital class, and those who receive home tuition, also make good progress overall because the partnership with parents and hospital staff is good and this contributes well to pupils' achievement.
- All parents who responded to surveys carried out by the unit agreed that pupils make good progress. One parent said that she had particularly noticed her daughter's improved personal development, which enabled her to begin learning again.

The quality of teaching is good

- The quality of teaching and learning seen confirms the judgements of the unit's senior leaders. The percentage of good teaching, particularly in English and mathematics lessons, has increased since the last inspection.
- Teachers have high expectations of what pupils will do and achieve in lessons. For example, teachers expect that pupils will achieve ever-higher marks in basic skills tests in English and mathematics lessons. However, the opportunities for pupils to develop these skills in lessons other than English and mathematics are not specifically planned, which means that they are not developed as rapidly as they could be.
- All staff manage pupils' behaviour exceptionally well in lessons to ensure that each pupil is challenged at the right level. As a result, pupils make good progress because they are interested in and enjoy their work most of the time.
- Teachers use questioning very effectively to check systematically on understanding as the lesson proceeds. They modify their plans skilfully in line with this information to ensure that each pupil is achieving very well at all times. For example, in an outstanding English lesson, the teacher gave just enough clues to enable pupils to understand for themselves the meaning of common expressions.
- All staff make sure they give just the right amount of support to ensure that pupils are confident enough to attempt tasks. However, pupils are not always given sufficient opportunities to

respond to written feedback in books and this limits the impact that marking has on achievement. Staff praise achievement well verbally in lessons so that pupils are keenly aware of when they have done well.

- Although pupils in hospital make good progress over time, they currently make less progress than other pupils. This is because the new school room is not yet fully set up and new teachers realise that they need further training to enable them to meet the needs of the very wide age and ability range.
- Parents agree that their children are well taught, including those who are taught at home. The unit provides good information and works exceptionally well in partnership with parents to give information about what pupils should do at home to contribute to achievement.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are outstanding

- Pupils are very welcoming, polite and well-mannered at all times. They are highly considerate of others' individual needs.
- The unit ensures it provides a caring, supportive environment where all pupils feel very safe and can manage their behaviour as well as possible at all times. Pupils' relationships with staff are excellent and behaviour outside lessons is excellent.
- Pupils have a keen awareness of how to stay safe when, for example, they learn to travel on their own to the unit. They know that there is always someone supportive to turn to if necessary. Parents agree that their children feel very safe and are cared for very well.
- Pupils are clear that bullying is not an issue and think upon the impact of their actions on themselves and others. They reflect sensitively about situations which have arisen for their friends outside school and help each other cope with this when comments made have been hurtful.
- Staff manage behaviour exceptionally well because they apply procedures consistently. They never miss an opportunity to encourage or explain the reasons for and the consequences of the choices the pupils are making. Staff model what they want the pupils to do at every opportunity.
- Any incidents that do occur are recorded in detail and reported to parents. Likewise, rewards are recorded and evaluated to ensure that they are promoting the objectives of the unit. Discrimination of any kind is not tolerated.
- Attendance is average because it is promoted very well and pupils attend as much as they can. Individual pupils' attendance rises rapidly when they start at the unit and this is usually maintained when they attend their mainstream school. Staff are in very close contact with parents so that they can give any additional support.

The leadership and management are outstanding

- Leadership at all levels is highly effective. The senior leadership has been uncompromising in driving the work and improvement of the unit and securing its future. The vision of supporting pupils to make a successful return to mainstream school in the shortest possible time is shared by all. The work of the staff to enable successful transition is extensive and highly successful.
- Partnerships with parents and families and with other schools in the local authority are exceptional. They contribute very significantly to pupils' achievement. The unit also works very well with a wide range of agencies to the benefit of the pupils.
- The unit's system for tracking the progress of pupils is meticulous. Any pupil at risk of underachieving is quickly identified and procedures are put in place to prevent this happening.
- The leadership of teaching and performance is excellent. Overall, procedures to check on the quality of teaching are extensive and thorough; they enable leaders to provide detailed and helpful information to support teachers in improving their practice. There is a good link between teachers' performance and pay.

- The staff support one another exceptionally well. They share the best ways to ensure that pupils achieve as much as they can by working and planning together very well. Leaders ensure that additional funds, such as the pupil premium, are used to good effect by providing extra resources for pupils known to be eligible for free school meals, such as additional access to staff. Staff review the progress of identified pupils and it is clear that the way the funding is being used is making a positive difference to these pupils' academic achievement and personal development.
 - The school has an accurate view of its own performance. Plans made are very effective because they are reviewed in detail and linked to training. Leaders know that they have some gaps to fill in the knowledge of the teachers new to their role, especially those who teach pupils in hospital. Plans reflect the clear vision identified in partnership with the management committee and very valuable support and partnership with the local authority.
 - The curriculum is often enhanced by highly creative projects which harness experts from other organisations, such as the university. Plans prioritise progress in English, mathematics and science as well as in personal development. However, leaders realise more could be done to promote pupils' basic literacy and numeracy skills in lessons other than English and mathematics. Carefully planned arrangements for pupils when they return to mainstream school give them the best chance of success.
 - **The governance of the school:**
 - The management committee is exceptionally effective. It makes a significant contribution to leadership and meets the needs of the unit exceptionally well because all the members have expert knowledge, which they bring to bear on the improvement of the unit. This means that members are able to challenge and support the unit well and ask very searching questions of its leaders about its work. Members have a very clear picture of what is happening in the unit in terms of the quality of teaching and pupils' performance compared with that of pupils nationally. They know that leadership roles and responsibilities are delegated well. They manage the budget effectively and make sure that all safeguarding procedures are strong. Members are clear about how the pupil premium is being spent and can identify the positive effect that this is having on eligible pupils. They are fully involved in performance management and know how this influences staff pay. The management committee has a clear grasp of how the unit's leaders are driving improvement.
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What inspection judgements mean

School		
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

Unique reference number	134159
Local authority	Stoke-on-Trent
Inspection number	402597

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

Type of school	Pupil referral unit
School category	Pupil referral unit
Age range of pupils	4–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	36
Appropriate authority	Management Committee
Head of Management Committee	Richard Woollacott
Headteacher	Julia McBride
Date of previous school inspection	19 May 2010
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